GENTLEMAN JACK;

OR,

LIFE ON THE ROAD.

A ROMANCE OF INTEREST, ABOUNDING IN HAIR-BREADTH ESCAPES OF THE MOST EXCITING CHARACTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PAUL CLIFFORD."

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PREFACE.

THE Romance, if Romance it may be called, of "GENTLEMAN JACK; OR, LIFE ON THE ROAD," having attained an amount of popular favour never before experienced in the annals of periodical literature, is now presented to the reading public in its complete form, with the conviction of the publisher that it will be ever considered as a standard work.

The extraordinary success of this work may be accounted for from the fact that there is not a page of it that does not glow with a life-like reality. Every incident is not only possible, but highly probable, and naturally flows from some one feeling it, although from the antecedent circumstances it would be impossible to anticipate what is to come.

We need not inform the readers of the following pages that the personages therein represented

"In their habit as they lived,"

are not the coinages of fancy, but realities; and many of the surprising adventures of Claude Duval herein mentioned are perfectly authentic.

With many thanks, both to the press and to the public, the publisher begs to present the work as a whole to the lovers of rational fiction.

London, February, 1852.

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GENTLEMAN JACK;

OR, LIFE ON THE ROAD.



HAMPSTEAD HEATH IN 1780.—A NEW MOON.—THE GIBBET AND THE OATH.

THE corpse had hung in the gibbet till autumnal rains had bleached face, hands, and clothing. Suddenly there came such a gust of strong wind that it swung the body horizontally from the gibbet. Two figures emerged from among a clump of firs. They were a girl and a lad; the girl clung to the boy, and in terror said:—"Oh, Claude, Claude, are you sure that you saw it?" "Saw it, May? Yes, as plainly as—as—I now see the moon in the clouds. It was the figure of our poor father." "You know, Claude, that our poor father is no more. Let us return home again. Oh, Claude, Claude, you know where this leads to." "I do. But it was towards here that the figure pointed." "You did not scream, Claude." "No, sister May, no. I saw the figure move towards the little window that looks this way, and it pointed in the direction of this place and then I sobbed 'father, father, father!' when it seemed to

roll away like a mist, and I heard nothing but the wind moaning round the cottage."

"It was very dreadful, Claude."

"Yes, yes, and yet I was more sad than frightened, so you see I rose and called to you, May, to tell you that I was going out upon the heath, and you would come with me. I have brought the old pistol with me, May; then we will now for the first time, look upon that which we knew there was to be seen on the heath, and yet never dared approach, for I think that was what my father meant to-night."

As this brief conversation was proceeding, the orphans, for such they were, had been ascending a raised portion of the heath, and when they reached the summit of what might be termed a little knoll, the young moon pressed out again from among the drifting clouds, and the girl in the distance—a distance that looked greater than it really was at that dubious hour, caught a sight of the gibbet. With a cry of agony she threw herself upon her brother's breast, exclaiming in thrilling accents—

"Claude, Claude, it will break our hearts. It will—it will."

The boy guessed well what it was she had seen, and he shook with a visible emotion for a few moments, before he dared himself look in the direction to which she had alluded. Then however, while her fair face was hidden on his bosom, and her long silken hair streamed about him, for it had escaped from its confinement, he shaded his eyes with his disengaged hand, and looked at the gibbet.

It could be but faintly seen, but if only the shadow of it had met his eyes it must have greatly moved him. The moon disappeared again behind a drifting cloud, and like a phantom the gibbet was gone.

"May, dear May," he whispered, "look up and speak to me. I am quite sure that, very dreadful as this thing is to us, that the dread of how dreadful it is must be worse than the reality. Come on, and lean as heavily upon me as you please; I am sure that our father whom we know is in heaven, meant us to pay this sad visit to night, as we were about to leave the place to-morrow. Come on, do not tremble so, May, courage, courage. We are not so utterly wretched even now poor, friendless and forlorn, as we really are, as he, Sir Lionel Faversham, who persecuted our poor father to death, and yet knew his innocence."

"He—he was innocent, Claude."

"He was. He told us that he was, and we will believe him as we believe in God, May,"

"Oh, yes, yes. It is something to know that he did not do the deed they said he did, Claude. That although he perished fearfully he perished innocently. I dare not look up again, but—but I will not leave you, Claude. I will go with you, but you will not ask me to look up again. Tell me you will not, for I know it will kill me to do so, or drive me mad, which would be worse. Oh, Claude—Claude, what will become of us?"

She sobbed hysterically upon her brother's shoulder, and stout hearted as the boy was, he now shook with emotion, and could hardly command his voice sufficiently to speak articulately. He did, however, after a slight pause, manage to breathe some comfort to the heart of May.

"Creep gently on," he said, "and you shall not look up, May, if you do not wish. For myself, I feel that before I leave this place, I hope for ever, I ought to take one last farewell glance at our poor father. Come on gently. See, the moon is peeping out again."

It was so. Through a wide straggling opening in the clouds, the bright and beautiful moon showed her silver crescent, and sent down a flood of silvery radiance upon the earth. The two mourners, for such indeed they were, slowly approached the gibbet, and now they were so near to that dreaded and truly dreadful object, that May felt she dared not raise her eyes from the ground, lest they should be blasted by the awful sight before her. To Claude, even, it was an act evidently of desperate resolution to look up, and when he did so, it seemed almost as if, by some more than natural power, he had wrenched his head in that

direction. Immediately on the other side of the gibbet was a bridle path, and beyond that again was a deep declivity descending into the road-way for carriages, but all in that direction was gloom, for the tall fir trees completely prevented any observations beyond the gibbet, at which Claude continued gazing, until his eyes were so filled with tears that he could see nothing, and then he dashed them away with his disengaged hand, and looked again.

"Father, father," he said, "they murdered you. You did no murder, although Sir Lionel took an oath to say he saw you do it; and why he was so wicked, God only knows."

"Claude, Claude," gasped May, "I—I never told you—but now in the presence of this dreadful object I feel that I ought."

"What do you mean, May?"

"I have thought at times that I knew why our poor father offended Sir Lionel Faversham; I do not rightly understand it, but Sir Lionel met me once upon the heath, He dismounted from his horse, and flinging the bridle across his arm, he would walk by my side to our cottage-door, and as we went, he asked me if I should like a coach to ride in, and to be a lady. Then when we reached the cottage he whispered something to our poor father, who, thereupon, raised his hand and struck him. Sir Lionel left the cottage without a word, and our father turning to me, kissed my cheek, and said, 'Never mention this affair, my May. It is quite over.'"

"And soon after came the—the charge against our father of murdering the steward of Sir Lionel in the shrubbery of Faversham House," cried Claude. "Oh, God—God, I see it all."

He clasped his hands, and dropped upon his knees at the foot of the gibbet.

"I swear," he cried, "I solemnly swear——"

"Oh, no, no, no," sobbed and entreated May. "Take no wild oath of revenge, Claude. Let us now pursue our original intention of going to London, and there seeking some honest means of livelihood, turning our backs for ever upon this place, which must, even to think of, be a horror to us."

"I will have revenge—no—not revenge, but justice. Henceforth a sense of my father's wrongs will make me a foe to all mankind, except those who shall assist me to avenge them; here in presence of his poor remains, I swear——"

"Hush! hush! Claude, do you hear nothing?"

The tramp of a horse's foot upon the bridle path, just beyond the gibbet, came upon their ears, and by one accord they both leant forward, to listen in the direction from whence the sound proceeded.

"Who is it?" whispered May. Who is it?"

"Some chance traveller on the heath," replied Claude. "Listen! listen! and yet it is a strange time of night, and the road is seldom used except by those who are familiar with it, and who are going to Faversham House. Stand in the shadow, Mary—of—of——"

The gibbet he would have said, but with a shudder he paused, and did not pronounce the word. May understood what he meant, and crouched down sobbing by the foot of the appalling object. The horseman evidently approached rapidly, and yet there seemed to be an unsteady, uncertain mode of progression about the steed, as it neared the spot were the corpse hung in its grim corslet of chains. It seemed as if the rider by whip, rein and spurs, were urging the animal to more speed than it chose, or had the power from fatigue or otherwise to make. At length, just such another light cloud which had produced a dimness over the surrounding scene, had swept across the face of the moon, and all was clear again, the horseman reached the point of his route, which was directly opposite to the gibbet, then it seemed as if some sudden panic had seized the horse, for it reared and plunged instead of proceeding onwards.

The moonbeams fell upon the figure of the traveller. The light wind carried his voice, as he uttered an imprecation, to the ears of Claude, who clutching his sister's wrist with a vehemence that forced a slight scream from her lips, exclaimed—

"It is Sir Lionel!"

Like a lump of lead, and with a heavy dashing sound, the dead body at this moment fell from the gibbet, and lay in a huddled-up ghastly mass at the feet of Claude—a mass of rusty iron, tattered clothing, and half decomposed flesh and bleached bones. Claude was upon his knees. The drops of mortal agony rolled from his brow. He plunged his hand into the breast of his clothing. The moonbeams fell glittering upon the barrel of a large holster pistol. It was levelled across the dead body, finding a resting place upon some of the iron work that had enclosed the head of the gibbetted malefactor. A sharp ringing report followed, and then horse and man rolled over the declivity, and disappeared in the profound darkness beyond. There was a crashing of branches of trees—a struggle and a cry, and then the thundering sound of the horse's hoofs, as he galloped madly onward, came upon the ears of Claude.

"'Tis done," said the lad. "'Tis done. The steed gallops home, but the rider remains on the heath. 'Tis done. I could not miss such a shot as that. Father, you are avenged! You are avenged!"

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST ROBBERY.—THE ROAD TO LONDON.—THE INITIATION OF CLAUDE.

For a few moments now there was a death-like stillness, and Claude might well do, as more calm reflection came to his aid, alarmed at the consequences of the act he had just committed, for however, in the heat of his passion, or the excitement of a moment it might bear the impress of a just retribution, its results could not be a matter of indifference.

It was from the clear intelligence and candid mind of his sister that Claude now sought for counsel what he was to do.

"May, May!" he said. "You know what has happened, May speak to me—speak, do not chill my heart by this silence—dear May speak to me."

She was silent still, and then Claude by a more accurate look at her pale face, discovered that she had fainted, and probably quite unconscious that any such act as he had committed had been done, and this thought produced a singular revulsion of feeling in Claude.

"She knows nothing," he said to himself. "She fainted perhaps before the shot was fired, and it was not all fright which caused her to do so—exhaustion—weakness from want of proper food, has some share in it.—Oh God, that it should be so. That one so good and so beautiful as you are, my poor May, should want what to so many are superfluities.—What can I do. What—what ought I to do?"

He rested his head upon his hands for some few moments, and then he made a resolution which will be best understood in its results, which were immediate.

After satisfying himself that May was still perfectly insensible, he gently crept from her side, and passing the gibbet made his way to the brink of the abyss down which Sir Lionel Faversham had rolled.—Then holding tightly to an alder tree which grew close to the edge; he tried to pierce with his eyes the gloom below, but he could see nothing. The rank vegetation effectually excluded all light, and to all appearance it just seemed like looking into a well. His determination, however, was made, and clutching at whatever roots or branches afforded him a chance of support, he slowly but safely descended the precipitous bank.

The depth was about thirty feet, and it took Claude some time, before he reached the road-way that wound through the hollow of the heath at its base. The moon was still struggling with the fleecy clouds which seemed resolved like some advancing host to obliterate her brightness, but at intervals there was light enough

to distinguish one object from another. The horse Claude knew was not there, but the rider he fully expected to find, nor was he disappointed, for a long dark object met his gaze, and he thought that a strange groaning sound came faintly upon his ears.

Creeping along with his body bent almost to the earth, and his hands outstretched, he made his way for the few paces that separated him from the body, and then he touched it. At the moment of doing so he shuddered, for there was to the imagination of the boy, something terrible about a corpse; but, muttering some indistinct words to himself, in which the name of his sister was intermingled, he gathered courage and began to execute his purpose, which was to find if the fallen man had money with him, which would enable him (Claude), and his sister to reach the metropolis in safety, and there subsist for a time until some better fortune should enable them to look more smilingly upon their fate.

"It is a just retribution," said Claude, "I—wonder if he carries a purse with him? This need never be known to May. It never shall be known, or to her perception each coin, and each particle of food purchased with it, would seem to be accursed."

His fingers trembled so, that it was only with the greatest difficulty that he could make the requisite search for the valuables which Sir Lionel might be supposed to have about him, but at length he found a long silken purse, which, from its weight, and the rich jingle of its contents, he judged contained what to him was a considerable sum in gold. Twice his hands had touched a bunch of gold seals that hung from the watch pocket of Faversham, and as often had Claude shaken his head, and left them, but now he lingered and listened attentively—not a sound came upon the night air, and for the first time, he showed a symptom of that mad-brained recklessness, which was a characteristic of his after career, for snatching the watch from the pocket, where it had lain so snugly, he said,—

"It's just as well to be able to know the time when one pleases."

The watch was a repeater, and in his haste, Claude pressed the spring, when, to his surprise, for he had no notion of such a contrivance, the little silvery bell struck one, and then chimed a quarter.

"Hush! hush!" said Claude, quite involuntarily, as he sprang to his feet. He then placed both watch and money in his pocket, and commenced clambering again up the steep ascent to where he had left May.

There was a strange feeling at his heart now, and a kind of dizziness about his brain, which Claude could not, or fancied he could not account for, although had he been a little more inquisitive into the sources of his feelings, and a little more candid with himself, he might have come to the conclusion, that those feelings were the result of the consciousness that he was both a murderer and a robber. The excitement of a moment, and strongly outraged feelings might do something in extenuation of the pistol-shot, but as regarded the purse and the watch, there could be invented no such excuses.

But the deed was done, so when Claude scrambled on, and when he had just reached the brink of the precipice, he nearly fell the whole distance back again, so startled was he by the sudden touch of some one on his arm from above, and the pronunciation of his name. The accents were those of May, and he recovered, saying—

"Oh, May, how you frightened me."

"Claude, Claude, what has happened. Tell me what has happened. Did not Sir Lionel fall over the bank, Claude?"

"Yes, and after that I heard the horse's hoofs upon the road towards the Bull and Bush."

"Then he was not killed by his fall?"

"Certainly not, May—She knows nothing, and in her confusion has forgotten the pistol shot," thought Claude, "and so far things turn out as I would wish them."

"Shall we come home?" said May, placing her arm across her eyes, lest they should take in a view of the horrible gibbet.

Claude was silent for a few moments and then he said:—"You know, May, we have talked often of leaving here for ever; why should we not do so to-night? There is only the cottage that we need care for—suppose we go to London at once, May, and see what fortune has in store for us. I have a little money, and we will so husband that that it shall last us a long time. What say you, May? The distance is short—what is that?"

The jingle of bells and the creaking of wheels had come upon his ears, and almost as he asked the question of what it was, he replied to it by adding—

"Oh, it is the Hendon waggon, which has just left the Bull and Bush. There is a chance for us, May—we can meet it about half a mile further on, where the road rises to the level of the heath, and so go on to London, and never again with my good will shall I look upon Hampstead-heath by night or by day."

"We are alone," sobbed May, "in the wide world, We have no friends but each other. Where you go, Claude, there will I go, and, Heaven knows, this place is too full of heart-breaking recollections to bind us to it. Let us go at once."

Claude was well pleased to find no opposition from May to leaving, and without casting another look at the awful spectacle that was at the foot of the gibbet, although they both lingered a little, and May wept bitterly, they left the spot making their way across the heath, guided by the monotonous sound of the bells that were at the heads of the waggon horses.

"Stop!" cried Claude, as he and May met the waggon near the Castle. "Stop. Can you give us a lift to London? We can pay."

The waggoner paused and stopped his team, and seemed to be considering a little, after which he said, half aloud—

"It's not very likely, now, surely, and I may as well earn a shilling." Then he cried in a louder voice. "Scramble in at the back, you will find lots of straw. Be quick about it, for I am rather late to-night—that's right—but, look you, if your places are wanted you must get out again and ask no questions, mind that now."

"There will be room enough for us, and a dozen others too, I should think," said Claude, as he assisted May into the waggon, and sprang in after her.

"I don't know that," muttered the waggoner, "and I am half afraid now of the captain. Yet it's a chance, and I don't see why I should not earn an extra shilling when I can. They are only a boy and girl, too, and can be easily put out if needs be, and yet—I don't know—I wish I had'nt——"

Thus muttering his doubts and fears about something which was quite unintelligible to Claude, the waggoner put his horses again in motion, and they crept at a lazy pace over the heath, which then had none of the snug villas and smart cottages about it that it has now; for with the exception of two trees, and Lord Mansfield's large house, there was not a more desolate spot to be found, at night, than the beautiful heath of Hampstead.

For a good half mile further on, no house or light was to be found, and the waggon, which was a large covered one, with an amazing width of entrance at the back, and containing nothing but a quantity of loose straw, had advanced about half that distance when Claude's heart beat violently as he heard distinctly the gallop of a horse across the heath, for a dread that in some inexplicable way the murder and robbery of Sir Lionel Faversham might have been discovered, and suspicion placed upon him, was busy at his brain. A sensation of absolute sickness came over him, as he heard the hollow ringing sound of the horse's hoofs upon the common.

The waggon stopped.

"Hilloa!" cried the waggoner, "do you hear, or have you gone to sleep? You can't stay any longer. Come out directly; or it will be worse for you! Come out, I say, or we shall all be in a nice mess. Confound me for a fool to take you till I was clear of the common!"

"Who is it? Who is it?" cried Claude, as the sound of the horses' feet came nearer and more distinct, giving evidence that he who was approaching would soon be close to the waggon.

"You would be none the wiser if I told you," replied the man, speaking hurriedly and betraying the utmost anxiety to get rid of his guests. "Scramble out any way, so that you be off at once. It's too late, he's here, I'm in for it at last!"

All this happened with such rapidity, and May clung so closely to her brother who was likewise rather entangled in the straw that lay so thick at the bottom of the waggon that even had he fell fully inclined to obey the hurried and rather vehement commands of the waggoner, he could not have done so with sufficient celerity to save the latter part of his speech, to the effect that it was too late. Under these circumstances, then Claude did the best thing he could, which was to remain ready to act according to circumstances getting as far as he could with May still clinging to him to the upper end of the capacious vehicle.

The night was now darker than before, for a mass of clouds had come across the young moon, threatening to obscure its light effectually for some hours so that Claude had no sense but that of hearing through which he could obtain any information.

"What do you tell me old Peter," cried a careless laughing sort of voice, "two persons in the crib—eh? A girl and a boy! Well, well, no matter. I like good company, and they will be none the worse for a ride to London with me. Where are they? Tell them to get up to the far end, and they will come to no harm. Throw open the canvass, Peter—don't you hear that there's half-a-dozen horsemen on my track?"

To the intense astonishment of Claude and the alarm of May, the horse with its rider bounded lightly into the waggon, and the canvass at the back was immediately closed upon them both.

"Down, Silversides! down mare," cried the man, and by the motions of the horse among the straw, Claude was aware that it had lain down on its side. He drew May as far as possible away from dangerous contiguity to the animal's feet, and then mustering courage to speak, he said,—

"Sir, we are not disposed to be in your way. We only want a lift to London."

"Very good," was the careless reply, "but mark me, my lad, if you prate of what you have seen to night I'll find you out, if you were as difficult to get at as truth in the bottom of a well, and cut your throat! Who are you?"

"My name is Claude Duval, and this is my sister May. Some people, however, will call me Jack," I don't know why. Pray who are you?"

"Humph, you want to know who I am?"

"I should like to know, for somehow I think we shall be friends yet."

"Do you my lad—well then I don't recollect my real name, but among my pals I am called Sixteen-string Jack, and this is my mare, Silversides."

CHAPTER II.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK FINDS AN APT PUPIL.—THE BROTHER AND SISTE SEPARATE.

After the mysterious personage who had so unceremoniously sprung with his horse into the waggon, had thus spoken, there was a pause of some few minutes duration, for neither Claude nor his sister could make much of the rather singular name of Sixteen-string Jack, and they feared to make a comment upon it, lest

they might offend one who evidently had the power to turn them out of the waggon if he chose.

"What are you thinking about," at length cried Jack, "I warrant now you are nicely puzzled to know what I am, so I will tell you; I keep a toll on the Great North Road, and as I don't like to trust anybody to collect my dues I do it myself, and as there are unreasonable people who object to pay, I carry a good brace of bull dogs with me."

"Bull dogs, sir?" said Claude.

"Aye pistols. These are my bull-dogs, and they never bark when I don't want them, but when I do, they open tongue to some purpose. Then again some folks after they have paid, go prating about it, and get others to ask disagreeable questions, so that I give the spur to my good steed, Silversides, and off we are over hill and dale like the wind. It's a brave life, I'm the real lord of many manors. The king of the road, and whoever travels by moonlight is a subject of mine, and must pay my taxes. What do you think of all that, my lad?"

"I hardly know what to think," said Claude.

"Don't speak to him," whispered May, "don't speak to him, he's a highwayman, Claude. Let us get out of here and walk."

"Hist!" cried Sixteen-string Jack, suddenly, "not a word, on your lives. Don't you hear?"

Claude listened, and distinctly then heard the tramp of horses feet, and in a few moments a loud authoritative voice cried,—

"Hilloa! Pull up waggoner. How far have you come, my man?" and by the trampling of horses and the bustle around, Claude felt certain that several horsemen had congregated about the waggon. He could hear too, by the hard breathing of the steeds, that they had been going at a quick pace, while the tone of inquiry of him who spoke was hurried and anxious.

"Woa!" cried the waggoner, and the horses paused, while the jingling of the bells at their heads, nearly ceased—"Woa! Anan sir? what *wur yow* a saying?"

"How far have you come down the road, my man?"

"Oh, how far? From Goulders Green."

"Has a horseman passed you on the heath?"

"One did.—A chap on a bay horse, and was'nt he a going it. Hounds! I thought he'd a been right over me waggon and all, I did. Hark ye my man says he, if you say you saw any one to night on the heath, says he, you may as well cut your own throat, says he, cos it will save me the trouble, says he, of finding you out and cutting it for you, says he, and then off he was like a shot; drat him I aint afeard of him, drat his impudence."

"Our man without a doubt," said the horseman. "Which way did he go?"

"Beyant there, to Caen Wood I take it."

"Follow me gentlemen, this will be a good night's work if we rid the neighbourhood of that notorious highwayman, Sixteen-string Jack, I fired at him, and perhaps he is wounded, in which case he cannot hold out long. This way gentlemen, follow me, and don't spare whip nor spur."

The party of pursuers gallopped off across the heath, and the waggoner without taking any further notice of the transaction, put his horses into motion again and entered the village of Hampstead.

"They were looking for you," said Claude to the highwayman.

"They were, my lad, but you see they are baulked; I wonder what the time is, I gave my watch this morning to Nan Eyles, and the one a gentleman lent me about half an hour since, upon the heath, has run down."

"I can tell you the time," said Claude, on the impulse of the moment producing the repeater he had taken from the pocket of Sir Lionel Faversham. "I can tell you exactly the time, I dare say, and it strikes too, though I don't know how exactly to make it."

It was too dark for the watch to be seen, but the highwayman was surprised to find that such an article was in the possession of such a lad, and he said,—

"Hand it to me. If it be a repeater I can make it strike."

By the feel, rather than by any aid from the dim light that now and then from a miserable oil-lamp came into the waggon, Claude managed to place the watch in the hands of his new acquaintance, and then he had the pleasure, in a moment, of hearing the little fairy-like bell sound the hour.

The different persons in that waggon were very differently affected by those slight and musical sounds.

The highwayman felt that there was a mystery attached, and he held his peace, and listened for the remarks of his companions, as being most likely to afford him some clue to what was as yet a perfect puzzle.

Claude was occupied with a mixed feeling of joy and pain. He listened to the sounds of the repeater with almost childish pleasure, but he felt at the same moment that May's suspicions would be aroused, and that he must in some way or other, either by falsehood, which he held in contempt, or by the plain truth, satisfy his sister's doubts.

But to poor May the tinkling sounds were full of nought but horror. Almost intuitively she seemed to be aware that the trinket was the prize of some lawless deed, committed when or how, she knew not. She had penetrated enough of their fellow companion's character to dread any closer connexion with him, and her soul was overshadowed by dread of disasters none the less appalling for being undefined, which loomed fearfully out from the darkness of the future. She felt that her brother's fate was in some way connected with the possession of the watch, which had appeared among them as mysteriously as if it were indeed one of those gifts of seeming value with which the spirits of evil were said to tempt men's souls. A moment only elapsed, when in a startled and fearful voice she broke the silence.

"Oh! Claude, Claude." sobbed May, "how came you by a watch?"

"What matters it," answered Claude, "where it came from? I have it, and that ought to be sufficient. It will make a pretty ornament for you, dear May, at holiday times, when fortune smiles once more upon us."

"Nay, talk not so. dear brother," whispered May, "I could feel no pleasure in wearing it, unless I knew how you came by it; and poor orphans as we are, and homeless wanderers too, Claude, I dare not hope for happy times for many a weary day to come. Set my heart at ease, then, and do not aggravate our present misfortunes by filling my mind with fears that I dare not give utterance to;" and May threw herself weeping on his neck.

"Fears! what have you to fear, May? Did you never hear of one person losing a watch on a dark night, and another person finding it?"

"Such a thing is quite possible," said May, "but even then, Claude, the watch would not be yours to keep or give to me. It would be your duty to hand it over to those who would find an owner for it."

"And many thanks I should get for that, sister. No, no, dry your tears, dear May, and rest satisfied that the watch shall not pass from my hands to another, owner or not owner, unless he who demands it is a better man than myself."

"Claude, Claude," exclaimed poor May, "how can you grieve me by saying so?—you cannot mean what you say."

"Ho, ho," cried Sixteen-string Jack, "I find you are a lad of mettle—eh? Come you may trust me, my lad. How came you by it? It's a dangerous companion for you, if there should be any hue and cry. You might do a worse thing than make me your friend in such an affair. You are silent—you are afraid to trust me. Perhaps that's natural; but have not I trusted you? A word from you to the horsemen that a minute since stopped the waggon, and I should have been taken. I could not have held my own against such odds, and then, as sure as to-morrow's sun will rise, I should have swung at Tyburn. I would fain do you a good turn. This watch may be your destruction."

"Keep it yourself, sir," said May, "and for God's sake, Claude, say not another word about it!"

"Nonsense, pretty face," laughed Jack; "for a pretty face I am sure you have however, let him speak out."

"I took it," said Claude, "upon the heath from Sir Lionel Faversham."

"You robbed Sir Lionel Faversham to night upon the heath? The devil! And is this the first little adventure of the sort?"

"The very first."

May burst into tears, and clung convulsively to her brother, as she sobbed,—

"The last likewise—the last, Claude, send back the watch, and ask for forgiveness. Oh, Claude, I thought we were unhappy, but I knew not what wretchedness really was until now; you will do as I implore you, Claude? speak, speak to me, and say you will do so."

"A dangerous course, miss," said Jack; "it's too late."

"Yes," said Claude, drawing a long breath, "yes, it's too late."

May sobbed bitterly, while the highwayman whispered to Claude,—

"You have done now what cannot be undone. As for expecting any mercy, even if you chose to seek it from Sir Lionel Faversham, you might as well expect a famished tiger merely to pass you in a lonely place with his compliments. If he can find you, he will not rest until you are in the cart on your road to Tyburn. You are fortunate in coming across me, for I can afford you both counsel and protection. When we get to London I can find an asylum for yourself and your sister until the hue and cry is over, and then you can take your own course, and unless I am very much mistaken, I can guess tolerably well what that course will be. A good horse!—a pair of pistols!—a light heart—and—"

"The road!" cried Claude. "Life on the road! I am poor and friendless—my father's bones bleach upon the heath. The sense of deep wrongs lies wrinkling at my heart, and I cannot bow and smile my way through life for a sup or a crust. The road for me! A short life and a merry one—and the sooner it begins the better."

"Hurrah," said Jack; "you are the lad for me. Here we are at the King's Head, near Kentish Town, where I can give you a welcome until to-morrow, and then take you to a safer place still."

"No, no," cried May, in a voice that was almost a shriek of despair. No, no,—oh, God, no!—Claude, Claude, you are mad!—You know not what you say!—I implore you by the tie that binds us, orphans as we are, to each other, to pause. Claude, Claude, for my sake, if not for your own, I beseech you not to give way to this frightful temptation. If you would seek happiness or peace, seek it in honour, truthfulness, and in honesty. You are on the threshold yet of life; you have not sinned deeply, Claude. Oh plunge not rashly onwards in the desperate course you suggest."

"Really, my dear," said the highwayman in a bantering tone, "you—"

"Peace, sir," said May, "interrupt me not. "I am talking with a sister's love to a brother. Shame, shame, upon you who have become hardened in vice, to strive to warp him round to a love of your own evil courses. Shame, shame, upon you, for your own guilt, but doubly shameful is it to snatch from a right course, a being, who cannot know as you know, the evil that presents itself to him in such fleeting but alluring colours."

"Very good," said Jack, "say your say, my lass, and let your brother take his own course, it don't matter to me; my career is fixed."

The waggon had stopped, and a glare of light came into its interior from a lanthorn that a man who had come out of a public-house door held up, while he shaded his eyes with his hands. The scene within the waggon was a strange one. The highwayman's horse, which occupied by far the greater portion of the interior, lay upon its side, while Sixteen-string Jack kept his hand upon the creature's head. The highwayman's dress could now be distinguished—he wore a scarlet coat with large lappels, slightly disclosing an embroidered waistcoat, and the lace ends of a rich, but not by any means scrupulously clean cravat. From the tops of his boots hung a knot of coloured ribbon, from which he derived his cognomen of Sixteen-string Jack, and take him altogether he looked the very

beau ideal of the knight of the road at that strange period when highwaymen were as much public characters as Members of Parliament are now. Claude was standing up, and steadying himself by holding part of the awning of the waggon, while May was kneeling at his feet in that attitude of intensity she had assumed to warn him from his desperate purpose of taking to the road for a livelihood.

"Hilloa, captain!" said the man, "What's it all about? Have you got some company?"

"I have," replied the highwayman, and then, turning to May, he added, "you are doing me a great injustice; you fancy I want to persuade you brother to go upon the road, but you quite forget that he has been there already, and that all I offer him is protection from the consequences of what has happened on Hampstead Heath, to-night. Do you fancy now that he has nothing else to do but to wish to lead a quiet, virtuous life, and that he will be permitted to do so? I can tell you it is not so. He will be hunted like a wild beast for what he has already done, and all I want him to do, is to stand at bay a little. But you may settle it between you, what can it matter to me?"

"Claude, do not answer him;—Claude—Claude."

She rose, and flung herself upon her brother's neck, so that he was prevented from making any movement towards Sixteen-string Jack, but he held out his hand, and the highwayman nodded, as much as to say, I comprehend you, you have made your choice, and then, pointing to the inn, the door of which was kept rather uncomfortably open, he paused a moment, as if expecting Claude to make an effort to release himself from his sister's detaining embrace, and follow him.

"May," whispered Claude, "May, you know not what you advise, I will speak to you to-morrow; let us to-night accept of rest and shelter where we can."

"No—no. Better starve—better be destitute in the streets, than enter that house."

"I cannot make such a return for a kind offer."

"Say you will not, Claude, and I shall understand you, although I shall never believe that it is you who speaks.

"Listen to me, May; you shall be kept like a lady, your happiness and comfort shall be my first care, you shall want for nothing. Let me go—let me go."

She clung tighter still to him; Sixteen-string Jack laughed, and Claude's cheek reddened, for he thought as boys are apt to think, that it reflected upon his manhood to be detained thus by his sister, so he spoke more angrily.

"May, I say, release me!"

As these words were uttered he flung her from him, and jumped from the wagon. With a cry of grief she followed him, and clung again to his apparel, but again he shook her off, and rather roughly too, so that had not Sixteen-string Jack interposed his arm she would have fallen, but when she found to whom she owed the temporary support, she shrunk back from him with a shudder, and clasping her hands, looked for a moment or two earnestly at Claude.

"Come, sister May," he said, "the rain is falling and the wind blows still, come in."

"No," she said, "no; since it must be so, farewell, Claude."

In a moment she darted off, and was lost to sight in the darkness.

"Stop—stop," cried Claude, "May, you will not go alone and destitute. Stop—oh stop!—listen, May, I have more to say to you."

He would have rushed after her, but the highwayman held him by the arm, as he cried,—

"Pho! pho! she won't run far. You will have her back again soon. Where is she to go to? make yourself comfortable. Landlord, bring a bowl of punch, and let it be the best you can make. I and my young friend must be better acquainted."

"But—but," said Claude. "but my sister——"

"Oh, you will see her again soon enough. Besides, what idea would you have of her affection, if she starts off from you, the first time there is

any little difference of opinion, while you, as a man ought to know best what to do?"

This was attacking Claude at his weak point.

"Oh yes," he said. "We men are not to be guided by women."

"Of course not. Come in, come in. The punch, landlord, the punch. The wind is cold indeed to-night. Claude Duval, you will be famous; I am no bad judge of such matters, and something seems to tell me that there never was yet a knight of the road, who will be able to compare with you. I shall be proud of you as a friend. Come on, come on, and we will talk more of it."

CHAPTER III.

THE LONELY HORSEMAN.—THE NIGHT ATTACK.—THE HUT.—A FAMILY CARRIAGE.

Two years have elapsed since the incidents recorded in our first and second chapters. It is a cold—bitterly cold night in January. The east wind is scattering sleet and hail like small sparks of sharpened steel through the air, and all as far as the eye can reach is darkness and desolation. In the midst of such a scene, and at a such a time, a solitary horseman is trotting across Ealing Common.

It is not by a regular bridle road that this horseman proceeds—on the contrary, whenever by the sound, and it is only by the sound that he can come to an opinion, in consequence of the darkness around him, he finds that his horse is on a beaten track, he turns aside until again there is nothing beneath the cautious hoofs but the green turf, or small pools of water into which it almost each moment splashes.

"Now by all that's good," muttered the horseman, as he clenched his teeth against the keen wind, and with his disengaged right hand, dashed the half blinding sleet from before his eyes. "I would not have come out on such a night as this, had it not been that the gaming table has so completely cleared my purse that it sadly lacks replenishing. It will look positively ungentlemanly to stop anybody on such a night, but needs must when a certain old friend of mine drives, so hurrah for my old luck, and here I am upon the high road at last."

There was just light enough to distinguish the principal road that went across the common from the darker colour of the grass that fringed it, and the solitary horseman now kept within half a dozen paces on the turf by the side of it.

By the turn he had now made at right angles to his former course, his back was turned towards the cutting sleet that was driving through the air, and he certainly got on much more comfortably than before, while he half sung to himself a popular air of the day, and when he fancied, and in most cases it was but fancy, he saw a hillock before him, he made the obedient horse give a demi-vault, which it executed with surprising grace and ease.

"Ah, my good Sue!" apostrophised the rider. "My good Sue, what should I do without thee? What should I be without thee, my gallant lass—fleet of foot—long in wind—sagacious, and more faithful than many human beings. I love thee, my Sue!"

As he uttered this panegyric upon his horse, he patted the neck of the animal, which by a short neigh seemed to be fully sensible that just then it was a special object of its master's commendations, and to be well pleased accordingly.

Suddenly the horseman gave the rein a peculiar touch, and the steed stood as motionless as though it had been carved in stone.

"Hush! hush," he said, "my old acuteness of hearing is bothered by the wind and the sleet, or I hear the sound of horse's feet.'

After then listening for a few moments he still was in doubt, for he suddenly flung himself lightly off of the horse, and placed his ear nearly on a level with the ground to listen, this process quite satisfied him, and vaulting into the saddle again, he said,

"Yes some one comes, I am not mistaken, and I have only to hope that his purse is well lined. It will be a great insult to a gentleman of the road if it be not, and must be resented accordingly. We shall see, we shall see. The horse's footsteps sound clean and clear as though it was no common hack. Now Sue, my lass, we may have a little adventure to warm our bloods, and faith we need it on such a night as this."

The sound of an approaching horse at an easy canter, was now plainly perceptible, and the highwaymen, for such our readers of course conclude him to be, walked his steed gently along the road, to meet the advancing traveller, and the dusky figures of a horse and man were soon seen against the leaden-coloured sky.

Thus approaching each other, but a very few minutes could elapse ere the highwayman and his intended victim came face to face, and saw as much of each other as upon such a night could be seen.

"Halt!" said the highwayman, "halt! answer me one question, Sir Traveller, and answer it upon your honour."

"What do you mean? Keep off, as you value your life," said the traveller, in stern accents; "I am armed.

"Very good. It is unsafe to travel unarmed, and not always safe even with arms; but to my questions: Are ye a gentleman? by which I mean, one who eats the bread of idleness, and is not engaged in any business pursuits."

"A gentleman!" said the stranger, "who dare dispute my right to that title?"

"Good. I never condescend to stop any but gentlemen, and since you assert your right to the designation,—stand and deliver?"

"What?"

"Your money—watch—rings—or, your life!"

"Now, by Heavens, this is the most barefaced and impudent attempt at robbery I ever heard of. You will consult your own safety by getting from before my path."

"You are mistaken, sir; I wish to behave towards you with all due courtesy, but you will best consult your own ease, by complying with my demand. As for my safety, I set my life upon casts like these, and am willing to stand the hazard of the die."

"Take it, then," said the stranger; and drawing a pistol from his pocket, he snapped it in the face of the highwayman. The powder flashed in the pan, without discharging the weapon, and the traveller, casting it to the ground with an imprecation, was fumbling in his pocket for another, which did not seem to be so ready to his hand, when, with a suddenness and a vehemence that could not be resisted, the highwayman closed with him, and grasped him by the collar, exclaiming as he did so, and flung him from his seat,—

"You should keep your powder dry."

"Villain," cried the traveller, as he lay half stunned by the fall.

"Not so," replied the highwayman, "if I were, what would there be to hinder me repaying you in kind for your intention, to blow my brains out by actually performing that process upon the small quantity you evidently only possess. Once more, your money and valuables!"

He had dismounted; and while his horse, Sue, stood profoundly still, the stranger's steed, alarmed at the confusion, scampered away over the common, and was out of sight in a moment in the darkness.

"Take my purse, and here, too, is my watch. I have but one ring, and that I wish to keep—not so much on account of its value, as from recollections connected with it."

"Oh, certainly. Don't say another word about it."

"You are chilvaric in your way," added the gentleman, as he made a vain

effort to rise but found that he had struck his head so severely against a stone, that the darkness seemed full of strange grotesque shapes, swimming before him I—I ask you a favour——"

"What is it?"

"I can scarcely speak. I think I shall faint from this fall. There is a traveling carriage coming with ladies, and one man; spare them. One lady is an invalid."

"What way is it coming? From town or country. Nay, you have already said so much, you may as well give me full information. You are silent—eh? Why he has fainted, I suppose. He must be seriously hurt, for it is not from any faint-heartedness he has gone off in this way. But if people will be obstinate, and resist the tolls, they must take the consequences. I won't leave him here though, to be run over by somebody, I can't be far off old Jarvis's place at Hanger-hill. If I could get him there, he would be safe until the morning and Jarvis could easily say he found him ,lying on the common. It shall be so; Sue, my lass Sue!"

The horse was close to him in a moment.

"This is not what you are exactly used to, my Sue," continued the highwayman "but at a pinch you won't object, I dare say. Humph! a tolerable weight, though thin enough."

He had lifted the insensible form of the traveller, and laid it as well as he could across the horse's back, and then taking the bridle in his hand, he guided it across the common, with which at that dark hour he seemed wonderfully familliar until he reached some trees skirting a low hedge, which formed the boundary of a little garden surrounding a miserable looking cottage. Then he paused, and blew a whistle in a peculiar manner, and in a few moments a man appeared at the door of the cottage, with a lantern in his hand.

"Jarvis its I," cried the highwayman.

"My noble captain! has anything happened amis?"

"No, but here is a gentleman who has had a fall upon the common, and muddled his brains for a time. I want you to let him lie quiet till the morning, when no doubt he will be all right, and relieve you from further trouble. If he remains on the common, who knows but somebody might rob him—eh, Jarvis?"

The man put the lanthorn on the ground, and by placing his hands on his sides, was evidently upon the point of bursting into a roar of laughing at what he considered such a famous joke, when he was checked by the highwayman's crying,—

"Peace, peace! I have no time to spare."

"Oh, certainly, captain; another job a coming, I suppose?"

"Possibly."

The still insensible stranger was lifted from the horse's back and carried into the hut, after which the highwayman mounted his horse again, and went back to the common at a hard gallop, until he reached the main road again that went across it, when once more he drew rein and listened.

"I hear nothing," he muttered, "could he have been deceiving me for any purpose? I am quite certain no travelling carriage has passed here to-night. Shall I be content with what I have already done, or shall I wait for it. Humph! ladies, he said, and one man; there will be more purses than one, and who knows but this fellow may take credit to himself when he returns to tell the story, for frightening me from an attack on the carriage. No, my Sue, we will not be put off by the story of an invalid lady; and if there be one, we will be so gentle that she shall feel no shock to her nerves. Ha! It comes."

He distinctly heard during a lull in the wind, the grinding sound of carriage wheels in the soft sandy soil. The horse too, seemed as though it pricked up its ears, and was fully alive to the excitement of its master's adventures. He paced slowly onwards in the direction of the approaching sounds, while the

highwayman in a low but not musical voice sung to himself a popular ditty, said to be composed by himself:

There's no life like a life on the road,
A good steed and a light heart give me,
Whi e misers are counting their gold,
I am careless, and happy, and free.

There's no life like a life on the road,
A pair of good bull-dogs give me,
Let plo ders ge sleeples's with s ghs,
As a king of the road I shall be.

He paused again to listen, and it was only at intervals when the wind lulled that he could do so, as blowing as it did from him in the direction from which the carriage was coming, it carried the sound away, instead of towards him, till he heard sufficient to be quite convinced that he was not mistaken, and slackening even the quiet walk of his horse, he turned it on to the grass again, so that no sound of its footsteps should create alarm in the minds of those who were approaching.

The road from Shepherd's Bush, then a wild desolate place, to Southall, was indeed so celebrated for the daring deeds of highwaymen, that it was no uncommon thing for people to turn back instead of crossing Ealing common, if there was any reason to suppose there was one of those night adventurers upon it, and hence it was that our hero did not think proper to give any premature notice of his presence to those whom he wished to attack.

And now about a quarter of a mile from him, he saw two faint star-like lights, and he knew them to be the carriage lamps, so that he had now a capital guide to the approach of the vehicle, and was able to take his station in the part of the road which he might think the best adapted for his purposes.

There was a hollow of about fifty feet in length, and it was in the lowest part of that where the highwayman took up his station, there being behind him a clump of fir trees, which effectually hindered his figure from being seen against the night sky. Moreover, those trees, tempered the wind considerably, so that the spot on which he fully intended to stop the carriage, was on that night the calmest upon the whole common, as well as, in consequence of its lying so low, the heaviest bit of road for the tired horses to struggle through, and so one at which they could be most readily stopped.

But it is time that we should take a peep into the travelling carriage, and see who they are that are so likely to be stopped.

CHAPTER III.

A HEIR AT LAW.—BEAUTY IN TEARS.—THE PROTECTOR.

THE travelling carriage which was doomed to come to an abrupt stand still upon Ealing common, had emblazoned upon its panels, the arms of one of the most ancient Oxfordshire families, and it contained personages so different in mind and manners, that even if it were not intimately connected with our story, it would be not a little curious to peep into it, and see how they behaved themselves individually towards each other.

It was one of the old fashioned roomy family coaches, that held six people without any inconvenience to speak of, and was drawn by two fat lazy horses, who never condescended to get out of a quiet walk of about five miles an hour

which was thought really very good work indeed, the more especially as the roads were but indifferent. On this occasion, however, there was a light load, for but four persons occupied the interior of the carriage.

One of them was an elderly lady, who seemed absorbed in painful reflections, for every now and then she shook her head, and gave utterance to a deep sigh. Then there was sitting next to her a young lady, who held the old lady by the hand, and who in a whisper would at intervals say something to her, which was intended to be cheering. On the opposite seat, crammed into one corner, was a younger lady, and all her efforts seemed to be to get as far as possible from a man who was on the seat beside her, and who was about one of the finest specimens of the "gents" of the period, that could probably have been found.

His coat was sky-blue, and had cloth enough about its skirts to make another of ample dimensions. His ruffles descended to the tips of his fingers. His hat diminished at the top to a ridiculously small circumference, and he held in both hands a riding whip, with the silver end of which he patted his mouth with great complaisance.

"Well, cousin Cicely," he said, "you don't seem the worse for your journey as yet, at any rate, do you now?"

This speech was evidently intended to procure a reply from the young lady, who held the hand of her elder companion, but it failed in that object, for the only notice taken of it consisted in a slight—a very slight inclination of the head from her.

"Well," he added, after another pause. "You may as well speak, I'm sure."

"What would you have her say?" inquired the old lady, tremulously. "You cannot expect that we should feel very happy?"

"Hem! Well I don't know that."

"What! Are we not now destitute?"

"Oh, no, no; I—that is you can look to me, you know. I used always to be counted a generous sort of fellow. The fact is, you take to heart the loss of the little property at Guilford, but it can't be helped, you know. You came into possession, all of you, because it was thought I was drowned on the river, but Lord bless you, I wasn't drowned at all. The fact is, I was picked up insensible by a Dutch smuggler and carried to Holland, that I was. He! he! he! Well, you must know I had no money, and——"

"You have told us all this before," said the old lady.

"Well, I was only saying—he! he! he!—Tom Brereton is like a cat, he always lights upon his legs—everybody says that. Well, you see, a fat little Dutch girl fell in love with me, so I borrowed some money of her, and bilked her. He! he! he! Then I came to England and found my old governor dead, and as I was supposed to be drowned, you and your family had walked from a couple of attics, in Bloomsbury, into the little Guilford property. Your son, too, must, to put himself forward in the army, borrow £100 on it. Lord! how you all stared when you saw me. Well, you ask me to come to London with you, to go to your friend Hammerton, the lawyer, and talk about it. Yes, says I—talk away. He! he! he! and here I am. This is my carriage, you know, properly speaking, though you do ride on the best seat."

"We will resign it to you," said the young girl.

"Oh, no, no—never mind me—I only just mentioned it, that's all."

"You may be the son of my poor brother, whom I call poor, because he was uncharitable," said the old lady, "or you may not; for as you know very well, if you be the person you represent yourself to be, I have not seen you since you were a child."

"If I be? Well, come, that is good. But the lawyer will soon put that to rights, and as for not seeing you and your family, the old governor, who has gone to glory I suppose, used to say, 'Tom, always keep out of the way of your poor relations. They will borrow your legs else, and leave you nothing but stumps to walk upon.' He! he! he! Good that was."

"And kind," said the younger girl, who sat on the same seat with him, and who now in a tone of bitter sarcasm, pronounced these two words.

"Well, miss pert," said Tom Brereton, "I don't see that you have any right to meddle with it. You are only——"

"My friend," interrupted the young lady opposite, and as such entitled to respect."

"Respect a fiddlestick! Upon my life, for people going out of their property you are about as confounded a set of stuck up folks as ever I heard of. I suppose your son, Markham, old lady, has got to London by this time, eh?"

"I don't know, sir," said the old lady.

"Oh don't you, ma'am. Well, I can't say I see why you should all of you be in such a way. You were poor before, and you will only be poor again, you know. I dare say you thought it an uncommonly nice thing, to drop into £250 a year, but after all you can go back to the two attics in Bloomsbury, you know, and try and get some sort of work to do, so as to pay me off by degrees, what you have already spent of mine. He, he, he! I think I ought to have rent for the house too, so long as you have been in it; upon my life I do."

"Can it be possible?"

"Rather."

"Alas, alas! and this is the amount of mercy I am to expect from my brother's son. Young man, we have told you candidly that we are now going to call upon a lawyer, to ask him what you can demand, and what you cannot."

"Oh I know that, but you need not all of you be in such a pet with me. If you had been civil, you need not have given yourself half the trouble. You were not over inclined to give me even a seat in the coach, though I did ask for it. He, he, he! my own coach, too. And why you should all be offended, just because I told Cicely she was pretty, and gave her the least tickle in the world, I don't know."

"If I were to inform my son, sir, of your conduct," said the old lady, "I would not answer for your safety one moment afterwards. I wish he had remained with us, but one reason why he did not was, that the road is so infested with highwaymen, he wanted to ride on till we were quite among the houses, to clear the way."

"Highwaymen! Bless my heart, you don't think there's any danger, do you? I've got £20 in my pocket, besides all my papers to prove who I am. Bless me. I—I don't feel comfortable at the idea of a highwayman, at all, somehow. I like my money."

"No doubt of it," said the girl on the seat with him.

"Of course I do, but I like my life better, and had rather, of course, like any reasonable man, pay something any day than be in any danger."

"So I should think."

"Ah, to be sure, you are after all a more sensible girl than I thought you. Now I tell you what we will do if a highwayman should stop us. I'll just slip down among the straw, and you can all of you say there are no persons but women here, and beg them to let you go."

"I should rather be inclined," said Cicely, "to direct attention to you, as bearing the semblance of a man, in order to protect our riches."

"No, no. You wouldn't do that now. How uncommonly unfriendly. Where are we now I wonder. Hoi, hoi! postillion, where are we now?"

"Ealing common sir."

"Just look out, and if you see a gentleman on a black horse, ask him to ride close to the window and not leave us, will you, and I'll give you a shill—I mean sixpence when we get to town, look sharp out now. God bless me, Ealing common. Why there have been more robberies on Ealing common lately, than everywhere else put together. They say Sixteen String Jack comes on this road sometimes, along with Claude Duval."

A slight start and exclamation from the young girl at his side, attracted the attention not only of Tom Brereton, but of the other ladies as well.

"What alarms you," said Cicely and then darting a glance at her contemptible cousin, Tom Brereton, she added, "pray sir, keep your fears to yourself. We do not share them, and therefore cannot feel in any way interested in them. If we should be attacked by a highwayman, he will perhaps for a moment fancy we have a man to protect us, but he will soon find out his error."

"Ah," said Tom, without showing much discomposure at the utterance of this remark, "I should not wonder now, but you think you will put me quite in a pet by what you say, but, he, he, he! it won't do, I assure you. Oh, dear no, and besides every inch that we get nearer town, there is less chance of a high man, and I of course am the more comfortable."

"You cannot surely sir," said the old lady, mean breaking silence, "that you have any serious intention of considering my son Markham as indebted to you for the use he has mistakingly made of the little property he thought belonged to us?"

"Why, as to that ma'am—aunt I suppose I ought to call you—as to that I——"

What sort of reply Mr. Tom Brereton was about to give to the remark of his aunt, is most unfortunately lost to posterity, for at the moment he had got so far in his speech, the carriage came to an abrupt halt, and a loud clear voice from the road side, cried—

"Move another pace, postillion, and I will try the temper of your skull with a couple of slugs."

"Murder!" groaned Tom Brereton, as according to his former expressed view of expediency in such a contingency, he slipped off his seat down among the straw at the bottom of the carriage. "Murder! There is a highwayman at last."

CHAPTER IV.

THE RECOGNITION.—THE BOBBERY AND THE RESCUE.—A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

A SLIGHT cry of terror was all that came from the old lady, and Cicely, flinging her arms round her mother, said with extraordinary courage—

"Be not alarmed, no man will wantonly injure us. I have heard that these highwaymen some of them have chivalric notions of honour, where females are concerned."

"Oh don't mention me to him whatever you do," whined Tom Brereton "Only think of my £20, my papers, and perhaps my life. Have mercy upon me. Confound the seat, I can't get under it. Miss Cicely—cousin Cicely, recollect we are cousins you know. Oh lord, here he comes."

The side lamps of the carriage sent a halo of light around the vehicle, and by its assistance the occupants of the vehicle could see a man's face, at one of the windows, which he rather dexterously let down from without, and then in the softest and most winning accents, as he laid his hand upon the panel of the door, he said—

"Be not alarmed ladies, I beg. I am aware that there is an invalid here, and will do my spiriting gently. I have the honour to request your purses and watches."

"Spare our lives," said the old lady.

"Lives! Oh, madam, can you fancy that I am a ruffian? I was misinformed, for a young gentleman, with whom I had the honour of a little conversation on the road, informed me that a man was of your party. You seem, however to be

alone, but do not let that circumstance alarm you. Unprotected females are the care of every gentleman."

"Will you permit us to pass, sir," said Cicely.

"Certainly, miss, will I, after the little ceremony of exacting a slight tribute, since you are travelling over my territory. All monarchs must have supplies, you know, however much in this case, I regret to see a shadow of alarm upon so lovely a face."

Cicely drew back as this compliment was uttered, for in her eagerness to endeavour to dissuade the highwayman, to allow them immediately to pursue their journey, she had brought one of the sweetest countenances the world ever saw, within the sphere of the lamp light, so that the highwayman caught a full sight of it, and he never forgot it.

"Take this," said the young girl, who had not yet spoken, as she handed a small silk purse to the robber. "Take this—look at it at your leisure, but leave us now."

"Who's that?" he cried. "Eh! Who spoke?"

As he uttered this hurried query, he looked more curiously into the carriage, the result of which was, that he saw the back of Mr. Tom Brereton's sky-blue coat. "Hilloa! what have we here?" he added. "Any skulking, eh?"

With the butt end of a large holster pistol, he dealt the hidden youth so serious a blow that he rose with a howl of pain, crying,—

"Oh Lord—oh Lord! Oh my back! Have mercy upon me, good Mr. Highwayman, I'm only an unfortunate young man who has nothing to give you. If you please, sir, to let me go this time, I'll take care the next time I meet you, to have a few pounds about me."

"Why, what poltroon is this?" cried the robber. "Come out, sir. Come out on to the common, and let me have a good look at you, that I may know a coward when I see one again. This fellow, ladies, is a disgrace to your society. Come out."

"Oh dear me. Now cousin Cicely, and you aunt, and you, miss what's your name, do say something for me, or I shall be murdered, I know. Oh dear—oh dear. Why did I come myself instead of sending somebody else on this errand?"

"Will you come out?"

"Don't insist upon it, I beg, sir, and I'll give you £10 down, upon my life I will."

"Be still, my Sue!" said the highwayman to his horse, and then immediately dismounting, he opened the door of the carriage, and seizing Mr. Tom Brereton by the collar, dragged him at once into the road, where that valorous individual fell upon his knees in the mud, and roared for mercy."

"Your money or your life!"

"Oh yes, of coure, sir. You will be paid. In this pocket book is my money, I'll get it out, sir, in a moment. Thank you, sir, I'm very much obliged. indeed."

"There's no occasion for so much trouble," said the highwayman as he twitched the pocket book from the trembling hand of Tom. "I can take it out myself at my leisure."

"But sir—good kind, sir. There's all my papers there to prove who I am."

"Never mind, you are sure to gain by the exchange if you are taken for some one else. Ladies have you any more money than what I have received?"

"We have but a small sum," said Cicely, "and God knows how sadly we want it."

"It is rather strange," replied the highwayman, "that ladies travelling in their own carriage should only have a small sum, and want that sadly; but if you will tell me upon your honour, that such is the case, I will take your word."

"Upon my honour it is so," said Cicely."

"That is sufficient, I have the honour, ladies, to wish you good night."

Cicely's hand was upon the edge of the door, and before she could be aware

of what he was about, the highwayman had raised it audaciously to his lips, and kissed it, adding in a soft and most winning tone—

"Believe that there are worse folks on the road of life, who pass along unsuspected, than Claude Duval."

"Claude Duval! Then you are that celebrated highwayman, who for the last year has filled report with his exploits, and—and—who——"

"Who never forgot that he was a gentleman in the presence of ladies," added the highwayman, "I have the honour to wish you good night. You may pursue your journey in peace, but should you be stopped at Shepherd's Bush, just say that Sue and her master has bidden you good night, and you will be allowed to pass on unmolested."

With these words, the highwayman left the astonished travelling party, and springing upon the back of his horse, was in a moment lost in the gloom that was beyond the little circle of light, cast by the side lamps of the carriage. Mr. Tom was still in the mud, hardly able to believe that after all he had really escaped with his life, from what he considered the most terrible danger he had ever been in, in all his career.

It was the postillion who first broke the silence that now ensued, and he did so by saying, in most dolorous accents—

"What shall I do ladies? Shall I go on. It was no fault of mine you know?"

"Yes, yes," cried Cicely, "go on as quickly as you can."

"No, no," shouted Tom Brereton. "Stop a bit—stop a bit. Don't go without me, you forget that I was pulled out of the coach. Stop I say, dont be going on in that sort of way. Hilloa! I'm all over mud. Come, come, a jokes a joke, but this ain't one."

The postillion was glad to get on, and in fact before Tom had began to call out in this way, for being left behind, the vehicle had already moved on a short distance, so that the terrified and bewildered postillion fully imagined that the shouting arose from other highwaymen, or perhaps the same, who might have come back, fancying he had not got enough out of the party. The consequence of this was, that instead of stopping, he started the horses on at increased speed, and after a further attempt to hold on by the back of the carriage, Tom was left sprawling in the dirt.

Cicely knew very well that such a catastrophe had occurred, but she did not under the circumstances think there was any very urgent necessity for taking any steps to rectify it, and in a few minutes Tom was out of ear-shot. As for the old lady she was in such a state of fright, that she scarcely knew what had happened, while the younger girl who had given the small purse to Claude Duval, uttered not a word.

Once Cicely thought she heard her weeping.

"Do not be alarmed, May," she said. "All is over now."

The young girl who was thus called May, started and spoke in a timid voice—

"Oh yes, it is all over. Thank God it is all over, and he has taken nothing from any of you. Oh most of all, I am deeply thankful for that. That is indeed a mercy."

"Nay, he could take but little from us, May, seeing that we have so little to lose, and certainly for a highwayman he was about as polite as any one could possibly with any reason expect. I am most anxious about my brother, Markham, and fear that some evil has befallen him upon the road. You are weeping again, May."

"I am deeply affected."

"Nay, my dear May, you should not allow a little circumstance like this, so to affect your nerves—all is over now."

"Can I be otherwise than affected," said the young girl, "when those, who in my state of destitution gave me food and shelter, are exposed to danger. Was I not a wanderer without a home in the streets of London, when you and your dear kind mother met me and took me home with you."

"Yes, but the candid manner in which you told us you were an orphan, and your name was May Russel, convinced us that we were right in thinking well of you, and your whole conduct has confirmed the thought."

"Yes, yes, I told you my name was May Russel, God will reward you."

"Say no more, May. That is a subject upon which you know I exacted, some time since, a promise that you would not speak, I know all that you would say, and therefore exacted such a promise. Let me beg of you to keep it, but, be assured, that let our condition be what it may, and our means ever so much reduced, you shall share with us what we have."

What reply the young girl would have made to this generous speech cannot be told, for at the moment she was about to open her lips to speak, the carriage stopped, and the postillion in a voice of terror, shouted,—

"Oh, Lord! here's another of 'em, I shall have them slugs in my nob yet, afore we gets to Tyburn Gate. Here's another! Here's another!"

A horseman galloped up to the carriage, and in a clear voice, said,—

"Ladies have you been stopped by a highwayman to-night, for I have?"

"Yes, yes," said Cicely. "Yes."

"Probably then a little bead purse that I took from him, belongs to one of you."

"Took from him!" cried the young girl, who had been called May. "Have you—you killed him?"

"Oh, no. We had a little encounter, and I gained the victory, after which he said to me, 'I regret that I took from a young lady in a travelling carriage a little bead purse, with a small sum of money in it. Will you restore it for me as you are on the road, and are likely to see them?' Upon which I took it, and here it is. There are some very bad characters high up the road by Shepherd's Bush, so if you please I will ride by the side of your carriage and escort you; I am well armed."

"Pray, sir, who are you?" said Cicely.

"I am an officer in the army, madam, but you see me in plain clothes, as I am at present what we call unattached."

The old lady had heard something of this colloquy and at once proposed her thanks for the offer of the officer's protection to town, and after she had said that, Cicely did not very well know how to say anything to the contrary, although from the conduct of Claude Duval, she had no fear of a second attack from him, and moreover, he had given her a pass-word against other depredators, in the efficacy of which she somehow or another placed implicit reliance, although coming from so suspicious a quarter as it did.

The officer took now for granted that he had full power to consider himself the escort of the ladies, for he ordered the postillion to go on at an easy pace, and with his hand resting upon the window sill of the carriage, he accommodated his footsteps to those in the vehicle, and so was able to converse.

"And so you have been stopped," he said, "by the celebrated—perhaps I ought to say notorious Claude Duval?"

"Yes," said Cicely. "He told us that was his name."

"And of course then you met with much politeness. He is well known to be specially gallant to women—nay I have been credibly informed in London, that some ladies who have been quite enchanted with the anecdotes told of the youthful, gallant highwayman, have actually gone to Ealing common for the sake of the chance of being stopped by him, and so achieving an interview with so celebrated a personage."

"Can it be possible?" said Cicely.

"Of my own knowledge, I cannot of course say, but I have heard as much."

"'Tis strange indeed," said Cicely. 'We on the contrary were in much alarm."

"You should not travel on such roads as this, unattended by a gentleman, permit me to say."

Cicely was about to make some remark about Tom Brereton, but she upon a second thought, corrected herself, and said nothing in reply to the officer, who, after a pause continued,—

"It is perhaps not quite correct of me as a stranger, to press my services upon you, but there is a frankness in your nature which will excuse me when I say, that I should esteem it a high honour to be of service to you in London in any way. Pray pardon me for saying so much, if you should think it in the least impertinent."

"Nothing can be impertinent that is meant to be kind," said Cicely, "but we—we—must decline making any acquaintance at present, sir."

"I bow to your decision," said the officer, "and as you will be soon in safety, I will leave you, merely remarking that I shall never forget this night."

"Indeed, sir!" said Cicely, in the most innocent manner in the world, for she was not sufficiently used to flattery to suspect that the stranger was only paving the way to the utterance of some well-turned compliment to her.

"Yes," he continued, "I shall cherish the remembrance of this brief conversation as one of the happiest moments of my life; I shall never forget tones that to my perception carry the sweetest music that my ears ever drank in with delight."

Cicely was silent—she felt hurt at this sudden freedom of the stranger's manner, and yet she did not know very well how to rebuke it, and he, probably fancying from her silence that he had a sort of license to go on, added—

"We may never meet again, but be asssured, that not the most vivid scenes of a chequered existence can ever obliterate an image that now lies enshrined in my heart."

At this moment a troop of about eight horsemen came along the road from London, and the foremost of them called out to the officer—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but have you come far up the road with your friends in the coach?"

"Yes."

"Then, sir, have you had a tussle with any highwayman? We have come out to see if we can capture the celebrated Claude Duval. Our horses are good, and so is our will."

"It's a great pity you should be disappointed then, gentlemen, of a little sport. —Ladies, I have the honour of bidding you good night.—Gentlemen, I am Claude Duval, and this is my horse Sue. Have you a mind for a canter to Wormwood Scrubs? If so, come on, and the devil take the hindmost!"

CHAPTER V.

THE RACE, AND WONDERFUL ESCAPE OF CLAUDE DUVAL.

For a few moments, as might well be supposed, the horsemen who had so frankly announced their intention of capturing the highwayman, if they could, were so perfectly astounded at the cool assurance of the object of their attack, that he had got a considerable start before they could among them settle the question of pursuit or no pursuit.

One of the party, however, who was apt to be more prompt in his proceedings than the others, cried in a loud voice as he spurred his horse—

"Forward! Do you want to be the laughing stock of all London?"

In most critical circumstances there requires but some one to give an impulse, and in this case, as it does in almost all cases, it fully succeeded, for one and all dashed after him who had spoken, at the greatest speed their steeds could compass.

But if the horsemen were astonished at finding the gentlemanly looking man, whose occupation appeared to be that of escorting some ladies into town, turn out to be the celebrated Claude Duval, how much greater was the bewilderment and surprise of Cicely Brereton and her mother? They were recalled, however to a consciousness of the necessity of immediately proceeding, by the violent weeping of May, who sobbed with such a convulsive energy that Cicely could not imagine how the occasion should be deemed sufficient to call forth such a gush of feeling, for, after all, singular as the adventure was, Cicely could find nothing affecting in it.

"My dear May," she said, "you have commonly so bold and firm a demeanour that I am surprised and grieved to find you thus afflicted."

"Then do not speak to me," said the young girl. "Do not speak to me just now, Miss Cicely, at another time perhaps I can tell you, but I implore you to ask me nothing."

This appeal uttered in almost frantic accents, was more puzzling still, and it was something of a relief when the postillion cried out—

"Shall I drive on? I thought it was him, for I seed a bit of a red coat peeping out from the top cloak he had on. Oh, I thought it was him, all the while, but I dare n't say nothing or he'd pretty soon have settled me. Shall I go on now?"

"Yes, yes," said Cicely, "and as quickly as you can."

The carriage rattled onwards, but, as it will be far more interesting for us to follow our acquaintance Claude Duval down the western road, we will leave the ladies Brereton to take their way unmolested into London, and once more place ourselves upon the track of the highwayman.

Although Claude, with his usual daring recklessness had, as we have seen, invited a pursuit, he yet seemed to be doubtful if the challenge would, under the circumstances be accepted by the horsemen, and as he was by no means inclined to be so absurd as to take a long gallop with no object, he reined in his horse, after going half a mile, and paused to listen.

All was still around him. It seemed as if at that moment the very genius of silence had taken up its abode upon that spot of earth, and this solemn repose of nature would have had an effect upon the warm and not unsuperstitious mind of Duval, had he not been much more intensely occupied by listening for any sound indicative of pursuit.

And soon it came. He heard the heavy tread of horses' hoofs in full gallop.

"Ah, my Sue!" he said, patting the neck of the beautiful animal he rode. "We shall be put upon our mettle. You must show them what blood can do with a light weight; and we must have no incumbrances, my lass."

As he spoke, he undid a clasp which held the cloak around his neck, that had so effectually disguised him from the recognition of the ladies in the carriage, and slung the garment over the front of his saddle. He then shifted his hat round about, for he had changed it likewise for disguise, the hind part before, and then, with a low chirping whistle he urged the horse forward, and off it went like the wind.

"My darling Sue!" he muttered, "we could beat them on a fifty mile chase, but why should we trouble ourselves so to do. We will bid them good-bye shortly, and if we can send them on a wild goose canter, we will."

Again he held his head aside to listen, and his practised ear told him how much he gained upon his pursuers, and how easy a thing it would be to distance them completely, and then take a route across the country, instead of by the high road, and so baffle them all—but as these thoughts passed rapidly through his mind, he heard a horse approaching from the other direction at a sharp canter, which would soon bring its rider face to face with him. This was not exactly what he wished, and yet it did not follow that the approaching horseman would take any notice of him, so he rode on, but at less speed, for he did not wish to seem to be a fugitive.

"Hold!" cried the horseman, as he came nearly up to Duval. "Hold, whoever you are, and answer me a question."

"What question?" said Duval, reining in Sue so suddenly, that she reared, and would have thrown a less practised rider.

"Is your horse fresh?"

"As a daisy in April."

"Then you must exchange with me, I'm a king's messenger, and my horse is tired; I can convince you I am what I say I am by showing you the badge of my office, a silver hound. Come, dismount at once, or I must enforce my demand. If you attempt to escape, I shall send a pistol shot after you."

The king's messenger, for such he really was, spoke in such a tone of decided and firm authority, that would have awed many a man into compliance with his wishes, especially as it was well known that ample remuneration was always given in such cases, but if ever a bold man met his match, the messenger had when he encountered Claude Duval.

"Its very kind of you," said Claude, as the messenger flung himself off his horse, and came towards him with the bridle in his hand, "to tell me who you are, and I cannot think of being otherwise than equally candid."

"Pho! pho! dismount, sir."

"I am, Claude Duval, the highwayman."

"The devil!"

"No, only one of his messengers. Good night."

As he uttered these words, Claude twitched the bridle of the messenger's horse out of his hand, and giving the rein to Sue, he was off with the other steed dashing on by his side, at the full stretch of the bridle which he held it by. This transaction had occupied far less space in the enacting than in the telling, and the galled and bewildered messenger found himself in the middle of the road, nearly five miles from London, and without a horse at all, in addition to which his own horse when it plunged off in obedience to the impulse given it by Claude Duval's, had saluted its former master with a kick, which, although not very serious, made him glad to sit down on the side of the road, feeling a little sick and uncomfortable.

In another moment the troop of horsemen in pursuit of Duval, swept past him at full speed, paying no attention to the cry he raised for aid.

On dashed Claude, and the horse without a rider, being relieved from its load, kept up the speed well which Sue enforced; but yet amused, as he was by this little extra adventure, Claude began to think he had better get rid of his captured steed, and he was upon the point of casting the bridle from him, when he heard a voice cry,—

"Murder! Murder! Will no Christian help me. Oh murder! murder! I'm all alone, I've been robbed by a highwayman. My name's Tom Brereton—murder! Help! Help!"

This was the very spot at which he, Duval, had first stopped the carriage, and he at once knew that the person who called so energetically for assistance, was the young man whom he dragged out of that vehicle by the collar. His fertile imagination and love of frolic at once suggested to him a plan of baffling his pursuers without fatiguing Sue, which he immediately resolved to put into practice.

"Oh, sir," he cried, "have you been robbed by a highwayman?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, dear; yes, and ill-treated, too."

"Well, I can tell you that there is on this road to-night, a regular gang of highwaymen, who are determined to rob and murder everybody they meet. This is my master's horse I am leading, mount it, and gallop, on keeping the high road, mind, till you meet a party of dragoons who are coming from Brentford, and then you will be safe, but if you or I remain longer here our throats will be cut."

"Oh, indeed, you don't say so."

"Indeed I do though. Come, quick, mount. I'll help you. Hold on any way

by his ears and his mane, for if you fall off you are lost. There, take this cloak round you, I'll clasp it—no thanks—all's right, off with you. Don't leave the high road. Good God, I hear them coming! Don't say a word, of course we ought all to help each other at a pinch."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear. I can't ride."

"Hold on anyhow, I tell you, and fancy all the while you feel a knife sawing away at your throat."

"Gracious goodness. Murder!"

Claude Duval gave the horse a slashing blow with a riding whip, and off it went, nearly maddened by pain and excitement, carrying Tom Brereton at a most respectable pace, while the cloak that was clasped round his neck floated behind him like some victorious banner.

"Now, my Sue," said Duval, and springing into the saddle again, he turned the creature's head towards a hedge by the road side, which Sue, fully understanding what was required now of her, cleared beautifully, alighting softly in a meadow on the opposite side, when Claude again immediately dismounted.

"Down, girl, down," he said, and the horse crouched to its knees, and then lay upon its side as quiet as possible, while Claude crouched likewise to the ground, for there was behind them a patch of light coloured sky against which he and the horse might perchance, have been seen. It was well that not a moment had been lost, for scarcely had these precautions for concealment been made when the pursuing party came up and actually paused a moment on that spot.

"He has taken to the meadows, I think," said one.

"No, no," shouted he who was heading the pursuit. "I saw his cloak fluttering behind him on the brow of the hill there, just as you get into Acton, by Berrymead Priory. Come on. Come, we shall have him yet. Come on."

Away they went again, and were soon lost to sound as well as to sight.

"So you think you will have him, do you," laughed Claude Duval. "No, no. My time has not come yet. Well, well, I have not had much luck to-night, so I will to London, and look over this pocket of that cowardly fellow, who, I suppose, will not stop until his horse falls with him. I can't yet get that girl Cicely out of my head. How came May with them?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE "OLD MOON" IN GATE STREET.—A CHANCE SHOT.—A VISITOR TO CLAUDE.

In Gate-street, Lincoln's-inn-fields, there was a public-house called the "Old Moon." It has been long swept away, and nothing even to indicate the site of it now remains. At the period of our story, however, it was in a flourishing condition, and was kept by a man whom no one ever knew by any other name than that of Anthony. He was a tall, lank, straight-haired, methodistical looking fellow, was Anthony, and he had a way of turning up his eyes, and uttering pious ejaculations, as if he were the most religious person in the whole neighbourhood; and truly, if attending a meeting-house in little Queens-street, and being about as hypocritical a rascal as ever stepped, gave him any claims to that character, he certainly fulfilled it.

At two o'clock on the morning preceding the night, some of the particulars of which we have brought before the reader, Anthony sat dozing in his bar. To be sure, his house was shut to all appearances, but at its back there was a long, low roofed room, to which there was an entrance by the flap of a cellar down a stable yard, and there Anthony had still some customers, although the hour was rather a late, or rather we ought perhaps to say, an early one.

These customers of Anthony's were of a peculiar description, for at one end of the long room, sat a man behind a kind of counter, and almost everybody who came into the room, went up to him, and placed some article before him, at which he invariably shook his head in disapproval and contempt, and then handed out some money, often accompanied by a declaration to the effect that he was ruining himself by degrees—always by degrees.

The articles so bought, were then placed in a basket projecting from the wall behind him, and whenever he had a small lot collected, he gave some sort of a signal, and the basket disappeared, being connected with a turnabout, similar to what may be seen in many convent gates on the Continent, after which it was sent back again empty by the same means.

At the other entrance to the room, two men and two dogs kept watch and ward, and no one was permitted to enter who was unknown to one or the other of the men, so that the place was pretty well guarded from intrusion.

"I shall be ruined by degrees," said the man at the counter; "what do you mean by this?"

The question was addressed to a mere lad, who had laid before him a bunch of gold seals attached to a piece of watch chain.

"I don't know," laughed the lad. "I made a grab at a ticker, and that was all I got, besides a hue and cry through the Dials."

"It's an insult—I shall be ruined—by degrees. There's five shillings for you, be off. Ah, Poll is that you? bless your pretty eyes, if I were not ruined now—by degrees, you should have a glass of the best wine in Anthony's cellar."

"Yes," said a young girl, attired in flaunting apparel, "by degrees I suppose. Where's Claude to-night?"

"Ah, my dear, that's what I have been asking, but business has fallen off dreadfully. We have very few gentlemen of the road come here now. Why I have known the time when Sixteen-string Jack would bring me in twelve or fourteen watches of a night, and a half pint measure full of rings, brooches, and shoe-buckles, and now——"

"He is in Newgate, where we shall all go in time."

"Ahem! by degrees. He is in Newgate."

"Yes, and he will go to Tyburn to-morrow."

"By degrees, I suppose, he will. Upon my life it's a pity—a great pity, when you come to think of it—by degrees, don't you think it is, Poll?"

"Don't bother! I want to see Claude. Don't you know he promised Jack that he would meet him on his road to Tyburn, and shake hands with him, in spite of all the officers."

"Why a—yes—by degrees."

"Well, I've seen Jack, and he tells me that there will be such an attempt to take Claude if he shews himself to-morrow, that he had better not do so. Jack says, he'll excuse him, and begs me to ask him in the name of their old friendship not to try it. I thought to have found him here. I'll go and speak to Anthony, perhaps he knows where he is. They say that six officers to-morrow are to share £200 among them if they take Claude."

The girl seemed well acquainted with the place, for after this brief dialogue with the man at the counter, she opened a door at one corner of the room, which disclosed a small flight of dark stairs; but while she is seeking Anthony, we will attend to something of rather an interesting nature which is going on just outside the entrance to the stable-yard from whence opened the cellar entrance of the Old Moon.

Two men were standing in the deep shadow of a small doorway opening into one of the stables which happened to be untenanted, and they were conversing in whispers.

"It was all very well," said one of them, "to draw lots in the governor's house at Newgate, as to which six of the lot of us should take Claude Duval to-morrow, if he ventures upon coming to shake hands with Sixteen-string Jack, and share

he £200 among them, but as we were not lucky enough to belong to the lot, it aint so pleasant to see one's £30 a piece go by us, is it now?"

"Sartinly not, but what a do it will be if we grabs him to-night, wont it?"

"Rather, I should say. Do you think the girl Lucy's information is to be depended on, that he gets here at half past two or so, and sleeps till next evening?"

"Yes, I do. Claude has neglected her, and a spiteful woman, you know, will do anything."

"Very good, now you know how we are to do. If he comes, I am to get behind him and fling my arms round him, while you, under threat of blowing his brains out, pop on the darbies."

"All's right. I don't see the trouble of taking him. He's only one after all. It's people giving him an advantage by being afraid, that does the business."

"Yes, that's it. Well, you remain where you are, and I'll get on the other side of the gateway. Don't you move till you see my arms round him, and now as we are in a queer neighbourhood, the less we say the better."

While this conversation was taking place, a figure, muffled up very much about the face, came at a rapid pace down Queen-street, and just as it was about to cross towards Gate-street, a girl rushed out of a doorway and flung herself at its feet.

"Claude, Claude!" she said. "Is it you, Claude?"

"Lucy, my girl!" said Claude Duval, for it was indeed he. "What ails you?"

"Kill me—oh, kill me, Claude, you ought to kill me."

"I kill you, Lucy? Why, are you dreaming, or have you taken leave of your senses?"

"I don't know, Claude, but you—you neglected me, and I thought you no longer loved me—I—I have betrayed you! Now kill me, Claude, and I shall die happy, but don't go to the Old Moon to-night."

"This from you, Lucy! from my own girl whom I have always loved. If I have not come near you much of late, it was only owing to poor Jack's troubles. I was getting money and friends for him, and yet it appears he suffers to-morrow; and you want me to swing at Tyburn, too, Lucy?"

"No, no. Oh, God! Claude, unkind words from you are sharper than knives. Oh, no—no—no. Cut my heart out of my bosom, Claude, and you will see then how I love you!"

"I never doubted it until to-night, Lucy. What have you done that should prevent me going to-night to the Old Moon? Come into this deep doorway and tell me."

"In a fit of madness, Claude—dear Claude, in a moment of despair, and jealousy, and rage, I told an officer named Morgan, that you came to the Old Moon about two, dear Claude. Kill me now, and I will not blame you, Claude—Claude, you cannot forgive me."

"Easily, my girl, and the more easily because I know that this will be a lesson o you, and you will never listen to the voice of passion and jealousy again. Come, come, don't cry, Lucy; you have made amends, you see, by warning me in time, so no harm's done. Forget it, my girl—I know this Morgan you mention. He is tolerably harmless,"

"Oh, Claude you are too good—generous to me. But where will you go to now?"

"Now? Why to the Old Moon, to be sure."

"No—no—oh no.—Who knows what danger there may be. You must not—shall not.'

"Nay, Lucy, your fears run away with you, I do not encounter more danger by going to the Old Moon, than I encounter almost every day of my life; and to tell the truth, I am a little curious to know how Morgan will manage this affair; I will tell you Lucy, in what my principal safety consists.—It is in the cupidity of the officers."

"How Claude?"

"They won't combine to take me, because there would be such a sharing of the reward, that each man's portion would not pay him for the danger; so be under no alarm. Go, home, and believe your Claude to be as true as ever, to you."

"Then you really have seen another that you love better than your poor Lucy, Claude?"

"Seen another? Where are there such eyes to see?"

The girl smiled, clung gently to his arm.

"Ah, Claude, when I am with you, I forget everything and am happy. It is when I am alone, that sad and gloomy thoughts of what I once was, rise up like spectres to drive me nearly mad."

"You should laugh them away."

"I cannot Claude, I cannot. They never come to me when you are with me; I seem then as if I were safe against anything in the world, and so I am. Oh, Claude, you will not go to the Old Moon, to-night?"

"I must Lucy. Go home, and be quite sure that all will be right. Perhaps I will come to you before the morning yet, for I have something to do for Jack, to-morrow, and have not quite settled in my mind, how to do it; so I think you may fairly expect me, within a few hours.'

"In that hope, Claude, I shall live."

She affected to leave him, but her fear for his safety would not permit her; and she followed him at a short distance, so that he was not aware of her presence, in the darkness of the ill lighted street, as he now walked rapidly on, towards the Old Moon; being however, quite prepared for any sudden attack that might be made upon him, by Morgan the officer

Of course it was not an attempt upon his life, he had to fear, but his liberty, and that consideration it was doubtless, that gave him a kind of fearlessness, which if his destruction had been aimed at, he could not possibly have possessed, for then he would not have known a moment when a pistol shot might put an end to his career. As it was, however, he passed on with an appearance of composure, to the gateway leading to the stables, where his two enemies were posted.

He wisely kept in the middle of the entry, and he had passed on some few steps, when according to his plan, which was no bad one, Morgan dashed out, and clasped him from behind, round the body, missing the arms, however, which it had been his great object to secure.

"Now Bill," he cried, "now for the darbies! We have him. It's a hundred pounds a-piece."

"Perhaps a small part of an ounce will do for one of you," said Claude, as snatching a pistol from his belt, he fired it at the open doorway in front of him, where he had just seen the glance of the other officer's eyes, as he was preparing to spring out.

A shriek mingled itself with the report of the pistol, and at the same moment, by a dexterous twist of one of his legs, Claude flung the officer who had hold of him on his back; but he would not loose his hold, and Claude went with him, but uppermost of course, so that while the officer got a blow upon the back of his head on the curb stones, he, Claude, was quite uninjured, and finding that his opponent was knocked insensible, he rose in a moment.

"So, so," he said. "That was the plan, was it? Not a bad one either, Master Morgan, it only wants that one condition of success to be entitled to great praise.—Ha! who comes here! Stand, or you die!"

"'Tis I, Claude," said Lucy, "I could not leave you."

"Eh? what's all this?" said old Anthony, the publican, who had been roused by the report of the pistol, and guessed that some of his customers were in trouble. "The Lord look down upon us, amen. What's the row. Eh? my rummy one?"

"Nothing particular," said Claude.

"Eh? What? Why it's you, Duval. Let us pray—I mean come in, my

tulip. Have the grabs been at you? Come along, my daffy-down-dilly, come along."

"No!" said Claude, "I only want to know if you have any news for me, Anthony?"

"Yes, I have: here's Poll has just come from Sixteen-string Jack, and he says you had better leave him alone to-morrow, for the Philistines will be mighty, and are determined, the Lord willing, to have you."

"Oh, is that all?"

"Yes, and enough too. But who fired the shot I heard just now?"

"No matter about that. When I am gone, bring out a lantern, and look about you; but tell Poll to say to Jack, when she sees him in the morning, that I'll shake hands with him, according to my promise, come what may of it. I have said it, and Claude Duval never broke his word yet."

"Amen!" said Anthony, "I shall go in to prayers; good night Claude, and luck go with you, for you are as fine a fellow as ever stepped, only I never could awaken you to a proper sense of religion. I'll come out with a lantern, and look about, as you say; I suppose somebody is in trouble."

"Not at all," said Claude, "somebody's troubles are over probably. Good night. Now Lucy if you will give me house room until the morning, I shall be obliged to you, my girl, and you see as I told you the danger has recoiled upon the heads of those who got it up for me. It was a chance shot, and no malice in it, so whoever has got it ought to blame himself, not me."

"I was so terrified, Claude."

"You always are. You ain't fit for a highwaymen's lass, Lucy."

"Don't say that, Claude, for you know I love you, and when you are taken from me, if ever you should be, I will not live long after you; but we will not talk in this way. You must be tired, come, come Claude, and I will get you some supper. Oh, how long it is since you have visited me, my brave Claude. I am happy now."

Claude Duval laughed as Lucy ran on talking as she walked by his side; and he from a little pouch that he had, carefully reloaded the small pistol he had discharged at the officer, for it was a favourite weapon, inasmuch, as it had not once missed fire since he had it, and certainly upon this occasion, he owed his liberty and life to it.

"I don't like these adventures, Lucy," he said. "But if they will interfere with me roughly, they must take the consequences."

"Yes Claude, yes. But what did I hear about your shaking hands with Sixteen-string Jack to-morrow. Is he not going to Tyburn?"

"He is. When I was friendless and homeless, Jack was kind to me, and I then said in answer to a remark of his that some day he should swing at Tyburn, that let that day, which I hoped would be far distant, come when it would, I would meet him on the road there, and clasp his hand in mine, and call him my friend."

"But the danger, Claude."

"If it it were certain death, I'd do it."

"Claude, Claude!"

"My Lucy, you need not try to dissuade me from this, my word has been passed, and I will keep it. Even you, with all your love, would despise me, if because there was danger to be apprehended, I shrunk from keeping a solemn promise. It must, and it shall be done,"

"But even Jack himself sent word for you not to do it."

"That makes no difference. Let me beg of you to say no more about it, Lucy. We are good friends now, my girl, and I would fain remain so. The danger is not so great as you think. I will, of course, take all the precautions I can, and in a life like mine, daring has such a charm about it that it saves me from a thousand little risks which would swarm about me, if once they thought I feared."

CHAPTER. VII.

CLAUDE DUVAL FULFILS HIS PROMISE.—SIXTEEN-STRING JACK'S ROUTE TO TYBURN.

A DRIZZLY misty rain fell upon London, and wrapped up the whole city as it were in a dense mantle of damp fog, on the morning after the occurences we have just related. By day break the only difference from the night was, that the wet mist which had before looked black, had a dingy white aspect, through which the few only passengers that were abroad, looked like spectres, being much magnified by the vapour.

Occasionally too, from amidst the halo cast around him by his breath, a horse might be seen snorting and struggling through the misty streets, while the watchmen, with their heads bound round by handkerchiefs, and ensconced in their blankets like great coats, looked out from their boxes, after their night's repose with lack-lustre eyes.

The rain streamed down the front of Newgate, in long black streaks, taking the channels of old streams, and falling with a dull pattering sound upon the pavement beneath; a sound which amid the stillness of the night, had reached the ears of a man, who was to be hanged at Tyburn, at twelve the next day.

That man was Sixteen-string Jack.

He had passed rather a wakeful night, but as he washed his face the next morning, he whistled an air in a clear and loud key, while he looked at the turnkey, who had brought him the means wherewithal to perform his ablutions.

"How do you feel, Jack, this morning," said the turnkey.

"With my hands I suppose, as I have always done," replied Jack.

"There's a fellow," said the turnkey, calling to another who was outside the condemned cell. Lor! bless you, he'll die game. He's just made a joke, now, he has."

"And why not?" said Jack, "Life's a joke."

"But is hanging a joke, Jack?"

"Yes, if you have the pluck to laugh at it, certainly."

"Ain't he a rum un?" said the turnkey, in evident intense admiration of Jack's mode of carrying off his certainly rather ticklest position. "We have had a few rum un's here Jack, but you is the *rummestest*. Howsomedever here's the chaplain, Jack."

"Very good."

"Unhappy man," said the chaplain, with a pious snuffle, "I hope you have endeavoured to make your peace hereafter?"

"All's right," said Jack.

"I trust that you look back with horror on your past life?"

"Horror!" cried Jack. "Oh, dear no."

There's no life like a life on the road,
Hurrah!
There's no life like a life on the road.

You stick to your trade, sir, and let me stick to mine. I am a highwayman! well I know the penalty of being caught and committed, and it has come to that at last. Tyburn tree is waiting for me, but I don't see why I should go out of the world snivelling; its enough to come into it in such a sort of way, when you can't help it. No, sir, I dare say you mean well, but I flatter myself though I am going to be scragged, I aint much worse than many of my neighbours."

"He's a rum un, aint he, sir?" said the turnkey.

"Silence!" cried the reverend ordinary. "How dare you use the low words 'rum un' to me, I shall have you discharged."

"Do, sir," said Jack. "It will be a christian like act, that will—mind you don't forget it, and when you are on your last legs, and giving a kick for another breath, may you feel as well as I do now, for I never yet did a wanton act of cruelty, and I never took a poor man's bread away from him for nothing."

"I perceive," said the chaplain, "that you are obdurate, I tremble to think what will be your fate in the world to come, you hardened sinner."

"Don't be absurd," said Jack. "But its always the way with you. I never met with anybody who pretended to much religion, who had any temper or charity. What's o'clock?"

"Nearly nine," said the turnkey. "Would you like anything, Jack."

"Yes, I should. Get us a lot of stewed oysters. They always make me ill in a few hours after taking them, but I shall be dancing on nothing at twelve o'clock, and then it won't matter, and I say—has Poll been again this morning? I want to see her."

"No, Jack, she hasn't been. I knows what you wants to see her for. Its to ask her if she has told Claude Duval not to try to shake hands with you in the cart. You may depend she has ferretted him out, and he's not so mad as to try it on, surely, when he knows that there's £200 issued out agin him."

Jack shook his head.

"I'm afraid," he said, "I'm very much afraid he'll try it. Claude don't look at danger before hand, and when it comes he stares it out of countenance. If there were £2000 against his name he would not mind. He gave his hand to me upon the promise a year ago, and he'll keep his word. Its the only thing that gives me an uncomfortable feel to-day. They will nab poor Claude as safe as possible; I'm afraid of that, and nothing else."

"Perhaps he won't try it on, after all, Jack."

"I'm afraid he will. But, however, as the old song says, 'What's the use o' grieving.' I will hope for the best, if I think the worst. I suppose we shall start soon—what noise is that?"

"The cart, Jack, that's all. There's a thousand people outside Newgate now, and they are pouring in by all the thoroughfares as fast as nothing. I don't think the parson will say much more to you, he has gone off in a huff, Jack."

"Let him go—all's right. I wish Poll would come. Where can she be? I suppose they will let her past the gate. It's very odd she aint here, and nine o'clock, too—Who's that coming?"

"Mr. Needles the sheriff, Jack."

Mr. Needles was the most bandily shaped man that the imagination could picture, for being just about as broad as he was long, he might have been set up in any way without detriment to his appearance, always providing that his sheriff's gown and chain were disposed accordingly. He was very near sighted too, so that when he wished to see anybody, he had to come within an inch of their nose. Mr. Needles was a kind hearted man, and whenever there was an execution, his feelings used to put him into such a state of perspiration that he shone all over is face and round, bald head, like a double dip in July. It was his duty now to let the prisoner know that he would soon have to bid the world adieu.

"Ahem!" he said. "Mr. a—a—really, I don't know your right name—Mr. a—a—a."

"Call me Jack, sir, call me Jack. You have done several kind things since I have been here, and I thank you with all my heart."

"Oh, don't mention that," said Mr. Needles getting more shiny than before. "Dear me, I often wish I was not a sheriff, but my time will soon be out, that's one comfort. Well, Jack, since that's what I'm to call you, I have only to say that we start at ten you know from here. Bless me, what's that?"

"Something among the crowd outside, sir," said an official. "Hillio! Davis, what's all that shouting for outside?"

"Only a mad bull, sir, among the people," said Davis.

"Poll not come," said Jack. "Poll not come!"

"You won't see her this morning, Jack," said the turnkey. "A man on a *hellephant*, and in armour couldn't get through such a crowd as there is now outside of Newgate, so it's quite out of the question."

"Well," said Jack, with a sigh. "I suppose it can't be helped. Mr. Needles, it won't be fair at all to interfere with Claude Duval to-day, when, if he comes at all to the cart side, it will only be to make an old friend's heart lighter by shaking hands with him, as he goes to death. It will be a dastardly thing to interfere with him then, sir."

"Dear me," said the little fat sheriff, "you know I have no more to do with that, than the man in the moon, Jack, I can't help it. It's uncommonly absurd of him to come, if he don't want to be caught."

"It is, but Claude is the man to do it for all that, and glory in it. I'm sorry Poll can't get to tell me if she took him my message. Ah!"

The great bell of Newgate had began to toll. The sheriff took out an amazing handkerchief, and wiped his head and face, which process took some of the shine off it for a time, and then he bustled out of the cell just as a turnkey ran in with some stewed oysters to Jack, according to the request he had made for that article.

It was not any personal fear of his approaching death at Tyburn, that made Jack turn aside, and shake his head at the stewed oysters; but it was his dread, lest Claude Duval should be taken in his chivalrous attempt to shake hands with him, that unmanned him.

"No, no," he said, "I thank you all the same; it was kind of you, and while I live I am not likely to forget it.—Good bye, old fellow. You, are among the few that I would have liked to stay among yet awhile, but as it can't be, why it can't and there's an end of it. I'm wanted, I suppose."

"Yes, Jack. They are waiting to knock your irons off."

"Very good, I'm ready."

A sort of procession escorted Jack to the lobby, where the process of knocking off his irons was adroitly performed, and then while a strange murmur arose from the crowd, partly of sympathy, and partly of excitement, the condemned man was placed in the cart that was ready to convey him to the place of execution.

Jack was bare-headed, and his face was pale, while his eyes roved among that sea of faces, as if with intense anxiety, looking for some one whom he wished to recognise. The chaplain got into the cart, and shook his head, in a manner which he intended should be impressive, and strike the crowd with a solemn awe, but the only effect it had, was to elicit an inquiry from one of the nearest spectators if he shook his head because he thonght there was anything in it.

This produced a laugh, but that soon passed off as the pale anxious countenance of Sixteen-string Jack, and his roving eyes met their gaze.

Just as the cart was about to start, and at least a couple of dozen of persons, who had pressed forward eagerly to offer drink or to shake hands with the culprit, had been thrust back by the officers, the Governor of Newgate stepped up to the cart with an open letter in his hand, and leaning forward to Jack, he said—

"A quaker gentleman, of the name of Luke Houlditch, living at Tottenham, and who was robbed on the highway by some one near Finchley, about three months ago has written to say that if you will say if it was you or not, probably it will ward off suspicion from another person who is somewhat suspected. Have you any objection?"

"Surely not at such a time as this," said the chaplain.

"None in the least," said Jack, "Can't he come and identify me, I can hardly take upon myself, with any certainty, to say yes or no."

"He says he thinks he should know you, but that he dreads a crowd, however he will make an endeavour to see you as you proceed up Oxford-street, when he hopes you will satisfy him, and I see no harm in your doing so."



CLAUDE DUVAL THROWING THE SPY THROUGH THE WINDOW.

"Be it so," said Jack, "let him come and look at me if he likes. I care for no man's scrutiny now." The governor gave orders that no one should oppose the approach of Mr. Houlditch, he drew back, and the cart started.

As the mournful cavalcade moved slowly down Oxford street, a man dressed in the garb of a quaker was seen sitting on the back of a black horse. The clothing of the horseman was of a grey surge of the true quaker's cut, and he wore a broad brimmed, felt hat.

"I tell thee friends," he said in a nasal voice, "that I have travelled even from Tottenham High Cross, to see this sinner and man of violence, for have I not suspected my own man Chqppings, of waylaying me, and did I not likewise supect the slaughterer of animals commonly called a butcher, Dobbs, who resideth at Tottenham, likewise of being the culprit, and have I not with the strong arm of the law persecuted him?"

"What will you take for your hat, friend," cried a voice in tolerable imitation of the quaker."

"Something of more weight than thy wit, friend," replied the man of peace.

A roar of laughter followed this retort, and another man cried—

"Can't you let the poor fellow go to Tyburn in peace?"

"Yea, friend, truly I do not wish otherwise, but if I recognise in him the son of Belial who robbed me upon the highway, and he confeseth so much upon seeing me, verily you see, I shall cease from suspecting and prosecuting innocent people, but should he say unto me, truly, friend Houlditch, I did not rob thee and strike thee upon the nose ——"

Another scream of laughter drowned the quaker's voice.

"Yea and verily, friends," added Mr. Houlditch, "I say unto ye, that my nose swelled exceedingly from the blow stricken thereon.

"Serve you right, too," cried a fellow.

"Thou mayest possibly be right, friend. The only bad thing is that thou art not served right by divers strokes on thy back at the cart's tail, as thou hast more than once already experienced."

It was quite clear that the mob was no match in wit for the quaker, so no one tried any more attacks upon him. Moreover, the procession was now close at hand, and that concentrated all the interest of the scene.

"Come out, broad-brim," said one. "Here's Jack coming."

"Yea and so am I friend. I only placed myself under this balcony, lest my outward man should get wet by the rain which is even now coming down. I fear that I shall not be able to get to him, as I am a man of peace, and little used to pushing and shouting, verily."

"Make way for the quaker!" cried several. "Make a passage for old broad-brim and no whiskers."

"I thank thee, friend, but if thou hadst no whiskers, thy wife, who is strong in the flesh, could not pull them."

"Confound the fellow," muttered the man. "He has his answers always ready."

The exclamations of the mob, and the odd figure of the quaker on horseback attracted the attention of the officers who were surrounding the cart, and they judged at once that he was the Mr. Houlditch who had been spoken of by the governor of Newgate, and as he was upon the near side of the way there was no great difficulty in inclining the cart towards the pavement so that he might ask his question of Sixteen-string Jack.

The demeanour of Jack now filled every one with surprise, for he betrayed much agitation of manner. His colour went and come, and he opened and shut his hands, while he muttered some words to himself, the only one of which could be caught was "reckless."

The cart was stopped within half a dozen paces of the pavement, and with great difficulty through the throng of people, the quaker made his way on his horse towards it, while Sixteen-string Jack looked eagerly at him.

"Now, sir," cried one of the officers, "ask your questions, and have done with it."

"What a throat thou hast got, friend," said the quaker, "keep thy mouth shut, I pray thee."

"Hoorah! Hoorah!" shouted the crowd, and various expressions indicative of a growing admiration for friend Houlditch, were freely uttered, while the officer who had spoken so roughly, bit his lips with vexation.

"And so," said Houlditch, to the condemned man, "thou art Sixteen-string Jack?"

"Yes," said Jack, and his voice faltered, as he spoke, "yes, and it's come to this at last."

"Well, friend, now I look thee in the face, I declare thou did'st never wrong me."

"Bravo, bravo!" cried a great blacksmith, who was close at hand. "Bravo! This here quaker is a trump!"

"Give me thy hand Sixteen-string Jack," added Houlditch, "God bless thee, my poor fellow, God bless thee."

"God bless you," said Jack, and tears gushed to his eyes.

"By G—— I suspect," cried a mounted officer, making a grasp at the quaker.

"What?" said Houlditch, as with one blow of the heavy loaded end of his riding whip, he knocked the officer senseless from his horse. "Suspect what, fool? Not more than I am quite willing to avow."

"He threw off the broad brimmed hat as he spoke, and Jack cried—

"Fly, fly. Oh, fly."

"Claude Duval!" cried a hundred voices.

"Yes," shouted the sham quaker, in a voice that made itself loudly and clearly heard above all other sounds. "Yes, I am Claude Duval, and I have redeemed my promise, of taking a kind farewell of my old, kind friend, and bidding God bless him."

The officers made a dash at Claude, but the people with a war of determination closed around him, and the great blacksmith shouted—

"Don't let them have him. The bloodhounds! Claude Duval never took a sixpence from a poor man in all his life, though he has given many a one."

"Fly, fly!" again cried Jack. A shower of stones saluted the officers, and the chaplain fell down flat in the bottom of the cart, to get out of the danger of the missiles. Everything seemed to promise that a severe contest between the officers would ensue, and the former drew their staves, but they were greeted by a laugh of derision, and pistols were produced.

"We will have him, dead or alive!" said one.

"Take him then," said Claude. "Farewell Jack. I have kept my word.

"Nobly, nobly," said Jack, "and—and Poll?"

"Shall never want while Claude has a crust to share with her, Jack. Make your mind easy about her. Good bye."

Some of the crowd had passed Claude's horse on to the pavement, and a lane was made for him, while the officers were so seriously obstructed that they could not move an inch; but two of the horsemen had cutlasses, andthey began to use them upon the heads of the people so furiously that the mob gave way a little, and unfortunately for Claude, he just arrived opposite the opening of a street, from which a dense mass of people were rushing, to know what had happened, so that he was completely fixed, while the officers were now gradually nearing him.

The corner of the street was a shop of some sort, but it had been closed to avoid danger to the windows, and above the shop was a large balcony in front of the windows of the first floor. Suddenly one of the windows opened, and a girl of great beauty, rushed into the balcony.

"Claude, Claude," she cried "it is Claude. Oh, God, 'tis he."

Claude Duval glanced at the window, and the words. "My sister May," escaped his lips. The mob too heard the young girl's exclamation, and the blacksmith shouted—

"Can you take him in at the window, Miss? If you don't he'll swing at Tyburn, this day week."

"Yes, yes. Oh yes, anything; Claude, Claude!"

Duval himself saw this was now his only chance of escape, and with surprising agility, he rose in the saddle and stood on the back of the horse, by which he

was enabled to clutch the lower rails of the balcony, and in another moment he drew himself up and waving his hand disappeared in at the window of the house, which was put down and the shutters closed immediately. The mob gave three terrific cheers, to express its triumph at the escape of the man, who for the moment, in consequence of a chivalrous act had become its idol.

The victim had escaped, but the confusion was still most serious, and the officers dismounted from their horses, for the purpose of breaking in the door of the house in which Duval had taken refuge; but that turned out to be a foolish proceeding, for being now on foot they were much more on an equality with the mob, and it was only by abandoning the seige of the house, that they regained the streets once more.

They held a short consultation among themselves.

"What's to be done," cried one, "are we to lose the money?"

"Certainly not. But you see we shall get pulled to pieces by the mob now if we make any attack upon the house. We must go on to Tyburn now."

"And do you think that such a devil as Claude Duval will wait for us until we get back. That's a likely thing."

"No. I never expected any such thing, but I propose that we go on a little as if we had completely given up all idea of taking him, and then that two of us with as little observation as possible, detach ourselves from the cavalcade, and go back to watch the house he has taken refuge in, so that if he does go from it, at all events he can be dogged."

"It's the only thing that can be done. Come along."

When the people saw the officers were consulting, and casting angry glances up at the house where Claude had found an asylum, they perfectly expected that some immediate and violent attack would be made upon it, but when the procession moved on to Tyburn, and no further notice of the affair was taken, the populace raised a great shout of derision, and the blacksmith cried out—

"Three cheers for Claude Duval," which were given most heartily.

We need not pursue the catastrophe at Tyburn, further than to say that Sixteen-string Jack, with all his faults, failings, crimes, and ventures, suffered the dreadful death that had been inflicted on so many—innocent we conscientiously believe as well as guilty—at that fatal spot, which even now when its name is mentioned rings upon the imagination as being redolent of fearful recollections of the past.

The lifeless body hung its hour, and was then removed by two females, who brought a hackney coach to take the sad remains, and their talk, for talk they did even amid their tears as they went away, was as much of the chivalrous Claude Duval and his ultimate fate, as of him whom in silence for ever, they had with them as a horrible and ghastly companion.

The officers did not forget their scheme of separating two of their number from the main body, secretly to watch the house in Oxford Road, where Claude had so very opportunely found shelter, and so intent were the multitude upon the last moments of Sixteen-string Jack, that the manœuvre was executed without exciting observation.

It would, however, have taken more wit and more courage than belonged to all the officers put together, to have circumvented Claude Duval. His time had not yet come, and he was doomed to be the hero of yet more striking adventures than had hitherto fallen to his lot.

We will take a glance at him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE BROTHER AND SISTER.—THE TITLE DEEDS.—CLAUDE'S DESPAIR.

It was indeed no other than poor May Duval, of whom the reader has latterly had but a transient glimpse, who assisted her brother Claude in at the window of the house in the Oxford Road.

For the first time during two years, he felt the pressure of her hand in his, and as the rapidly closed casement and shutters stilled the roar of the multitude without, he could hear the sobs that came from her agonized heart.

All was darkness, however, now in the room, for the shutters were hastily barred by May, and fitting closely as they did, scarcely a ray of daylight found its way into the apartment. How complete—how total was the change from the shout of the multitude without, and the glare of mid-day, to the silence and darkness of that room!

Claude was sensibly affected by it, and his voice shook as he spoke to his sister.

"You have saved me, May," he cried.

"Hush. Oh, hush," she cried. "This way—this way."

She opened a door, and a gleam of light came again into the room. He followed her into an apartment at the back of the house, and then she tried to look at him—she took his hand and tried to speak, but the effort was too great, and bursting into tears, she flung herself upon a couch in an agony of grief.

Claude shook a little, and he paced the room several times before he spoke. Then pausing opposite to May, he strove to speak in a calm and composed voice, as he said again,—

"May, you have saved my life."

"And you, Claude," she sobbed, "have broken my heart."

"Is this kind, May, at such a time as this?"

"Kind! Oh, Claude—Claude, can you utter a reproach? What are you? Dare I answer my own question. You were poor, forlorn, dejected; what are you now?"

"None of those, May."

"Worse, worse, a thousand times worse, for you then stood upon a rock of adamant, you sat upon a throne, to which angels might bow down in reverence."

"You speak in riddles, May, I must confess my inability to understand you."

"The rock you stood upon, and the throne upon which nature had placed you, have both one name. That name is innocence."

"Let other's upbraid me for my life," he said, "from you, May, I did expect reproaches."

"They are not reproaches, Claude. Witness these tears, that I speak in all the sadness of grief, and not in anger. Hark! Do you understand those shouts?"

"I do not."

"The mob congratulates itself upon the escape of a criminal, and even I am from this moment involved in your guilt and your shame. I who by word or deed have wronged no one, I am at last betrayed even by my bitter feelings, to be the partner of iniquity. Your guilt is now my guilt, for I have received and continue to shelter the guilty man, against whom the hand of justice is raised. Thus Claude, no man can err, but he brings sin and sorrow upon others as well as himself."

"This state of things can soon be altered," said Claude, bitterly. "The

balcony by which you but a few moments since admitted me, is close at hand. I will relieve you from the weight of my presence, by leaving this house in the manner that I entered it, and the first declaration I make to my captors, shall be one exculpatory of you, for I will declare that instead of affording an asylum to the highwayman, you refused him one with the bitterest reproaches. Farewell."

"Claude, Claude."

He waved his hand, and strode into the dark room.

With a cry of dismay May rushed after him, and while his hand was upon the shutters, she flung herself into his arms.

"Claude. Brother. Take my heart from my bosom and see how yet you dwell in its inmost recesses. Oh, Claude—Claude, if I could but die for you!"

"Let me go, May, I know I am unworthy of your affections. I know you did all you could to turn me from the course of life I have adopted, but I would not take your counsel, and therefore, it is unfair of me now to involve you in any difficulty for my sake. I am lost, I know, and the steps in life that I have taken I cannot now recede from. I do not now speak in anger, May."

"No—no, Claude. You shall not go."

"Nay, I pray you let me. It was the thoughtlessness of a moment that made me accept an asylum here. When I saw you, of all houses in this great city, I ought to have avoided this.

May clung to him still, and he could not without absolute violence have extricated himself from her embrace, and that of course, he was loth to use, so that she succeeded in detaining him until the procession of the doomed man, and the roar of the multitude of people that accompanied it were past, and but a confused murmur came upon their ears; Claude listened attentively, and then turning to May, he said,—

"Sister, it is rather sad to meet thus. How have you fared since last we parted? I have thought of you day and night, and sought you, and employed others to seek you, but all in vain. My eyes never rested upon your face, until I stopped the coach at Ealing Common, in which, to my surprise, I found you seated. I nearly fell from my horse in the suddeness of the recognition. I knew your voice, and yet could scarce believe it was you. I thought some resemblance of tones might have cheated me, but when I came to look at the little bead purse you handed to me, and knew it had been our mother's, I could no longer doubt."

"Yes, Claude, it was our mother's, and it is the only relic I have of her,—I thought it might arouse dormant feelings within your breast, and make virtue once more an inmate of your heart—did you not feel something, when you looked upon it?"

"There is a gulf, May, now between me and what the world calls virtue, that I may never hope to pass. You got back that purse with my tears and kisses upon it."

"Oh, Claude, you are not lost."

"You know not what you say."

"Yes Claude. Indeed, indeed I do. There is—there always is, even in this life, a future for those who have the courage to dedicate it to virtue. Do not delude yourself with the vain and specious argument, that because you have sinned, you must still sin."

"But May, would you have me from some romantic notion of repentance, voluntarily give myself up to the hangman?"

"No, no, no—I—oh, no. That would not follow. Your better nature would so show itself, that for once an attribute of heaven—mercy, would be borrowed, by those who hold the scales of human justice, and you would be spared."

"Alas! my May, you speak more, much more like the heroine of some romance, than as one, who, in this matter-of-fact world, has known what sorrow is. I tell you sister that having chosen, and so far proceeded in my present course of life, I have no hope, no chance of any other. I must now, like the forlorn hope of an army push on, a the only chance of presevring, for yet awhile my existence.

I must fall at last, and I can but protract the arrival of that day. Do not urge me more upon this impossible point."

"You speak desparingly, Claude."

"Not so, May. Hopefully I speak. It is true that I am a highwayman, and that society is up in arms against me. I stop a rich man upon the highway, and by force, I take some of his money, but what I do I do boldly. I am not a lawyer—a member of parliament, so that even if people in their indignation at my proceedings were to go so far as to call me a thief, I am not a sneaking thief, such as those I have mentioned; nor am I a tradesman who will go to church regularly every Sunday, and yet all the week be fattening and guzzling upon the products of the hard earnings of others, whose boots, in point of fact, he is perhaps scarcely worthy to polish. No May, I deceive nobody, and when I stop a traveller with a well lined purse, and cry, 'stand and deliver!' I think myself a worthier man than many, who are most specially commended to Providence, and held up as patterns of everything that is good."

"You do not mean what you say, Claude."

"Do I not. I can hold up my right hand, and take my oath of it."

The sound of carriage wheels suddenly pausing in the street below, now attracted the attention of both brother and sister, and May trembled as she said—

"It is Mrs. Brereton and—and——"

"She whom I heard named Cicely," exclaimed Claude, "I bless the danger that has once more taught me there is a chance of gazing on that lovely face."

"Are you mad, Claude? What can you mean? If they should find you here, what can I say? I am lost, lost."

"How sister. I am not ugly enough to frighten them, am I?"

"Can you jest at such a time as this. Oh, Claude, what shall I do? When I was friendless and destitute in the streets of London, chance, or the goodness of Heaven, brought me in contact with these ladies. I told them that I had no home, but I concealed my real name, and instead of May Duval, I called myself May Russel. Since then they have afforded me an asylum. Oh, if they should now find they had been deceived, and that I was sister to a—a——"

"Highwayman you would say."

A sharp tat tat at the street door interrupted the conversation, and May glanced about her, in a distracted manner.

"You must hid,e Claude," she said, "you must hide.'"

"Wherever you please," he replied. "Only place me somewhere where I shall have a chance of seeing the young lady, named Cicely, that is all I ask, and I shall be patient, if I am forced to remain twelvemonths, wherever you place me."

There was a large cupboard in the room, close to the fire place, and into that May hastily pushed Claude, and closed the door upon him, just as the street door closed again, after admitting the ladies Brereton to the house, and May had only just time to open the shutters of the front room, before they ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE.—CLAUDE'S ESCAPE.—A DRIVE TO NEWGATE.—THE ROAD AGAIN.

It is true that a servant girl who was in the kitchen of the house, at the time Claude Duval had taken refuge in it, might have been cognisant of the fact, but when the riot began, and the whole street was in an uproar, she had prudently got into the coal cellar, nor did she emerge therefrom until the ladies Brereton

who upon their arrival in London, had taken for a short time that house furnished as it was, knocked at the door.

Thus it was that not only was Claude's presence unknown to the ladies, but May had had the opportunity of holding the brief and agitated conversation with him, which we have recorded, and which as is usual enough with such arguments concerned neither party, while it certainly had the effect of paining both.

"Oh, mum," said the girl to Miss Brereton, there's been such a *riotation* in the streets, mum. They have been taking Thirty-two-string Jack to be hung mum, leastways I ain't quite sure that's the number of strings, but it's something like that mum."

"How alarmed you look Ann," said Cicely.

"Yes miss, I is all that. Will you walk up. There's a good fire in the drawing-room. Oh, you would have been *scarified*, if you had been here, Miss, when the *riotation* was. I got in the cellar, and so heard it all over my own head, though I couldn't see much of it, in consequence you see miss, of the roof."

Cicely was evidently in a dejected state, but the peculiar phraseology of Ann, extorted even a smile from her, as she ascended the staircase. May was in hope that the ladies would go into the front room, but to her chagrin, for she was not very mindful of Claude's request, that he might be placed somewhere where he could command a view of Cicely, they sat down in the back room, and old Mrs. Brereton after a few remarks, looked closely at May, and said—

"Why, child you have been crying."

"Have I, madam?" said May, scarcely knowing in her confusion what she replied to the most inopportune, but yet kind enquiry.

"Your eyes tell that you have. Look at her Cicely. Ah! my dear, what have you to cry for?" You are not as I am, full of grief and uncertainty regarding a son."

"Or as I am regarding a brother," said Cicely.

May could hardly retain her tears from flowing afresh at this, by a great effort she did put on a show of outward composure, as she said—

"Then all enquiry regarding Mr. Markham Brereton is fruitless?"

"Quite so," said Cicely. "It is quite clear my brother has not arrived in London, or he would have gone to Mr. Hughes, the lawyer, to ascertain where we were staying. How strange it is that we should hear nothing of him since he trotted on to see that the road was clear as we come to town. Do you recollect, May—I do not, but my mother thinks the highwayman who stopped the carriage said something to intimate that he had met Markham."

"He did," said May, in a half stifled tone.

"But what was it, my dear?" said the old lady.

"It was only an intimation that he had been informed that there was an invalid in the carriage, and who else but Mr. Brereton could so have informed him."

"But, Markham is repulsive to strangers, rather than communicative," said Cicely.

"Certainly he is," added Mrs. Brereton. "Alas! alas! all these things will bring me to my grave, I can see that."

The old lady's tears began to flow, and May blamed herself for not asking explicitly of Claude if he had had any encounter with Mr. Mark Brereton. There was a painful silence for a few moments duration, which was interrupted by a slight exclamation from Cicely, who picked up from the floor close to her feet a small piece of folded paper.

"What is it?" cried May.

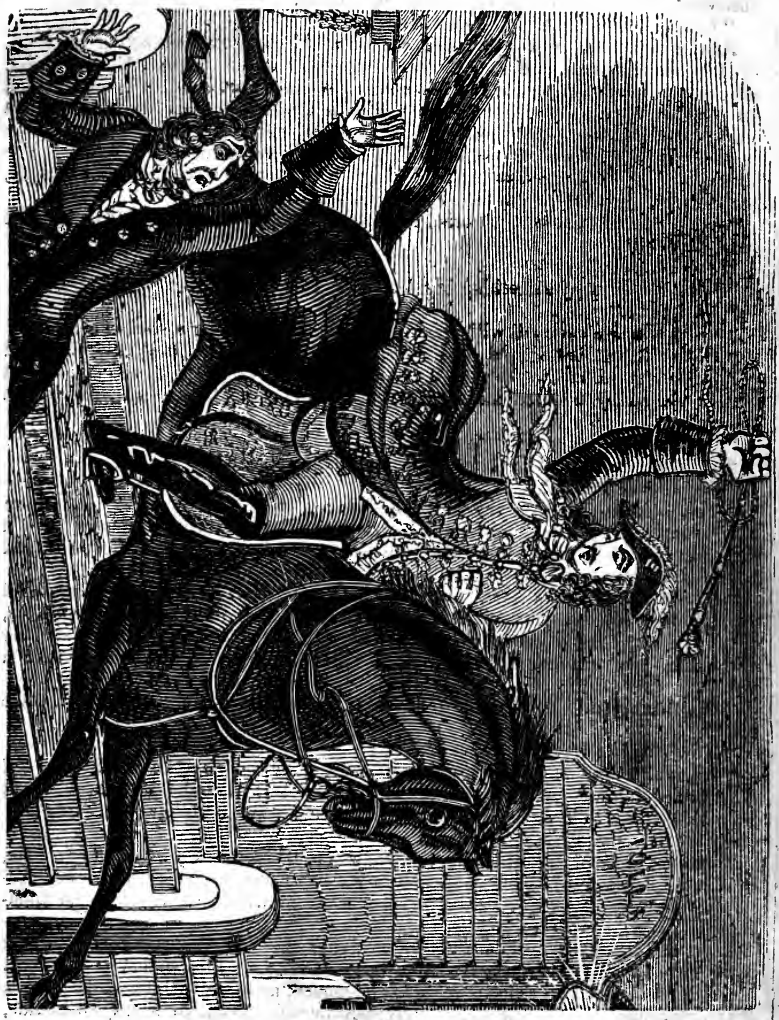
"I know not," replied Cicely. "It seemed to fall at my feet only just now."

She opened the paper, and to the surprise of herself and her mother, read the following words.

"Mr. Brereton did meet Claude Duval, but he is not hurt, and will soon be with you."

"Gracious Heavens!" cried Mrs. Brereton, "who wrote that?"

"Are we in a land of enchantment?" cried Cicely.



May turned of an ashy paleness, but uttered not a word.

Fortunately for all parties, even Claude himself, who had been guilty of this indiscretion, there was a loud and quick succession of knocks at the street door, which for the moment effectually took their attention from the mysterious note found on the floor. The perpetrator of these knocks proved to be Markham Brereton, who had opportunely arrived, to the no small joy of his mother and sister.

The first greetings were scarcely over, when an exclamation from Cicely directed all eyes to the street on which the room they were sitting in looked, where, plain

enough, they saw the victimised Tom, and on the impulse of the moment, Markham threw open the window, and called aloud to him.

"Good God! is that you, Tom Brereton?"

At the voice Tom looked up, and uttered a hideous groan—relaxing his hold of the horse, he rolled off it, close to the threshold of the house. Cicely looked all amazement, and Markham ran down stairs to the street door, to know what on earth could have reduced Tom to so miserable a plight, for his feelings towards him were much more those of contempt than any thing else, while none of the family were so unjust as to blame him for claiming what was his own. The only objections they urged to his proceeding was, that he made his claim roughly, and carried it beyond their means of restoration.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Markham, when he had dragged Tom into the passage.

"Oh! oh! oh!"

"Well, you can say something besides 'oh!' I suppose?"

"No I can't."

"Why, you are covered with mud. Have you been riding a steeple chase?"

"I don't know, but I dare say I have as I came along. Oh dear! oh dear! They soon caught me, and wasn't I thankful; then they upset me, and wasn't I glad; then they collared me after rolling me in the mud, and then what do you think?"

"I really don't know what to think."

"They said I was Claude Duval, the great highwayman."

"You Claude Duval?"

"Yes, to be sure, that's why they run after me, crying, 'Stop him!' Ah, I have had such a job! they soon found out I wasn't the highwayman, however; but I'll tell you all about it soon. Only let me lie down, somewhere, for a little while, and get off these horrid muddy clothes."

"I don't know, cousin Tom," said Markham, "that we are particularly called upon to show you any courtesy, for you were rather scant of that article with us, but it is not my disposition to return evil for evil, and as this is for the time being our home, you can come in, and I will see that you are accommodated with a bed."

"Oh, thank you. You haven't seen anything of my black pocket-book, have you?"

"How should I know anything of it?"

"Ah, well! dear me. All my bones ache, they do indeed. Oh, oh, oh! Stop him—stop him. There goes the horse! Well, I thought at last, I would keep that as a set off against what I had lost; but I am certainly the most unlucky fellow. Oh, dear!"

Markham assisted him up stairs to a bed-room, where he left him, to get rid, by himself, of some of the dirty apparel in which he was enveloped, before he questioned him any further, regarding the manner in which he came to be so situated.

May, who had been most anxiously revolving the best means of getting the party out of the room in which Claude was concealed, had ordered Ann to lay a lunch in the parlour, so that now it was announced, and they all descended to it, May promising to join them immediately, but her object was to speak to Claude, so the moment the room was clear, she opened the cupboard, and with a face as pale as death itself, she confronted him.

"Fly, oh fly," she said, "fly at once, or all will be discovered, and after the deceit I have practised, I can hope for no further friendship from those who have been so kind to me."

"Fear nothing, May, I may yet be able to protect you."

"It is not the loss of their protection, but it would be the loss of their good opinion, that would cut me to the very heart."

"Nay you will not lose the good opinion of any one, whose good opinion is worth the having; but I know this is no place for me."

"Then fly from it at once."

"Into the arms of the officers, do you mean? Did you not hear Mr. Brereton say that men were watching the house? For whom do they watch, but for Claude Duval?"

"Alas! alas! What can be done?"

"I scarcely know, yet. But while I am thinking about it, take this pocket-book; It did belong to the young man called Tom, who was in the carriage with you all. It contains various documents connected with his property as well as the proofs of his personal identity, I wish you to give it to Mr. Brereton."

"How am I to do that, Claude?"

"Place it somewhere in such a position that he cannot fail to see it, and now tell me is there any possibility of getting on the top of the house?"

"Yes, I think there is."

"Then do you go down to your lunch and leave me to manage my own escape. What's that noise and shouting in the street?"

May ran to the window and looked.

"It is the cavalcade returning from the execution of Sixteen-String Jack," she said,—

"Ah poor Jack," said Claude. "Well, well, that's past now."

"Claude, Claude, they stop here. The officers dismount.—They advance to the house.—Oh Claude—you are lost—lost."

"All are not lost in danger, May. Go down stairs, and whatever may happen express no surprise or apprehension. Even if you should see me taken, I charge you by the affection I know you still bear to me, to say nothing."

He dashed up the staircase, as he spoke, towards the bed-rooms of the house, and as he did so he heard a clamerous knocking at the door. Now, Claude had had not the most distant idea that Tom Brereton had been brought into the house, and when he went hurridly into the first room, he came to in order to see what its capabilities of concealment was, he was not a little surprised to find a man in bed, looking the picture of fright.

"Murder, murder!" said Tom, "what's that."

"Why, who are you," said Claude.

"Eh?"

They confronted each other for a few moments in silence, the thoughts of each being busy in very different ways.

Claude was considering how he could turn this meeting in the way of his escape, and Tom was wondering to see a man in quaker garments by his bedside, with anything but the manner and countenance of a quaker.

"Oh, dear, who are you," added Tom.

"Are you the fellow that was robbed by Claude Duval," said Claude, "and made to gallop away upon a horse, with six men after you."

"Yes—oh dear yes."

"Then your life is not worth two minutes purchase. I would not give a farthing for it, you will be a dead man in five minutes notice."

CHAPTER. XI

THE SECOND ADVENTURE OF TOM BRERETON.—CLAUDE'S ESCAPE.

WHEN Claude Duval uttered these words, to the terrified and already nearly distracted Tom Brereton he glared at him with such a comical expression of face, that he Claude, had not been seriously bent upon mischief, he must have laughed. As it was, however, he did continue to keep something like a grave countenance, as he repeated—

"Yes, you are even now in fact a dead man."

"A—dead—man? Oh, oh! Mur——"

"Hush! Such exclamations can only hasten a catastrophe which I would willing prevent, if possible. Listen to me. It will be some satisfaction to you to know in your last moments, why it is you are sacrificed. Listen."

Tom only glared at Claude with a bewildered look, and trembled so that he shook the whole bed, and set the rings by which the hangings were suspended, gingling furiously.

"You are aware," added Claude, "that you were robbed by that celebrated highwayman, Claude Duval, who took away your black pocket-book, and who afterwards to avoid pursuit from himself, got you mounted on a horse, and set you off at full gallop with half a dozen men after you, who thought they were pursuing him."

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Well, Claude is taken, and it is believed by all the highwaymen and cracksmen in London, that you were at the bottom of a deep laid scheme for his capture, and have in fact been successful in effecting it, the consequence of which is that dreading your power and finesse, they have come to the determination to destroy you."

"But it ain't true. I have got no power—no finesse, Oh, dear, oh, dear."

"That's likely enough, but you won't make them believe it."

"Then what am I to do?"

"I am the chief of the Bow-street runners, and will save you if I can; only you must obey me implicitly."

"I will, I will. Hark! do you hear that?"

"Yes, they have forced open the street door."

While he was speaking to Tom Brereton, Claude had cast his eyes anxiously about the room, and in one corner he had espied a large chest, to which he now pointed significantly, saying—

"I suppose you have no particular objection to get in there?"

"In where?"

"In that chest. It strikes me that by so doing you may save yourself; I can just at present see no other way of aiding you. The theives who are looking for you, expressly to take vengeance upon you, while not probably thinking of ooking there, while, I with some of my fellow officers, will come and take the chest away to a place of safety with you in it."

"Well, but——"

"As you please, your fate be upon your own head. All I have to do is to go and make oath before the magistrate of Bow-street, that I offered you a mode of escape which you thought proper to reject. I have the honour of bidding you good day, sir."

"Oh, no, no. Stop, I—I will do it. Oh, dear, what a sad thing to be so knocked about to be sure. I have only just escaped from the back of a wild horse, and now I am forced to get into a great box."

"It is the tailure of war."

"Is it? But I don't want to be at war with anybody, I only want to be quiet, that's all. The idea now of anybody thinking that I laid a deep scheme for anybody, I wish I could lay one to get home again, and be in peace and comfort, that I do. I know all this will be the death of me."

With groans and sighs, Tom got out of bed, and with no little difficulty stowed himself away in the chest, which having the key in the lock, Claude securely fastened, and then just as he heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs, he darted into the bed, and covered all but his face up with the abundant clothing that was on it."

The door of the room was dashed open in another moment, and eight or ten officers entered it. They were well armed, for they evidently expected some resistence, in the capture of such a man as Claude Duval. They looked rather

disappointed, when they only found a bed room, and a man lying in bed with a languid aspect, which Claude put on very consistently.

"Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen!" he said. "Who are you? Oh! tell me who are you?"

"Who are you?" cried one of the officers.

"I hardly know, for I can't exactly say whether I'm asleep or awake, gentlemen, I was asleep, but—that is to say, I think I was asleep, and then my name was Mr. Brereton, but just now a fellow came bang into the room with a pistol in his hand."

"A pistol. That must be our man. Was it Claude Duval?"

"Who?"

"Claude Duval, the great highwayman."

"Lord how should I know? I'm a respectable man, and have got no such acquaintance."

"Where did he go?"

"I was telling you, but you are so impatient. He held the pistol against my head, and says he 'say one word and you are a dead man,' says he, for may my mare Sue lose her wind, if I don't blow your brains out."

"Its our man," cried the officers. "There can be no mistake now, where did he go?"

"Well, I'm a telling you, but you get so furious. You must be a sad fellow at home, that you must—my father's a wool stapler, and he often used to say to me, 'Tom,' say he, 'whenever you————.'"

"Confound your father. We want to know where Claud Duval went."

"Well, I'm a telling you. He didn't wait for me to say anything, but after he had threatened my life in a manner of speaking, he popped into that great box there."

The officers raised a shout of exultation, and three or four of them rushed towards the chest, and sat down on the lid.

"Ha! ha! ha;" laughed he who had carried on the brief conversation with Claude. "Ha, ha, ha! I rather think we have the fox in a trap now."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of his getting out," said Claude, "I forgot to tell you that he asked me to lock it up, and take the key, and say my cloathes were in it, that's all, and I did lock it, and here's the key, gentlemen."

There was at this moment some half stifled cry from the box, but it was not sufficiently clear to be understood, and the officers felt then that assurance was doubly sure.

"What say you, comrades," said one. "We know that our prisoner is a troublesome fellow, suppose we take him off to Newgate just as he is, box and all?"

"That's an uncommonly good idea," said Claude.

"So it is," said the others, for they all seemed to shrink from a personal encounter with so redoubtable a personage as Claude Duval, and the opportunity of taking him away safely in a chest they considered was by no means to be slighted.

A furious knocking arose from the inside of the box, which convinced Claude that Tom Brereton had heard sufficient of the conversation to find out how he had been imposed upon, but the officers would by no means consent to his release, and the more violently he kicked the panels of the chest, the more intent were they upon getting him away just as he was.

"We are very much obliged to you, sir," said the principal of them to Claude. "Very much obliged, indeed, so now we will take away your troublesome customer, and you may be quite sure you will never be troubled him with any more, for he will be hanged at Tyburn next sessions, as safe as we have him here in the box."

"No doubt of that," said Claude. "I'd take my oath of it, I would, gentlemen, and when he is hung, you may take your oaths I shall be there, and in the best place, too."

The officers took up the chest among them, and staggered down the stairs with

it, while one speeded the others, and called loudly for a cart in which to carry the treasure to Newgate. One was soon pressed into the service, and away the whole party went, most specially delighted with the success that had crowned their efforts, and quite congratulating themselves that there were no more of them to share the £200 reward amongst.

"Well, Mr. Tom Brereton," soliloquised Claude, as he sprung from the bed, when the officers had fairly departed, "you are doomed to be of great service to me. Twice have I owed my escape to your accidentally coming into my way, but the mistake will be discovered as soon as they get to Newgate, and perhaps sooner, so this is no place for me."

He stood at the door and listened for a few moments, and then, not hearing any one stirring in the lower part of the house, he cautiously slipped down and reached the passage in perfect safety. Just, however, as he was passing the parlour door he heard the sounds of weeping in the room, and peeping through the crevice of the door, he saw Cicely Brereton setting at a table absorbed in grief.

"My poor dear mother," she said,—"she is at last no more.—Alas, alas, when will Mark return with the physicians?"

"What can be the meaning of this," thought Claude. "Why the old lady must have died suddenly. How beautiful Cicely is, and yet how absurd it is of me to continue thus looking at her, and drinking in such deep draughts of love. She can never be more to me than a beautiful picture. Oh, would that I had never seen her, for then I should have continued to be the same careless fellow I was, but which now I can never be again, for the thought will at times come over me, that by a different course of life, I might almost have made myself worthy of such a treasure as Cicely Brereton."

He felt that he ought to go at once, and yet while there was still the opportunity of looking at the beautiful girl, he could not make up his mind to tear himself away, but like a worshipper at some shrine, he stood in an attitude of rapt devotion to her charms.

Suddenly she rose, and approached the door. He had not time to leave the passage, and in another moment they were face to face. A slight scream came from the lips of Cicely.

"Be not alarmed," said Claude, "you never in all your life, Cicely Brereton, had less cause."

"Who, and what are you?"

"Pardon me, if I reply to neither question, and likewise pardon, for saying that although there is not, and cannot be, the most distant shadow of a hope in my mind of ever calling you mine, yet I love you as never yet man loved, for it is a love without hope, and yet complete."

Without giving her time to make any reply to this most singular declaration of attachment, he took her hand, and for one moment pressed it to his lips. In the next he was gone, and May who had been in the back parlour, with the corpse of old Mrs. Brereton, who had suddenly expired without a sigh, only just in consequence of hearing voices, made her appearance in time to see the street door shut after him. She did not, however, see that it was her brother Claude.

"Oh, May, May!" said Cicely. "Who has been here?"

"I know not."

"A man in grey clothing, and—and handsome, yet bold. There was something too in the tones of his voice that I seemed to remember. He has just left the house."

"Thank God!" exclaimed May, for she knew that he was in safety, although how he had managed to effect his escape from the officers, she could not tell.

"Yes, thank God?" said Cicely.

"Yes, yes, at such a time as this, surely we want no visitors, Cicely. Oh, that Markham would return."

Markham did return quickly, bringing with him the nearest physician, but all

the skill and all the learning that the world ever saw, could not again have rekindled the flame of existence, in the now senseless form of Mrs. Brereton.

We must leave the Breretons now, to give what course they may please to the natural grief that was sure to affect them, while we follow the more stirring features of the gallant Claude Duval. Oh, how noble, and admirable a man was spoiled, when by the force of adverse circumstances such an one as he, with all his chivalry of spirit, and high aspirations, took to the road for a subsistence. Surely there is something wrong in the constitutions of a society, in which it is accident and not desert, that places persons in favourable circumstances.

To one man of genius who from some confluence of circumstances over which he has had no control, meets with the proper field for exertion, and the reward of his ability, there are a hundred who go to the grave unknown, unappreciated, and unpitied.

Long—long ago, it was capacity that made a man; but now-a-days Shakspere might starve in London, with Hamlet in one pocket, and Macbeth in another, if he had not money to push them and to pay for a shoal of puffing advertisements in the newspapers or the reviews. It is capital now that governs all things, and virtue—talent—nobility of soul, if yoked to poverty may go a begging on the highway, or as Claude Duval did, take to the bolder course of robbing travellers with well filled purses.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE "REIN DEER" MOORFIELDS.—CLAUDE'S NEW TITLE.—THE BISHOP OF EXETER.

CLAUDE when he reached this street, looked neither to the right nor to the left. In the first case he felt confident that all the officers had departed with Tom Brereton and the box to Newgate, and even if he were wrong, and any one had lingered on the spot, his looking for him would not make the danger of an encounter with him the less; so Claude walked on with as measured an appearance as any chance passenger could wish to have.

He had not gone very far though, before he became conscious that a shabby looking man was creeping after him.

In order to make sure that his imagination was not deceiving him, he turned suddenly and sharply, and a few paces in the contrary direction, when the shabby looking man was so confounded by this unexpected manœuvre, that he ran into a doorway, which proceeding quite convinced Claude that he was right in his first conjecture, and that this man, for some object, was watching him.

This was not a state of things that he was likely to allow to continue, so he slackened his pace just as he arrived opposite to a stand of Hackney coaches, he turned again as abruptly as before, and reaching the man before he could get out of the way, he said—

"What do you want with me?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the man.

"For what?"

"Why—a—a—I—you see I'm no fool, I know what I know."

"And what's that?"

"You are Claude Duval."

"Well?"

This answer of Claude's took the spy so much by surprise, that he could not tell for a moment or two how to avert it, but then feeling that what he had to

my must be said quietly, he strove to put on an appearance of boldness as he poke.

"I am a police spy," he said. "The officers employ me to ferret out things, sir. They pay me badly; give me a £20 note, and I dont see you at all till the next time. They think they have you, but I did not, so I lingered about the house, and you see I am right. Here you are, sir."

"And why don't you take me. You know there is a reward of £200 to whoever will lodge me in Newgate."

"Yes, sir, but then I—I would rather not try to do such a thing, I'm afraid you would not let me. Ha! ha! You understand, sir."

"Perfectly. You are afraid."

"Well, I—I you may call it so if you like, sir. Twenty pound is not much for a gentleman like you, who gets your money so easy, you know."

"But if I have not got it?"

"Why then, I'm afraid I shall have to stick by you and call for help, and share the reward with some half dozen people who may come to my assistance."

"Well, well," said Claude, with a smile. "You shall have what you so absolutely require of me. Call a coach, will you."

The spy beckoned to a coachman, and a vehicle from the stand came to the curb-stones, and the driver, with all his greatcoats, let down the steps and adjusted the straw in the inside, while Claude and the spy stood close to the large windows of a confectioner's shop.

"Well, coachman," said Claude, "you see this gentleman by my side. He is what is called a bum baliff. Take a good look at him."

The coachman stared, and so did the spy, but they had neither of them time for much reflection, for Claude suddenly pounced upon the latter, and seizing him by the back of the neck with one hand, and about the middle with the other, he flung him through the confectioner's window with such tremendous force, that he carried all before him. There was a crash of glass, a yell from the spy, and a scream from the young lady in the shop, who had been reading a novel when she was thus intruded upon.

"My eye!" exclaimed the coachman.

"Drive round two turnings, and then put me down," cried Claude Duval, as he sprang into the coach, "You shall have a guinea for this job."

Never did the coachman spring upon his seat with more activity—never was the old horses so earnestly solicited by voice and whip to show that there was some mettle in them yet, and never had the crazy vehicle gone through the air with such rapidity since it had been invalided from regular family service. The two turnings were soon taken, and then Claude alighted, and giving the coachman the guinea he had promised, he said,—

"Now drive on, and if you are overtaken and questioned, you have only to say its a mistake, and let them look in and so you have no fear."

"Ah, bless you, sir. You is one after my own heart," said the coachman. "Good luck to yer, sir, wherever yer goes, and whosomedever yer be."

Claude waved his hand, and then dashed down a narrow court, which led him into the not very salubrious parish of Soho, from whence he made his way by a great number of very obscure turnings, with all of which, however, he seemed wonderfully familiar towards the city, his object being to reach an inn near Moorfields, call the "Reindeer," where he not only knew he should get shelter until night, but where his gallant and docile steed Sue was, for he had not brought that creature upon the perilous expedition of shaking hands with Sixteen-string Jack, on his route to execution. He valued Sue much too highly to risk her loss, and as we have seen, he was forced to abandon the horse he rode upon that occasion, but as it was only borrowed from a livery-stable keeper, it gave him no sort of concern, as he knew the owner would easily get it again.

After about half an hour's rather hard walking, during which Claude's mind was much more full of thoughts of the beautiful Cicely Brereton, than of the many

perils that surrounded himself, he reached a narrow street in Moorfields, which is not now in existence, for so many of the houses perished one night in a fire.

About the middle of this street is the Reindeer, opposite which is a little tobacconist's shop. Claude directed his steps to this, and after exchanging a few compliments with an old woman, jumped over the counter, and entered the bar-parlour. He was in the cellars of the Reindeer in time to hear the following—

"We talk of him among ourselves. We whisper about him in the street, tell



stories of him in the flash kens, and so we name him, and do mischief continually. As there has been another hundred offered for him by the secretary of state, within these three hours, I propose that we never utter the name of Claude Duval, except when we know all's right, but find out some other name to call him by, that the grabs will be some time finding out."

"Agreed!" cried a dozen voices, and then one deep stentorian voice said—

"Let's call him, as he is so *unkimmon perlite*, Gentleman Jack."

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

"As good a name as could be hit upon," said the former speaker. "Let it be Gentleman Jack. There's such lots of Jacks among us, that the grabs won't know who we mean."

"And we is all gentlemen," said the proposer of the name.

"Certainly. We live upon our means, and do no work, so gentlemen we are, and that's settled then, my pals, so its understood when we talk of Gentleman Jack, we mean ——"

"Claude Duval!" cried Claude himself opening the door and suddenly appearing among them, to their astonishment and delight. A cheer arose that brought the dust out of the crevices of the old joints overhead, and the landlord made his appearance in some alarm, to know what was the cause of the uproar.

"What's the row now?" said the landlord.

"Hurrah! for Gentleman Jack. Hip, hip, hip! hurrah!"

"And who the dence is he?"

"A dozen bowls of punch, landlord," said Claude in a clear voice that rose high above the babel-like confusion of sounds around him.

If anything had been wanting to raise Claude's popularity to the very height, this liberal dose of punch would have done it, and all the scruples of the landlord to the uproar, vanished in a moment, as he disappeared to execute the order, and it was by such prodigal liberality that Claude found partizans, go where he would, and friends almost at every turn.

The motley crowd pressed eagerly around him, and no monarch on his throne, ever had such ready slaves, and real admirers as Claude Duval, sitting on a wooden stool in a cellar at the Reindeer. There was not a word that fell from him, that was not treasured up to be repeated, and his looks were studied with quite a perplexing perseverance.

"Well, landlord," he said, to that individual, as the first bowl of punch was by him produced. "Is Sue all right?"

"As fresh as a daisy, Claude."

"Stop!" cried one. "We call Claude, Gentleman Jack now, so mind your eye."

"And well you may call him gentleman anything," said the landlord, "for in all my blessed life, I never comed near such a gentleman, he's a out and outer, he is, bless him. I always feels as if I could cry for a week, when he comes here and spends all his tin like a brick, I does. Oh, he's one of the right sort, he is a regular kidney."

"Drink, my pals," said Claude, "I m going to borrow a trifle to-night of the Bishop of Exeter as he comes from his country house to town."

"You don't mean that Gentleman Jack," cried one, but the evident marks of gratification upon his face showed how much he hoped Claude did mean it.

"I have said it;" added Claude, "it is not so troublesome a job as to shake hands with an old friend this morning while two hundred pounds went begging for my head; I will do it, for I want to have a look at the bishop's young wife, who report says is the beauty of the age."

"Bravo, Claude! bravo, Claude!" said one.

"Take that," cried one, and then planting a blow upon his nose that brought forth the blood in a ruddy stream, "take that, don't you know we all agreed to call him Gentleman Jack?"

A quarrel was now upon the point of taking place, but Claude Duval rose and got a hearing, upon which he said,—

"Gentlemen all, I have to remark that I have no objections to a fight, but if we are to make that a portion of the evening's amusement, mind you don't any of you upset the punch, that's all."

This restored good humour, the belligerents shook hands and at ten o'clock that night Claude Duval was on the road.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DANCE ON THE COMMON.—THE BISHOP POSED.—A SONG AND ITS EFFECTS.

The then Bishop of Exeter was notoriously one of the vainest, proudest prelates on the bench; of course he was a follower and disciple of the meek and humble precepts of Christianity, and therefore he was insolent, and overbearing to those who were not so great in the eyes of the stupid world as himself, while to the magistrates of the land, particularly to the monarchy, the bishop was all smiles and sweetness.

This was the man whom Claude Duval announced his intention of robbing, being probably incited to do the deed from the notoriety which it would bring upon him, as well as by a desire to look at the beautiful young bride of the meek and humble man of God.

The bishop was past the middle of life, and he had taken unto himself a young damsel of eighteen, as a wife, whom he had purchased of her friends, and we may likewise say of herself, by a settlement of two thousand pounds per annum, payable from the date of the ceremony that made her the helpmate of the pious and abstemious individual who, of course, was wholly devoted to the cause of religion.

How could he think in common justice of anything else but the gospel when he was paid twelve thousand pounds a year for doing so?

But we prefer after all the highwayman to the bishop, so we will follow Claude, or Gentleman Jack as his new name was, and at times we shall find it convenient to call him by the latter name a little and at times by the former name alone.

Young Romeo whilst waiting news from his lady-love describes himself as most unusually light hearted and joyful in his feelings, when in reality he was on the eve of the announcement of the most dreadful calamity that could befall him, namely the death of Juliet. He says,—

"My bosom's lord sits lightly on its throne.'

but with Claude the case was precisely the reverse, for although his thoughts as he left the Reindeer were all with her whom he now loved devotedly, a deep despondency had crept over his spirit.

Never before, during the whole of his short, but most chequered career, had he ever felt such a depression of soul as now afflicted him. He would truly have given his life for a pin's fee. The bridle hung listlessly upon the neck of his steed, and he gave himself up to bitter thoughts.

Such was his state as he reached the top of the Oxford Road, and saw the light that gleamed from either side of old Tyburn-Gate. The sight of that spot brought, naturally enough, some thoughts of Sixteen-string Jack to his mind.

"Alas! poor Jack!" he said. "There are many who pity you, but you are, after all, much happier than your poor friend, Claude Duval;

"After life's fitful fever you sleep well,"

while I am now the slave of such sadness, that if the law don't quickly lay hold of me and finish me, I think I shall almost feel inclined to give in to the first person who opposes me, and please my sister, May, by dying quietly, with a conviction of all my sins upon my head. "Ah, Cicely, Cicely, it is your sweet face that has worked this change in me. To love one like you, and yet to feel that there is for ever an insurmountable barrier between us—a gulf which can never be crossed, is to taste of the bitterest cup of sorrow that evil fortune can ever place to mortal lips. Oh, Cicely, Cicely!"

"Now, sir," cried the tollman, "do you want to ride over the gate?"

"What is it?" said Claude, rather angrily, for he had been so immersed in his own reflections, that he did not notice how near he was to Tyburn-Gate.

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"Why it's the toll, if its all the same to you, spooney," said the man.

"Take it," said Claude, "and lay the amount out in the purchase of better manners. "What ho! my Sue—my gallant Sue!"

As he spoke, he struck the man sprawling to the ground with the handle of his riding-whip, and in another instant the horse leaped the gate with surprising ease and agility, and took its rider at a gentle canter down the road.

"Now that just sarves you right," said the other toll-man, to his prostrate companion, before whose bewildered eyes, there danced a thousand lights. "You hav'nt been long here, to be sure, and you don't know folks as I know 'em. Now who do you suppose that was?"

"Where am I?"

"In a puddle in the Uxbridge Road, to be sure. Where should you be. I seed it all. That gemmen as you offended drops a guinea every now and then at this here gate, and so we never axes him any questions, when he comes through, whether he's a-coming fast or slow, and if you wants to know who it is, I can tell you—it's Claude Duval. So now don't be a fool another time, old fellow."

This was not much consolation to the new toll man, but as by this time Claude was half a mile down the road, he had to pocket the affront and the blow he had received in the best way he was able to do.

In the meantime, Claude, whom this little incident had restored, put Sue to a canter, and soon breasted Craven hill.

"Well, well," he said, "I may make myself miserable as long as I like, and it won't mend matters. She can never be mine, although I think it would almost drive me out of my mind, to hear that she was ever another's, and all I can do is to do her and those belonging to her all the good I can. Bless her sweet eyes, I shall never see their like in this world again."

His thoughts then turned somewhat to his sister, May, and then there was some pleasure in thinking that she was safe from the world's storms, in the society and protection of such a being as Cicely Brereton, for although he, Claude, had certainly heard that the fortune of the Brereton family was not in the most brilliant state, yet he had too little thought of the every day concerns of life, to suppose that such a gloriously fashioned creature as Cicely could ever be the sport of a malignant destiny.

These thoughts lasted him until the last gleaming light of the suburbs of London was left behind him, and the keen air from the fields opposite Holland Park, blew upon his cheek. A distant clock struck eleven, and Claude deliberately counted the sounds, and as the last one died away in faint echoes, he heard a tramp of a horse's feet approaching from the direction of Shepherd's Bush, close to where he now was.

Claude paused, and drew up by the road side.

The horseman approached rapidly, and by the time he was just opposite to where Claude had withdrawn his horse, the highwayman called aloud to him, saying,—

"Sir, it you are a Christian, tell me it the road is safe from highwaymen lower down."

"Oh yes, I suppose it is," was the reply, as the man drew rein.

"I hope you are not deceiving me, sir. They say that Claude Duval, the terrible highway robber, is on this road. I hope you are not he, for they tell me he is up to all sorts of tricks."

"Oh, stuff! I Claude Duval! Rubbish! I am the Bishop of Exeter's outrider, I gallop on before to pay the tolls and prepare a change of horses, when required for the bishop."

"What? Is the bishop on the road?"

"Yes, to be sure he is."

"Then I shall think myself safe, for no highwayman would have the impertinence to show himself under such circumstances. I should say good-night, sir, I thank you."

Claude galloped on towards the country, while the bishop's outrider proceeded

townwards, after remarking to himself that the man who had just spoken to him, was about the greatest goose he had met with for a long time.

"Well," said Claude to himself, "the bishop is on the road, that is one piece of news gained, at all events, which is worth the having, for now I will at once fly at my high game, and let go any meaner prey I may happen to meet."

There were some symptoms now of the moon rising. This was not exactly what Claude wanted, and yet it could not be said that he actually feared it, for he had not unfrequently committed some of his most daring exploits when the silver orb of night was fully in the ascendant.

"Humph," he said, "we shall have a light night after all. Well, well, so be it; it is by boldness and effrontry I do what I do, and not by being befriended by darkness."

This was most literally true, and such was the terror which the very name of Claude Duval frequently inspired that he might be likened to Cæsar, for he came, and saw, and conquered.

There was only one state of things, which in his robberies upon the highway, Claude always wished, and that was to be as far from houses as possible, for in the immediate vicinage of dwelling places he certainly ran the risk of serious interruptions, but give him his prey alone, on the heath for example, and he truly considered himself monarch of all he surveyed.

Acting upon this feeling and from these considerations, his great object was to meet the bishop upon Ealing Common, which was then by no means the fertile and well villa'd, if we may be allowed to coin such a term, place that it is now. On the contrary, it was in every sense of the word a barren spot.

The village of Ealing consisted of one public-house and a few insignificant cottages; while Hanwell, its near neighbour, was more contemptible still, if we may except the fact that there was then a church and an old parsonage house, which gave a sort of importance to a place otherwise of none whatever, save in the eyes of certain admirers of the piscatory art, who were wont to angle in the Brent River, which thereabouts murmurs its gentle way through the meadows.

But Claude Duval was in no very poetical mood, so we, in accordance with his spirit, revert to more stirring scenes.

By the time he reached the common, the moon—a young one—was making a bold struggle to peep from amid the clouds, and see how the world was getting on, and it did so far succeed as to light up the road across the common, in bright contrast to the dark foliage that skirted it. We have before noticed a group of trees that grew to the left of the heath, and which Claude had before taken advantage of as a kind of dark background to the stirring picture he made take place in front of them. He paused again upon that spot.

"Now," he said to himself, "if this bishop should prove the man of courage he is represented, there may be a nice little case of church patronage for the government to dispose of to-morrow morning. We shall see, we shall see."

Claude applied all his attention to listening for the approach of the bishop's carriage, so much so indeed, that he hardly noticed the sound of horses' feet coming in the direction whence he had so recently trotted, but just as he began to think the bishop was long in coming, he had the vexation of seeing by the dim light from the again slightly clouded moon a figure on horseback arrive upon the common.

"Confound you," muttered Claude, "whoever you are, I only hope you will pass on without observing me, and that, unless your eyes are tolerably keen, or rather intolerably keen you may well do, for the moon is luckily behind me and throws where I stand into absolute gloom."

The horseman was coming on at a slow pace, and yet to the perception of Claude, as he anxiously watched his progress, it seemed as if either from intoxication, or exhaustion, or perchance sudden illness, it was with the greatest difficulty he kept his seat on the saddle, reeling about as he was, and grasping the neck of the horse.

"What on earth can be the matter with the fellow?" thought Claude. "Now if the fool cannot get past here, he may be most confoundedly in my way."

It seemed as if the horseman however, was as anxious to get on as Claude could have possibly wished him, and that it was from some special reason to the contrary, that he made no quicker progress. Soon he arrived nearly opposite to where Claude Duval was concealed, and then the horse made a rather hasty movement, which nearly precipitated his rider from his back, and convinced Claude that it was not the animal, but he who rode him, that controlled what might have been a good pace.

The moon too at this moment, looked through a crevice in the murky sky, shining down with slant rays from behind the clump of trees, in whose deep shadow Claude was stationed, full upon the figure of the horseman.

As if surprised then, at the sudden gust of moonlight, the stranger turned his horses head towards it, and lifting off his hat, gave a deep groan. That groan was echoed by a sharp cry of astonishment and dismay, from the lips of Claude, for in the cold pale face before him, and upon which the moonbeams fell so clearly, as to make mistake impossible, he saw the features of Sixteen-string Jack!

CHAPTER XIV.

CLAUDE IS A LITTLE UNNERVED AT THE APPARITION.—A SONG, AND A DANCE.

THE sharp cry of alarm that had come from the lips of Claude Duval, when he recognised the pale and partially convulsed features of the man, who was hanged only that morning at Tyburn, was a sound so unusual to the ears of Sue, that for the first time since she had been in the possession of her present master, she took fright.

With a snort of alarm, the animal reared and turned completely round. Then bringing down its fore feet with great violence to the ground, it dashed at headlong speed among the trees.

Claude Duval it is true was astonished, unnerved, and terrified, but not to a sufficient extent to lose all self-command over himself, or power over his steed. If he had not exercised some sort of immediate controul, he and Sue both would no doubt, have met with some tragical end among those trees, some of the overhanging branches of which would have dashed their brains out, but Claude gently drew rein, calling to the horse in his own familiar voice—

"What ho, my Sue? Gently lass, gently!"

So habituated was she to obey the slightest signal given by him, either by rein or voice, that almost in a moment she paused, but Claude either trembled himself, or the horse shook from fear, and made him think so."

Perhaps it was a little of both.

For the space of about five minutes, however, he sat on his saddle, without making the least exertion to go back to his former place upon the heath, and during that time he was in such a state of utter bewilderment, that it could scarcely be said he had his proper senses about him.

"I am not superstitious," he said, at length, "but I have seen the ghost of Sixteen-string Jack to-night, as I am myself a living man! Yes, I saw him."

So confident was Claude of the identity of the apparition, that he would have had no hesitation in the world, to risk his life upon the statement, and now as he drew a long breath, and wiped away the drops of moisture upon his brow, he unconsciously muttered these words

> "Can such things be, and overcome us like a summer cloud,
> Without our special wonder?"

'Yes," he added. "It was Jack, I cannot be mistaken. What can such an appearance portend to me. Is this to be my last adventure? Am I to-night to bid the world adieu? I have heard, but ever treated such tales as the invention of brain-stricken idiots, that before a man is snatched from life by violent means, he is subject to such visitations as these. Can all that I have hitherto scouted and laughed at be really true?"

Claude felt terribly embarrassed. If he admitted to himself the fact of the appearance of Sixteen-string Jack's apparition, he felt he must likewise open his mind to the reception of a thousand things which his better reason had hitherto treated with disdain.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "I do much regret that in my alarm I fled. Oh, if I had but staid and watched it I should then be certain; but am I uncertain? No—no, I certainly saw it. Aye as plainly as ever I saw aught living."

Slowly he turned his horse's head in the direction of the common again, and if such a state of feeling can be understood, we may say, that he both hoped and feared still to find the apparition on the spot where he had left it. At all events, his short progress back was marked by more nervous agitation than in all his life he had ever exhibited.

When he reached the precise spot, however, from whence he had caught a view of the appearance, although the moon was still shining clearly, the place was free from all intruders, and a silence as of the very grave reigned upon the common.

"'Tis gone," he said. "Gone, and for the remainder of my life, I shall be involved in a sea of doubt and conjecture regarding this affair, unless I see it once again, and if I do I will follow it, aye, if it lead me to the gates of the infernal regions. So ho! my Sue, are you all right, my lass?"

He accompanied these words by a caress of his steed, who, by pawing the turf, and arching its neck, acknowledged the attention of the only one from whom it cared for such a kindness. Claude now rapidly recovered his usual devil-may-care style of thought, and his great fear was, that while he was away, although the time was brief, the bishop's carriage had passed, and so he had been cheated of all his time and trouble in waiting for its arrival.

"No—no, I can hardly think that," he said, at length, with a half laugh, which did not sound very mirthful, "Jack would never serve me such a trick I am confident, either alive or dead."

He glanced around him as he uttered these words, as if he almost feared this recklessness might again awake the apparition.

All was, however, profoundly still, not a vestige of anything in the shape of the appearance of that which had terrified Claude Duval could be seen, and yet he hardly knew whether to consider that to be a relief or not, for he would fain have made assurance doubly sure, by once gain looking upon that face, which he thought he had seen his last of in Oxford-street, and then again encountered so strangely on Ealing Common.

But all these thoughts and feelings soon gave way before the new idea that took posssession of him, as he now heard the sound of rapidly approaching carriage wheels.

"He comes," said Claude. "That must be my friend, the bishop."

He advanced some short distance to reconnoitre, and then he felt quite positive that his eyes had not deceived him, and in a few moments more, too, he saw the flashing of lights through the dim and murky air.

"All's right! All's right! He comes, he comes, and I shall soon see now whether or not this appearanee to me upon the common was prophetic or not of coming evil."

It will be seen that Claude did not doubt the reality of the apparition that ne had seen upon the heath. He could have taken his oath, so strangely was the whole affair hedged round by circumstances of proof, that it was a supernatural appearance.

The bishop's carriage was rather a large and unwieldy machine. The bishop

like bishops in general, knew what comfort was, and accordingly his carriage was more like a small house upon wheels, so full of all sorts of conveniences was it, than anything else, and he was lolling in it, little suspecting any one would have the audacity to attack so very great a personage.

Claude put Sue into a quiet sort of canter, and just as the carriage was passing him, he fired a shot over one of the postillions' heads, and then cried,—

"Stand!"

The horse upon which the postillion rode reared, but the man drew rein, and the carriage was stopped accordingly.

"Mark me, postillion," said Claude, "if you move on another step, as sure as I am a living man, and my name is Claude Duval, I will blow your brains out, and leave them on the common to be picked up by crows at daybreak."

At the dreaded and well-known name of Claude Duval, the postillion cowered down in alarm, and took the utmost care that his horses should remain quiet, while Claude trotted up to the door of the carriage, from which the bishop was now looking with a face nearly purple with rage.

"The Bishop of Exeter, I presume," said Claude.

"Well, fellow, who are you?"

"Claude Duval, the highwayman."

"Drive on postillion—drive on—drive over the rascal."

"The postillion," said Claude, "has more brains, and more politeness than his master. Civility, my lord bishop, may perhaps be policy upon the present occasion."

"Take that," said the bishop, suddenly producing a pistol, but Claude's hand was in a moment upon the barrel of it, and turned it aside, so that some of the contents, when the bishop pulled the trigger, passed within dangerous proximity to his lordship's wig.

"Murder! Fire!" said the bishop.

"It is well, sir, that my temper," said Claude, as he snatched the pistol from his grasp, and flung it into the road, "is better than yours, or there would be a vacancy in the see of Exeter to-night."

"Do you want to murder me?"

"Why do you ask? If I wished to do so, I should hardly stand to parley with you. Remove your head, sir, out of my way."

The bishop drew in his head, and then Claude as he looked into the carriage, saw by the aid of a small lamp hanging from the roof, in the interior, a young and beautiful female, who betrayed much alarm.

"Is this your lady sir?" cried Claude Duval. "Introduce me, if it be."

"I—I—really—Lady Exeter, this is—ahem! Claude Duval."

"You won't kill us," said the lady.

"No madam, although I suffer a most cruel death, from the fire of your eyes. My lord bishop, I will trouble you for your trinkets, and watch. Of you madam, I only require some souvenir as a remembrance, not of your beauty, for that I cannot banish from my heart, but of this happy meeting."

"No, no, no!" cried the bishop. "What impertinence."

"I'm sure he's rather polite," said the lady.

"Polite? How, madam?"

"Be quiet, sir," said Claude. "Is it true madam, that you are an exquisite dancer of the minuet de la cour."

"Ah, I was before my ——"

"Sacrifice you would say. Now my lord bishop, I will trouble you for your money, and valuables. Sir, I thank you. You have handed them out promptly, although not with the most polished air in the world. From your intercourse with courts, you ought to know better, and as for you madam, will you condescend to alight, and upon this dry and verdant sward, dance the minuet with me?"

"Death and fury," said the bishop.



The lady offered no objection but the want of music, which Claude told h should be supplied by the bishop. Claude whistled the tune over, so that the bishop might follow him. After many protestations of incapability and unwillingness, the Right Rev. Father in God, wanted to know the sum that would cause Claude to forego his freak, when he was informed that twenty years of his revenues would not be a sufficient temptation, as his mind was fixed upon it.

"My dear," said the bishop's lady, "do try the tune. It's very easy."

"Yes," said Jack. "Easier almost than preaching."

"Ah, do!" added the lady.

"What do you, too, take part with a highwayman against me? Oh, good gracious! Do I live to hear this. Upon my soul, madam, I believe you would rather dance with him than not."

"It will soon be over," sighed the lady.

"Well, well," said Claude, "we will not trouble his lordship, but manage the tune ourselves."

"As you please, sir," said the lady. "I have heard that you are now named Gentleman Jack."

"I hope at all events that in this brief interview, which I shall never forget to my dying day, I shall merit the appellation of gentleman."

"Oh, dear yes."

"No, no!" roared the bishop.

"Really, my lord," said the lady, "I must say your conduct is not what one ought to expect from a dignitary of the church. If your lordship is so very averse to my saving your life by a mere dance by moonlight, I advise your lordship to lean back in the carriage, and shut your eyes for the next quarter of an hour."

"Shut my eyes!"

"Yes," said Claude, "it is good advice."

"Is it? Confound me if I think I can be too wide awake just now, that's my opinion."

"Come," laughed Jack. "If we wait all night, I am afraid we shall not induce his lordship to appreciate this little joke. We had better have the dance at once."

The lady made no objection, and as Claude whistled the tune, they both exerted the measure with great grace. The lady panted slightly as Claude handed her back to the carriage, and either by design, or accident, a gold bracelet she wore fell to the ground.

"Your bracelet, madam," said Claude, lifting it up.

"No—it is your's."

Claude bowed, and thrust it into the bosom of his apparel. The bishop now would not say a word, although Claude bade him rather an elaborate good-night, but the lady was by no means so obdurate, replying with seeming sweetness of voice, to the salutation of the highwayman.

"Drive on, postillion," cried Claude.

The lights of the carriage dashed before his eyes, and in another moment the vehicle was gone.

A mass of dark clouds had been creeping for the last ten minutes slowly up from the south, and now they just touched the edge of the moon's disc.

Claude glanced upwards, as he said,—

"No more moon to-night."

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips, than he heard the sound of feet coming at a quick pace down the road, and he drew close to the pathway to listen. In a few moments a female, as he knew by the voice, paused, being apparently quite unable to proceed further, and cried frantically,—

"Oh spare me, spare me!"

There was another rapid sound of feet, and then a hoarse voice full of brutality cried,—

"Where are you?"

"Here. Here. But spare my life. You shall have all the money I have. Why should you threaten to kill me?"

"Oh, you are there, are you?" said the man. "Why did you run away. Come, come, its of no use trying to escape from me. It's your money or your life always, and at times when I think proper it's both."

"But you will spare me?"

"I don't know that. Who do you think I am, now? I'm the well-known highwayman, Claude Duval, so you had better make no resistance to me. You can say you were robbed on Ealing common by Claude Duval."

Gentleman Jack before the conversation had got thus far, had quietly alighted from his horse and crept towards the speakers.

"Come," added the fellow, "I have a lantern here, and we'll see if you deliver up all the money you have or not. Have you any rings on your fingers?"

"Oh no, sir. Oh, no."

"Nor in your ears?"

"Not one, sir. Oh, spare me."

"Ah, we shall see. We shall see."

There was a sharp crackling noise, and the fellow had ignited a match, by which he set light to a small piece of wax candle in a lantern, which shed a dexterous ray around it.

"Now," he said. "As sure as I am Claude Duval the celebrated highwayman, I will have all your money."

"But," said Claude, suddenly grasping the fellow by the collar, and twisting him round, "I thought Claude Duval never robbed defenceless women."

"Oh, murder! murder! Oh, dear!" cried the footpad.

"Go your way," said Claude to the poor woman, who was upon her knees trembling, "go home. It is better that I and this gentleman should settle our accounts alone. Good-night."

The terrified woman did not wait for a second bidding to begone, but started off across the common at a great rate, leaving Claude to fight her battle in her absence.

"Now," said Claude, "I want to know who you really are."

"Hands off. Keep your hands off me," cried the fellow, "or I shall lose my temper. I am one you will be afraid to hear mentioned."

"Well, let me hear."

"I am the famous Claude Duval."

"Really. There must be two of the name, then, for folks have been in the habit of calling me Claude Duval, and you may see my horse there, by the light of your lantern, waiting for me somewhat impatiently."

The fellow shook in every limb.

"Have mercy upon me," he said. "Oh, have mercy upon me."

"Did you ever show mercy? Now, mark you. I have forgiven many a man for aiming at my life—I have forgiven a few for doing me other injuries, but I never yet had an opportunity of asking myself, until to-night, if I could forgive a man for taking my name, and committing a dastardly action under cover of it."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear. "What will become of me?"

"I don't know, just yet. I think I will give you a run upon the common for your life."

"A—a run, sir?"

"Yes. What conditions do you require?"

"If you will let me have it in the dark, sir, I—I think, that is, I hope, you will be so good as to let me go, sir. Oh, dear."

"You think the darkness will be in your favour, do you?"

"Perhaps a little, sir."

"Very well, then I will put out the lantern you have. Turn its beams a little to your left, and you will see a stagnant ditch, the delight of frogs and ducks. Do you observe it?"

"Ye—yes, sir."

"Then in that I will extinguish your like."

Claude was but a slight looking man, but upon more than one occasion he had shown what amazing personal strength he possessed, as well as what astonishing tact he possessed in the management of it, but never upon any occasion had he so exhibited both that strength and that dexterity as upon this. He by a sudden movement, caught the fellow up by the middle, and fairly flung him forward, nearly fifteen feet into the black, stagnant ditch, which he had just alluded to.

A cry of despair and agony, came from the lips of the footpad. Then there was a tremendous splash, after which all was still.

Claude walked calmly back to where his horse was standing, slowly to himself whistling the tune, to which he had danced with the bishop's lady, and giving him-

self not the smallest concern about the footpad; indeed, when he had mounted, and trotted off, the only remark he made, was—

"That fellow being born to be hanged, is of course proof against any death of a watery character."

Claude did not seem much to care in what direction he went, and as he was for some time under the shadow of trees, he did not feel that there was a great change taking place in the weather. After he emerged, however, which was soon the case, to a more open part of the heath, he became aware of that fact.

At about a quarter of a mile ahead of him, he saw a dim flickering kind of light, and as the wind began to sigh and moan among the large trees that skirted the heath, he made his way at rather a swift canter in that direction.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GREYHOUND INN.—AN ADVENTURE.

The rain came pattering down, and Claude paused immediately at some short distance from the light that he descried. He could not quite make up his mind, whether to wait for a time, or to take further chances upon the road.

Under these circumstances, a simple piece of arithmetic, always with him decided the question; he began to reckon up how many hours his horse had been on foot.

"Yes," he said, "it is time you should have a rest, my Sue, so girl we will go to this house, which if I mistake not is the Greyhound, and has been mentioned to me, as a place where I can be safe."

He soon reached the door of the hostel, which, however was closed upon the sound of his horse's feet; it seemed as if some man who was on the watch got curious, for he looked out at a window, nearly level with the road, saying—

"Who are you, old fellow?"

"Are you the landlord," said Claude.

"Yes, I am. What then. We don't take in travellers here so late."

"A word in your ear my friend. Folks call me Claude Duval, who know me. Hush! I hear you have company. My horse and I only want one hour's rest. Do not mention me to any one."

The landlord was all obsequiousness directly, and Claude had soon got into the corner of a long room, in which were many persons, and one had just began to speak, as follows—

"Fill your glasses, gentlemen, fill your glasses, and don't be afraid of seeing the bottom—you wont see a worse reflection there than that of yourselves. Maids have their glasses, and why not men. They are often as intoxicated with what they see as ever knight of the road could feel when under the inspiring influence of the choicest vintage."

"That is true," replied a tall grim-looking individual, who sat in one corner, and who lifted up a large well-filled glass. "I have seen many things, and had some narrow escapes, but that which I account the luckiest of all, was an escape from matrimony."

"Ha! ha! ha! Escaped from matrimony, were you ever menaced?"

"Aye, aye, I have, but I escaped, and you see me here free, aye, as free as man can desire to be, and I will yet drink the lasses, though I would turn down my glass at 'matrimony.'"

"You are wise," resumed the first speaker, "but if you will drink the lasses, so let it be, and when you have replenished both glass and pipe, I will find you in

a little food for the mind, by recounting a matter that happened some few years back, that will pass the time, and show you how a few things have been done."

This proposition was acceded to by acclamation, and glasses were lifted high, and the toast drunk by the boon companions, who changed their postures, and when the silence which had been so loudly invaded was restored, the first speaker began.

"It is now five-and-twenty years since what I am going to tell you took place, and will show you that the cause of many a deed is not that which appears upon the face of it as the most immediate and the most probable.

"There was a dashing blade, called Overbury Tom, from the name of the place of his birth, and sometimes Coventry Tom, or Dashing Tom of Coventry, because he was well known in those parts, and feared, for Tom was really a desperate man. He had been in the army for a short time, and had, I believe, served a short time abroad, but upon his return he found himself with only his commission, and no patrimony.

"This was especially distasteful to Tom, because he had rather a luxurious taste and extravagant habits, which were much promoted by the habits of his brother officers, and yet still more by the fact that in addition to his being an especial favourite among women, he had fallen deeply in love with the daughter of one of his superior officers, and it was necessary that he should maintain a good appearance, and have a well-filled purse.

"Under the circumstances, however, he could not very well do the latter, because there were no means of obtaining a supply, save at the gaming table, but Tom Overbury was not the man to thrive at the gaming-table, because there was too much of the reckless elevation of spirit about him, that made him restless, and the bottle had more charms for him than play, though he used to lose money that way, but never made any money there.

"Things being in that state, he passed along, one thoughtful evening, and Tom's evenings were generally joyous and riotous—he was passing down a lane near Coventry, when he entered the yard of a rural public-house, not far from the main road, but yet so far that it was somewhat surprising that it should find custom enough to support it, and neither would Tom have alighted there, but he had ridden many miles, and a storm began to rage with great fury, and being unwilling to encounter it, as he had no particular object in so doing, besides as I said this was a thoughtful evening with Tom, and he sought shelter in the small roadside house.

"'There,' said he, to the horse-keeper, 'take care of the animal. I will come and see to him by-and-bye, and if you do your duty your fee wont be any the less.'

"'All right, your honour,' said the stableman, or boy rather, for the young fellow had not arrived at the years of manhood, who acted as horse keeper, 'you shall not complain of me.'

"'Have you any visitors here?'

"'A few.'

"Tom turned and entered the large kitchen, which appeared to be the only place at the disposal of guests, but there was a large fire, beside which was seated two, who bore the appearance of being travellers like himself.

"He took his seat before the fire, and called for the best the house afforded, and entered into conversation with the two strangers who were there before him, and endeavoured to throw off the gloom that had for once overtaken him.

"'Have you travelled far,' inquired one of the strangers?

"'Not far, yet far enough to be fatigued,' replied Tom, 'you seem somewhat travel-worn yourself, though the weather, however, has made me turn in.'

"'Aye, you are fortunate to have no worse motive to seek shelter for the night,' replied the stranger, 'I have had a much more urgent motive.'

"'May I inquire what that may be?' continued Tom, since you openly allude to it.'

"'You may sir. I was stopped and robbed, and my horse wounded. I feared

going any further, and I feared staying in a place, so dismal and distant from other habitations as this, and yet now I do not regret it.'

"'You have seen enough to make you satisfied with your host, I presume?'

"'Exactly—I have—I am more at ease, rest and a good draught of ale—the only things they have here, have restored my senses, for I was well nigh unable to judge which was my right hand, or which was my left.'

"'You must have been sorely beset.'

"'I was,' replied the stranger, 'and I ran some danger of losing my life. I was armed with a brace of pistols.'

"'You were stopped by more than one man then?'

"'Oh, dear no. I was riding, when I was overtaken by a man, whom I had met at an inn I had left, and he entered into conversation, for half a mile or more, and then suddenly he put a pistol to my breast, and demanded my money.'

"'And you complied,' said Tom?

"'Not at once, for I fired my pistols, but the fellow only laughed, as though he had been bullet proof, and then I was at his mercy, and he struck me on the head—felled and wounded my horse by firing at it, but very slightly to prevent my giving chase, I suppose, robbed me of all he could find about me, and then left me stunned on the ground.'

"'And when you got up he was gone?'

"'Yes, he was, but I was not hurt much, or my horse either, so we found our way hither, and I hope in safety, but the rogue did not deprive me of my money, save what he found loose on my person, and as that appeared large enough to satisfy his wants, why he searched no further, and I escaped with the most considerable part of my money.'

"'You were fortunate sir,' replied Tom, 'pray how could you contrive to evade the search of a knight of the road. I thought their scrutiny was rigid, and long practice had rendered them so expert, that they were seldom foiled.'

"'You are correct in that supposition, I believe, but I have very nearly three hundred guineas in a belt round my person, and that is unusual, and thus I have saved my money, though I have lost over forty guineas.'

"'Ah, that was a clever trick,' said Tom.

"'I would recommend you to employ it, sir, if ever you travel with a considerable sum of money about you.'

"'I will, replied Tom, 'though I must say, I do not need the stratagem, since I am always armed, and my regimentals are enough, to cause my person to be respected, they cannot expect of a soldier, who has seen a field of battle to surrender.'

"'And have you been in the wars,' inquired the stranger.

"'Indeed I have, but I must not boast but I am armed and do not fear one or two men, since I am in some measure used to deadly weapons, but I never had occasion to defend myself on the road yet.'

"'Do you intend to remain here for the night,' inquired the stranger.

"'I shall, if I be obliged, and yet if the storm holds up, I should prefer riding on to the next market town, where I can be entertained more suitably.'

"'Well,' said the stranger, 'a king's officer is always welcome company, and if you really go to-night, and will permit me to travel as your companion, I will defray all charges, and consider myself as greatly your debtor.'

"'I will accept your company, though I don't know that I can accept your other offer, but I will see my horse baited at once,' replied Tom.

"Overbury Tom went out and saw the horse fed, and looked at the strangers horse and saw the wound was but slight, and then ordered his own to be fed, which being done he once more returned to the kitchen, where he sat, and had some refreshment.

"An idea had entered Tom's mind for the first time, which kept its ground, despite his determination at first to resist the impulse, which was to rob his intended companion upon their journey, and thus procure a round sum.

"Tom had been very short of late, he had got into debt among some of his

fellow officers, and he feared being asked for it, and unable to satisfy the demand, and he greatly feared it being at any time whispered that his means were limited, because it would tend to interfere with his amour with the daughter of his superior officer.

"However, after much thought, he determined that he would at an unguarded moment deprive him of his money, and then change his route, and thus escape detection, and should the worst happen, he would at all events place himself far above suspicion; but there was no fear of his being detected, and his wants were so pressing, and all his resources were dried up, and none for the future would be open to him, save the produce of his commission, which was mortgaged for some time to come, and would not been enough to support him in his mode of life, being scarce a fourth of his wants in the way of money.

"Things went on very well. They had some ale, for it was all they could get, and then when the storm abated, which it did in about an hour, they both quitted the hostel, and proceeded towards the next town in company, and travelled along for a mile or two as very good friends, until they came to a very lonely spot, when Tom said—

"'I should not much like to meet any highwayman here. It is so very lonely a spot.'

"'Nor should I,' replied his companion. 'It was just such a place as that, I was so lately stopped in—'

"'And if you were again, you would not probably get off so cleverly.'

"'That's true," replied the other, 'but then you see, I should have much faith in my belt, and that you know is a secret not divulged to any one.'

"'Yes, there was another man in the room where we met.'

"'There was so, but he's not here, and it is unlikely I shall be again caught out with so much money about me—it will be a warning to me, and I shall never be found such a goose as to do the like again.'

"'Then those who desire to rob you, had better do so at once.'

"'Ah! ah! you are right, but it would take more than one or two to stop me now with you by my side.'

"'True, but yet now I think of it, I am terribly in want of money.—I should very much like to borrow a small sum of money—say three hundred pounds, eh?'

"'Eh?—What?—I beg your pardon,' stammered the traveller.

"'Why you can have no objection to take the word of honour of a king's officer for so paltry a sum as that, surely you don't hesitate?'

"'Oh dear no, but you see I can't spare the money, indeed I have'nt got it.'

"'Your belt.'

"'Oh dear! oh yes!—but I can't lend it—because—because I want it.'

"'Exactly,' replied Tom, 'and I must borrow because I want it. So what am I to do? Must you or I go without, eh?' said Tom, in an angry voice.

"'But to lend—I don't know you, and my own wants——. What security? You are joking. Oh dear, aye, I know, you only intend to joke.'

"'The devil a bit,' said Tom, who could hardly forbear laughing at the fellow's amazement and fears. 'I must tell you, you must lend me your belt. If you doubt my honour, you must give me satisfaction. I shall take upon myself to chastise you at once, and do not know but what I ought to shoot you at once, and prevent any further trouble.'

"'But good heavens! you, an officer, don't intent to commit robbery!'

"'No, I merely intend to borrow three hundred guineas of you, which as you have objected to, I must insist upon as a matter of honour. Lend me that sum at once, or you may depend upon it you will inhabit a coffin.'

"'Oh my God!' exclaimed the traveller. 'What shall I do.'

"'Hand over your money, my friend,' said Tom, pulling out his pistol, which he presented to the other's head, 'nand it over I say, and let this tell you how much in jest I am, a single attempt at resistance will be fatal to you.'

"The poor devil knew not what to think, save indeed, that he was unable to resist, and had indeed, no power to do so, so with a rueful countenance, and a sorrowing heart, he undid his belt, and reluctantly handed it over, saying,—

"'There it is. I am a ruined man. Return me enough to pay my way home —nay do not take all from me.'

"'There are some guineas to carry you back—but I must prevent you going anywhere on horseback, so I will just borrow your bridle, and I will leave it on the first gate after I have passed two miles up yonder road, you will find it there if you walk as far. Good-night.'

"So saying, he put the belt into his pocket, and slung the bridle on his arm, and rode along at a rapid rate, left the bridle at the place he mentioned, and then galloped across country, and in another hour and a half stopped at a small inn, a distance of five and twenty or thirty miles from the scene of action.

"He soon after came to London, and paid his debts, or some of them, and flourished with the remainder of the money. But light come, lightly go, says the adage, and so it was with Tom, who no sooner got to the end of his money, than he bethought himself of turning out upon the road and obtaining a supply.

"This was natural enough. He had once benefitted by laying contributions, and his necessities were of that character, that he preferred chancing a halter. Life's a game of chance, he would say, and if the game was well played who could grudge the stake."

"And he was right," said one of the company.

"Entirely so," added another. "I propose the memory of Overbury Tom."

"Overbury Tom" was echoed from every mouth, and deep draughts were quaffed to the memory of the hero of the tale.

To proceed; you see he was no chicken, a big, but not a clumsy man, of great strength and activity, of undoubted courage, and was more than a match for any one whom he might chance to meet with. He did turn out and again was successful. He returned with a well filled purse, and became the idol of his companions.

"He was proceeding very fast in the amour with the young lady I spoke of, but he had gone so far, that it became the duty of her parents to inquire into the state of our friend's income, which was somewhat inconvenient. He fenced about for some time, and evaded it, but there was no avoiding it, and he declared he had no property, and all he had to depend upon was the pay he received, and the voluntary contributions of his relatives, which he expected would increase rather than diminish after marriage.

"There's no disguising the fact, but he was not very urgent in pressing the marriage, conscious I suppose of the precarious life she would be compelled to lead, and yet he had gone too far to withdraw; the result was the seduction of the young lady and a regular scene in the family, who took the girl away and secreted her, so that Tom never afterward saw her, or even heard of her. I believe he shed tears in memory of her, but yet after all they had done whatever under the circumstances was best for her.

"With Tom, however, they determined not to part, and he was called to account by the father, and Tom was obliged to meet his superior officer, whom he conceived he had injured.

"They met. Tom received his adversary's fire, but refused to fire in return, but after much remonstrance, he was compelled to discharge his weapon, and then a second fire was demanded, and as the first had been nearly fatal to Tom, he felt exasperated, that so much rancour should be shewn towards him, and an evident desire to destroy him manifested by his antagonist, whose enmity appeared deadly.

"The second fire was granted, and it ended in the fall of the girl's father, who was mortally wounded, and Tom himself escaped by a miracle, for a button was shot off his breast, and that was close work.

"However, they said a great deal about murder, and fighting his superior officer, in such a way, that Tom was determined to quit the army to save himself from a

court-martial, and perhaps from being shot; for there was a great influence at work against him. He once more took to the road, and had the good fortune to meet with a man who carried much money about him. After many years of various frotunes, he one day came upon a travelling party on the main road from London to York. There were in the carriage two gentlemen, three ladies, besides the driver, a man servant, and a woman behind. He darted down a small lane, and as the carriage ascended a sharp hill, he rode up and commanded the postilion to stop.

"'Your money or your life,' said Tom. 'You are a bold man to attack so many,' said an elderly gentleman. 'No more words—money!' said Tom. A young gentleman who was in the carriage, and about being married to a beautiful



young girl by his side, gave orders for the men to make use of their arms. A servant, while in the act of levelling his gun, was shot by Tom. The young man rising to seize him, was fired at, but the bullet missing him, entered the young lady's breast; she jumped up, but instantly fell back again with a faint scream, and died. The destined husband blindly threw himself upon Tom, who cleft his skull in two with his sword, which he ever retained by his side. 'Enough,' said the elderly gentleman, who was afflicted beyond measure, and barely able to understand his position, for the other two ladies had fainted, and were covered with blood: 'take what you want, man, and go hence—you have done what you cannot undo—more blood may be shed, but money will not buy back the lives of these.'

"Away flew Tom to the nearest market town, where he sold his horse, and obtained another, for his own was scarcely fit for such hard service as was required of him, for he justly thought this last affair would cause a terrible commotion among travellers, and he should be hunted from place to place, and the best thing he could do was to place himself in a situation to baffle them, and escape by his fleetness, perhaps to Scotland, and if that would not do, to go to Wales, and thence to the south of England, and perhaps to London itself.

"It was no bad idea, and on went worthy Tom, but it was a long journey, and attended by difficulty and danger, but he was equal to that.

"However, he had but little time to spend, here he rested one night, and finding the hue and cry out after him, he took flight and proceeded to York. Here he rested a day or two, but finding he was sought, he started for Darlington, and then to Morpeth, and after a day or two got near Edinboro', where he found himself headed by the Loudoners, who were let loose after him, and he was recognised, and a capture attempted.

"But he was not the man to surrender at any odds, for he said neither Tyburn nor York would ever see his funeral procession, or execution, he fought, and killing one, and mortally wounding the other, the third fled for Edinboro'.

"Tom now headed back, sought refuge in Durham, but he knew he was not safe, and quitted that place by daybreak, being determined to get away by flight, but resolved to die at bay, and have no last dying speech and confession.

"He was a good man—a brave man, and he continued his journey for a day or two till he got to Derby, where he resolved to stay for a few hours, and then set out for Coventry, Gloucester, and Bristol, and then pursue what road he thought proper; but he never got to any of these places, the pursuit was hotter than he had any notion of, and men had been sent from London in another direction, upon hearing he had been turned from Scotland, and they came up with him—or I should say they met with him a few miles on the London side of Derby, in a lone spot, where there was no escape save by fleetness back again, but he came upon them too suddenly at the turn in the road near a wood, which obstructed his view, and he was fairly caught.

"'Surrender, or you are a dead man!' said the first.

"'I am a dead man if I do,' said Tom, 'so I have no encouragement to do so,' and as he spoke he shot the man down, and drawing his sword soon charged them military fashion, which so disconcerted them from the strange mode of resistance, and his being in the midst of them, that he nearly escaped, though pistol shots were flying about in abundance, till one shot him through the back; he lingered but a few hours and then died; peace be with him, he was a brave and daring man.'"

"And that's all, is it," said one, who had listened attentively to the recital.

"Yes, and enough too," said another, "but I have something to say. There is a stranger in the corner of the room there, who has heard all and says nothing. He takes his drink in silence. We don't know him, and as we consider ourselves bricks here, and good fellows, I intend to have him out."

All eyes were now turned upon Claude Duval, as he sat in silence in the corner of the room to which he had retired. His thoughts were at that moment full of her whom he loved, and bitter imaginings were chasing each other like a hideous brooding phantom through his brain.

And often amid all other considerations, and painful reflections, the remembrance of the appearance of Sixteen-string Jack upon Ealing Common would obtrude itself, giving, when it did so come across his memory, a powerful and almost electric shock to his nerves.

For a moment or two he was not conscious of having become the object of so much attention, but when with a wink at his comrades, the man who had talked of bringing him out walked up to the table, and gave it a blow with his hand, Claude looked up.

"Hilloa! my friend," said the fellow. "Is this your brandy?"

"Yes," said Claude.

"Very well, then I will show you what good fellowship is by drinking it off for you, since you have been nursing it so long.'

As he spoke he finished Claude's glass.

"Landlord," said Claude, "another glass of brandy-and-water."

The steaming beverage was brought to him, and then taking it in one hand, he rose, saying,—

"You have just drank one glass of liquor belonging to me, to please yourself. You shall now drink another to please me."

Before then any one could interfere, he dashed the fellow's mouth open with a blow of his disengaged hand, and poured the whole glass of hot spirits and water into it.

A general scene of confusion ensued. The man was within an ace of being choked, and several voices cried out to know who the stranger was.

"I am Claude Duval," he said. "Good-night, gentlemen."

The effect of the pronunciation of the name was quite electric. They all crowded round him now, as though he had been some hero, and the unfortunate "brick" who wanted to bring him out looked panic-stricken. Again Claude said, "Good-night!" and then one of them cried,—

"What are you for the road, captain, again to-night?"

"I am," said Claude, "I am."

"A storm is brewing."

"No matter. My vocation is on the road, and there can be no storms of the elements equal to the storm that will at times rage in a man's heart. I do not feel at ease to-night."

At this moment a man entered the room, and whispered to Claude that there was a young lad without, who had a note for him. A cold sensation somehow crept over Claude's heart, and he could not but tell himself at once that there were such things as omens in this world.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LETTER FROM LONDON.—THE FALSE CHARGE.

All who were present and saw the effect which was produced upon the redoubtable Claude Duval by the mere reception of a letter, could scarcely think it possible that in him they beheld the man who was so proverbially careless of life that a pistol shot was considered as but an ordinary occurrence. They could scarcely comprehend the proposition that there might be the greatest possible amount of physical courage, and yet a large share of what is called nervous feeling.

Duval, or Gentleman Jack, as it will be now more convenient, as well as more proper to call him, heeded not whether his conduct created surprise, censure, applause, or any other feeling. He was completely absorbed in reading the letter which had been placed in his hands.

It was as follows, and was from his sister May.

"Claude,

"Dear Claude, for you are still dear to me, notwithstanding the past, you are called upon solemnly to do an act of justice. Mr. Mark Brereton is falsely accused by Tom Brereton of robbing and attacking him on the highway, and in fact your deeds on Ealing Common, when you stopped the carriage, are sought by Tom Brereton to be fixed upon the innocent Mr. Mark. Remember that Mark is Cicely's brother.

"This is from one who still calls herself

"May Duval."

"My horse," cried Claude, "my horse!"

"In a moment, captain," cried one, "in a moment; and when you come this way again, don't forget to call here."

"I will not, you may be assured. I am one who forgets and forgives many injuries, but a kind word sinks deeply into my heart, and is never forgotten. Good night to you all, and good fortune."

"Three cheers," shouted one, "three cheers for Gentleman Jack!"

"No, no—oh, no," said the landlord. "Remember that quietness is security. Don't do it, though if time and place were fitting, there is no one who would stretch his lungs more than I should in such a cause."

"You are right," said Jack. "Let us have no cheering. I am well pleased to know that I leave friends behind me here."

"Your horse is ready, captain," said a man, coming that moment into the room; "but there are two horsemen haunting about the road."

"Do you know them?"

"No, captain; but they look woundy suspicious, that they do. If you take the path by the coppice at the back of the house, though, you will avoid them."

"No," said Claude, "I would not run the chance of avoiding a friend, for fear I should happen to meet an enemy."

He waved his hand to those who were assembled, and strode to the door. There was a look of gloom upon his brow, although his words had been light and careless, but the sight of his gallant steed pawing the earth with impatience to be off, roused him, and he patted the creature's neck, as he said,—

"Ah! my Sue, you are as fond of the road as your master!"

"She never had such a master until she knew you, captain," said the landlord.

"And she shall never have another," responded Claude, as he sprang lightly into the saddle.

"Remember what my man told you about the horsemen," whispered the landlord. "They bode you no good, you may depend."

"Thanks, thanks. All is right."

In another moment Claude darted into the darkness, but when he had got some distance from the public-house, he pulled rein and dismounted, laying his ear flat against the ground, and then he distinctly heard the sound of horses' feet at a gentle walk; and having ascertained that they were coming towards where he was, from the direction of London, he mounted again, and at a gentle canter went on his way to meet them.

In the course of a few minutes, the sound of the advancing horses' feet was quite plainly to be heard without anything in the shape of extraordinary vigilance, and then, through the dusky night air, Claude saw those whom he had good reason to suppose his foes, advancing.

They, too, must have observed him about the same moment, for, putting their horses to a trot, they came rapidly up to him; and one cried,—

"Stand, in the king's name!"

"Well, what then?" said Claude.

"Who are you?"

"A gentleman. Has the king turned highwayman by deputy, and are you about to attempt to rob me?"

"You are my prisoner!" said one of the men, suddenly making a catch at the bridle of Claude's horse.

"Paws off, Pompey," said Claude, as with the heavily silver-mounted butt end of one of his pistols he struck the man on the back of the hand, putting him to the most exquisite pain.

The other immediately fired a pistol full in Claude's face, and the bullet actually took up the skin by his cheek so finely, that it looked more like as if he had received a very slight graze than anything else. In fact, at the moment he was

perfectly unconscious of having been touched at all, and could hardly in any way account for the bullet missing him.

"Confound the fellow," cried he who had fired the pistol, when he saw that Claude still maintained his seat in the saddle. "He is certainly made of cast iron!"

"Perhaps I am," said Claude, as he fired at him; "are you?"

The man fell from his horse with a deep groan; and the other cried, in loud accents,—

"Villain, you have murdered the man!"

"Fortune," said Claude. "If ever there was in this world an unprovoked attack, it was that made upon me. I only acted upon the defensive. Take care that you don't fall into the same condition as your friend. I would fain spare you, if I can."

"You spare me!"

"Yes. Beware, I say! Are you drunk or mad that you bar my path, and so tempt me to lay you prostrate? I am not in my usual mood,"

"I know you. You are the highwayman, Claude Duval. I am John Jeffries, the officer; and I have made up my mind to take you."

"You are a gallant fellow!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I do not believe there is another officer in England who would say so much to me alone upon a country road. I never take a life, or commit an injury upon any one if I can avoid it. Get out of my path, I conjure you, for the sake of yourself and any whom you love."

"No, dead or alive, I will have you! Take that."

During this brief dialogue the officer had been quietly pointing a pistol at Claude, and now, as he spoke, he pulled the trigger, but the weapon only flashed in the pan, upon which he turned his horse's head, and tried to escape at full gallop.

"Indeed," said Claude Duval, as he set his teeth. "So you are for a race, my friend; so be it. Now, Sue, girl, now."

A touch of the heel of his boot on the flank of the mare, and a slight movement of the rein was all that it required to put Sue to her metal, and off she was like the wind.

No doubt the man who had thus made so violent an attack upon the life of Claude heard the noise behind him of his pursuer, for his speed evidently increased, and he went on at a break-neck pace, while Sue, although gaining upon him, by no means seemed to be doing too much work.

It was a fearful race that which was now taking place between those two men; the one was actuated by the most abject fear for his life, and the other with something of a spirit of revenge.

And yet neither of those passions really belonged to them. In the first place, the officer was a man of decided courage, but when he found that, after making an absolute attempt upon the life of Claude Duval, he was unarmed, he fully expected nothing short of destruction; and the fear of present death will often unman the stoutest heart.

Then, again, as we well know, Claude Duval was not, by any means, a man of revengeful spirit; but who, in the moment of excited feeling, contingent upon an attack of the nature we have recorded, could help feeling some degree of irritation?

We do not represent Claude as other than human, and there are few indeed who would have even commenced the chase as he commenced it, and fewer still who would have ended it as we shall see he ended it—nobly and chivalrously.

Claude had arms, with which, probably, he might have brought the affair to a rapid conclusion, for his aim was almost unerring, but he sufficiently controlled himself not to use them; but with the frightful speed that Sue was capable so easily of making, gained each moment upon the desperate officer.

The only hope which the latter now had of escape consisted in the fact that there was a turnpike gate about a half a mile a-head of him, and he thought that if he could but gain that before he was overtaken by Claude Duval, that the highwayman would hesitate before he committed any deed of blood in the presence of a witness.

Claude well knew of the existence of that gate, and revolved in his mind what he should do upon reaching it. Although there was little enough time for reflection upon the subject, for in the course of half a minute more, he heard the officer shouting in a loud voice—

"Open the gate—open the gate."

"Hilloa!" cried the man, who had charge of the highway obstruction, "hilloa—who are you?"

"Open the gate at once! I am an officer—open the gate for God's sake—there is some one behind me."

A light flashed amid the darkness, and Claude, as Sue flew on like the wind, could see the white rails of the turnpike gate flashing in the dim gloom.

The officer now drew rein, and cried again—

"For God's sake let me through the gate, and then close it again against Claude Duval, or I am a dead man.

The turnpike-man flung the gate open, exclaiming as he did so—

"You can pass on; but if you think that my gate can keep out Claude Duval, you are much mistaken. What the deuce is he coming after you for?"

The officer darted through the gate, and the man flung it shut again at the moment, and then held up his lantern to see who was really in pursuit of the alarmed officer.

"Now Sue!" cried Jack.

In another moment she was over the turnpike gate, as lightly as though she had been a feather wafted by the wind!

The officer's horse was exhausted. He reared, and then making a fearful plunge threw its rider on the road, and galloped off full of fright, for it had not been accustomed to the violent manner in which it had been urged to such desperate flight by its rider.

The turnpike-man looked aghast and terrified, and he could not, in the hurry and excitement of the moment, interfere one way or the other, and if Claude Duval had been actuated by the sanguinary feelings which the officer in his own mind had attributed to him, he might easily have taken his life.

A touch to the rein of Sue brought the faithful and obedient creature to a stand, and Claude dismounted leisurely.

"A short chase," he said.

"W—w—what do you mean, sir?" stammered the turnpike man.

"Nothing particular."

"Mercy—have mercy upon me," said the officer, as stunned and half disabled by his fall, he assumed a crouching position on the ground. I did but try to do my duty. You would have done as much if you had been in my place. Have mercy upon me, as I would upon you.

"Permit me to doubt that," said Claude. "Your mercy upon me would have consisted of a bullet in my brains,"

"Oh, no—no——"

"Hush! For your own sake, at such an awful moment as this, do not lie!"

As he spoke, Claude took a pistol from his pocket, and approached the officer, who uttered a cry of terror, while the turnpike-man, turning very pale, said—

"You will not murder him on my threshold?"

"You have said it," replied Claude.

And he still approached the officer, until he was near enough to grasp him by the collar, and then, while the trembling wretch was gasping in all the agony of the immediate expectation of death, Claude spoke, in a firm clear voice—

"You have made a dastardly attempt upon my life, and now you expect me to spare you."

"Mercy—mercy!"

"Did you show any? Prepare yourself for——"

"Death—death!" cried the officer, "death at last!"

"If your pistol had not missed fire, I should have been a dead man now, and, therefore, having caught you, I have but a few words to say to you."

The officer fell back and closed his eyes as he thought, no doubt, upon the world for ever. Heaven and his own heart can only know how fearful were his sufferings during that short space of time. No doubt if he had committed any evil deeds, they crowded to his recollection, and he suffered much more than the pangs of death could possibly have amounted to.

Claude Duval placed his mouth to his ear, and whispered,—

"When next you meet me take care your powder is dry."

Rising then from his stooping attitude, Duval sprung upon his horse again, and waving his hand to the petrified turnpike man, he went off towards London at a sharp trot.

For a few moments after he had left them, neither the officer nor the man in charge of the toll gate moved, but the latter called out,—

"Why he hasn't killed you."

The officer lay quite motionless upon the ground and made no reply, and when the toll-keeper reached up to him, and examined him by the aid of his lantern, he was astonished and terrified to find his eyes having a fixed appearance, while a pallid hue of death was on his face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INTERVIEW WITH THE ATTORNEY. THE ATTEMPTED ARREST.

We will follow Claude to London, where he was doomed to pass through some adventures of most unparalleled audacity and risk.

The chase of the officer had extended far enough up the London road, to shorten the distance that Claude had been from the metropolis considerably, and the first faint grey light of dawn was making its appearance in the east when he entered Oxford-street.

Then he slightly drew rein, so as to reduce the pace of Sue to a walk, instead of the easy canter she had begun at. A shade of care was upon the face of Claude.

"What am I going to do?" he asked himself. "Am I upon the point of making a sacrifice of myself for another, or am I after all doing an act of common justice, which at all risks all men who have any principle of honour at their hearts are bound to do? Ah, Cicely, Cicely, were it not for you, I think ere now a feeling of despair would come across my heart, and I should fancy the world and all its uses not for me. What shall I do?"

He paused a moment, and it was doubtful just then, whether or not he would persevere in his intention of making an effort to save Markham Brereton; but then he suddenly told himself, that it was not as Markham Brereton that he would try to save him, but as the brother of Cicely, and the mere pronunciation of her name was a spell so potent that in a moment it banished all his scruples.

"It shall be done," he cried. "It shall be done, at whatever risks, it shall be done."

The dawn came creeping slowly on as he paced down Oxford-street, and as he gazed before him, he saw the night-clouds in the east gradually opening to the beams of the great luminary that as yet had not reached the horizon, but sent his

rays like the advance guard of an army, to clear the way for the main bodyand dislodge all minor enemies—then by little and little the shadowy east became lit up by a faint glow of colour, at first a grey—then the grey deepened—and here and there a warmer tint crept over the edge of the clouds, many of which soon after assumed a purple tint, while a fiery glow shot along the parallel of clouds, and when the space opened, a golden light streamed forth.

Claude Duval gazed upon the beauties of the east, they were no less marked than those of the west, which come like the illumined cover of a great book to close upon the day; now the cover was turning—the giver of all things was opening the book to commence the day—and from it streamed light, and all that brings good to man.

The houses came irregular and at intervals, no sign of life could he see save that here and there a coach-dog opened its deep-toned throat and bayed at the passing stranger, and the cocks from the roost gave clear and shrill notice of the break of day.

He looked upon the dark forms of the houses, many of them much alike, but yet he could not well distinguish them quickly, for the light not yet being strong, he could see those best whose forms soared high and stood in relief against the sky, which was each moment becoming stronger.

Claude Duval had a tolerably fair recollection of the house, in at the window of which he had been received by his sister, on that most eventful morning when he had been so daring as to shake hands with Sixteen-string Jack, and he looked out sharply for it.

Still there were so many houses alike that he might have been rather puzzled but for one circumstance, and that was his observing fluttering from one of the windows of a house a white handkerchief.

"That is it," he said, "May has adopted such a mode of making her house known to me without fear of mistake, and that white emblem is significatory of the innocence and purity of the dwellers in that house. Yes, I will at any risk do what is right."

He halted at the door of the house and as he cast his eyes up to the window he saw the hankerchief suddenly removed.

"May sees me," he said, "the poor girl has been upon the watch."

Then as some new thought came across his mind, he knit his brows, and muttered.

"Does she love this Markham Brereton?"

He then strove to recollect every look and every tone of hers while she had been speaking of the brother of Cicely, in order to see if he could come to a conclusion with regard to this new idea of his, but he could not take upon himself to say that absolutely he had seen or heard anything that gave a colour to it.

"I will say nothing to her upon the subject," he thought, "until I know more than I do now concerning it."

At this moment the door of the house opened, and May, covered up in a grey cloak so that no one not very intimate with her appearance could have known her made her appearance.

"Dear Claude," she said, "you have obeyed my summons."

"I have, May, but how you found me I am at a loss to imagine.—It is not every one who can pounce upon my whereabouts as your messenger contrived to do."

"No matter, Claude, no matter. There is ample time for me to explain all that to you, but at present things of far greater moment call for your attention. You must save Markham Brereton."

"Why must I, May?"

He looked as sharply into her face as he propounded this question as the dim light enabled him to do, but he could not trace any deepening colour, or other symptom of a more than just interest in Brereton's fate.

"Because it is just to do so," replied May.

"Am I always treated justly?"

"Perhaps not, Claude, but are you to be wicked because all the world is not righteous? No, no, I know your nature better, Claude. You would not have come here at all, if you had not meant to do all there was to do. There is an attorney of the name of Hammerston, and you must come with me to him, to tell him confidentially how innocent Markham is." "An attorney?" "Yes, but an honest, honourable man, strange as it may appear. Come, Claude, I will walk by the side of your horse." "Not so," said Claude, "I will lead Sue by the bridle, and walk with you. Is the distance far?" "Oh, no. It is but a street or two. Oh, Claude, you will not play us false? You will snatch from destruction one whom you know to be innocent?" "Yes," said Claude, "I will save him if I can. Heaven will not see an innocent man thus perish." "No, no, it will not," cried May. "Ah, Claude, something of your better nature still clings to you." "Did you think it all gone, May?" "No, no," she sobbed, "I always hoped—always thought that the day would



come, when you would forsake your present mode of life and———" "No more of that—no more of that, May," cried Claude. "What I am I must remain, but you ought to believe the same that I am still human. Why do you pause?" "We are now," said May, "at the door of Mr. Hammerston's house."

CHAPTER XIX.

CLAUDE'S PROMISE.—THE ESCAPE.

Claude might well pause for a few moments ere, even now, he committed himself so far as to walk into what might still be a snare made for him. The street was a solitary and deserted one at all times, and at that early hour of the morning most particularly so, for not a soul was to be seen, although Claude looked both to the right and to the left, anxiously and scrutinizingly. He then, while May knocked timidly and with a degree of uncertainty at the door of the house, fastened the bridle of his gallant steed to the large iron railings in front of it, and calmly awaited

the issue of an adventure which was so fraught with peril, that few in his situation, would have placed themselves in the way to encounter.

May had to repeat her summons several times before a head was projected from one of the windows, and a gruff voice demanded who was there.

"That is you, Mr. Hammerston, I am certain it is you, I know your voice, sir, and I know likewise, that it will give you pleasure to hear that I can bring you proof of the innocence of Markham Brereton."

"If you can do that," said the attorney, from the window, "I shall not regret having my rest disturbed."

The window was closed, and the head was withdrawn; nothing was spoken between the brother and sister for the next five minutes, after which the attorney opened the door himself, hastily dressed, to welcome his known and unknown visitors.

"Come in, come in," he said, "probably you think you have discovered something which convinces you of his innocence, but which won't convince the laws."

"Oh, do not say so, Mr. Hammerston, do not say so," added May, "even you would be convinced. I bring with me a fearful proof."

The attorney led the way to a small room upon the ground floor, closely followed by Claude and his sister May. The door was closed, and the highwayman flung himself into a seat which May pointed to him, and the words she seemed disposed to utter died away on her lips.

The window of the apartment looked towards the east, and there was sufficient light already in the glowing morning to enable each of the persons in that small apartment to see each other distinctly, so that there was no need for artificial light, and as Claude sat immediately facing the window, the attorney had an extremely good view of him.

"Why do you not speak?" said Hammerston. "Who is this person you have brought with you?"

"The proof, the proof," gasped May, and she could say no more.

"Hold," said Claude. "Suffer me to speak. Let me ask you, sir, is Mr. Markham Brereton accused by his cousin, Mr. Tom Brereton, of any crime?"

"Yes," said the attorney, "a highway robbery, and the whole affair has placed me in a most embarrassing position, being as I am, the attorney for the family, all parties come to me, and now that the Breretons may be considered as a house divided against itself, I really don't know what to do among them."

"I do not ask, sir," added Claude, "from idle curiosity, but I would fain know upon what grounds Mr. Markham Brereton is accused by his cousin?"

"Simply these. Tom Brereton states that the first arrangement was for the whole family, consisting of himself, Markham Brereton, the old lady, and Cicely, to come to town together in the family coach, but that Markham Brereton for no ostensible reason in the world, must needs go on in advance on horseback, and that he, Tom, having in his pocket all the necessary documents to prove who and what he was, felt naturally anxious concerning them, but important as the possession of those documents were to Markham Brereton, he little suspected any attempt from that quarter to deprive him of them."

"Nor was there any," exclaimed May.

"Allow Mr. Hammerston to proceed," said Claude.

"Tom Brereton then goes on to state," continued the lawyer, "that somewhere about Ealing Common, the carriage was stopped by a disguised horseman, and those very papers stolen from him, he having every reason to suspect such disguised horseman was no other than Markham Brereton, and that the terror of Mrs. Brereton and Cicely was only affected."

"And the result of all this," said Claude.

"The result is that Markham Brereton is now in Newgate."

"Impossible!"

"True, nevertheless, and if his cousin chooses to swear to his identity, he will find it an extremely difficult matter to escape the accusation."

"And yet," said May, "he is innocent."

"Completely innocent," echoed Claude, "this accusation is the most monstrous thing I ever heard of."

"An assertion of his innocence is of little moment," said Mr. Hammerston, "have you proof?"

May looked anxiously at her brother, and after a few moments' silence, Claude spoke.

"Sir," he said, "I have proof, such a proof that I think even you will admit to be irrefragable. I am about to place a confidence in you which may appear to be indiscreet, but I am solemnly called upon to save an innocent man, and I am here to respond to the appeal. Tom Brereton was stopped and robbed near Ealing Common upon the occasion to which he refers, and documents of importance were taken from him, but not by Mr. Markham Brereton."

"By whom then, that is the question?"

"A question easily answered. I was his assailant."

"You—and is it possible you come here, exposing yourself to frightful danger,—"

"No sir, I never expose myself to frightful danger; neither you nor I need suffer a momentary pang of disquietude. I can protect myself, and the same feelings that brought me to this house, will save me from becoming the easy prey of treachery."

The attorney drew a long breath, as he looked anxiously at Claude, and added in a low tone,—

"Have you any objection to tell me who you are?"

"Not in the least. I am Claude Duval."

The attorney's chair ran upon castors, and at the mention of the well-known name of Claude Duval he backed it precipitately until he reached the wall.

"Is it possible!" he exclaimed "I see before me the—the—the—notorious highwayman."

"Yes," said Claude, "I am he. I was on Ealing Common on the night in question, and you may come to a safe conclusion as to whether I or Mr. Markham Brereton stopped the carriage. I see sir, that you bend looks of surprise and distrust upon this young lady, you know her by the name of May Russel, and as the companion of Cicely Brereton; her real name is Duval, she is my sister, and remember sir, that that is a secret confided to your honour."

"I am all amazement," said Mr. Hammerston "and in the wildest suppositions, even in my dreams, I could never have expected to see Claude Duval in this apartment,"

At this moment a door, but not the one through which the attorney had brought his guests, suddenly flew open, precipitating some one who had been incautiously leaning against it to listen, into the apartment, Claude sprang from his seat in an instant, and seized the intruder by the collar, exclaiming as he did so—

"Do you keep spies, sir, on your premises?"

"In faith no," said the attorney, "but this is my articled clerk, and I assure you I had no more idea that he was without, than you had. Samuel Spark, how came you to leave your bed at such an hour? It's a hard case to get you up in anything like reasonable time when you are required for actual business."

"Have mercy upon me," said Samuel Spark, "I was passing the door as aforesaid, and accidentally touching the panel, it gave way as herein before stated; I have heard nothing, and know nothing, in as whereby and nevertheless, and notwithstanding—"

"Let me beg him off," said Mr. Hammerston, "he is harmless enough."

"As you please, sir," said Claude, and he released the affrighted clerk, "such persons, however, are full of mischief; at your intercession I release him, but I anticipate danger."

Samuel made his way from the room, looking heartily rejoiced at his escape,

and the attorney again assured Claude that he need be under no sort of apprehension.

The latter however, did not appear to share the confidence of the attorney, but kept a wary eye around him, during the continuance of the interview.

"In what way, sir," he said, "can I save this falsely-accused gentleman, and at the same time preserve myself from the hangman's hands?"

"I own myself puzzled," said Hammerston, "it is a question that deserves and requires serious consideration, and I must not give a precipitate answer; you have doubtless established some mode of communication between yourself and your sister, so that without your endangering your safety by coming here again, I can through her communicate with you."

"Be it so," said Claude, rising, "and if this is to be my last exploit, it will not be a dishonourable one; I shall not have in vain preserved what you, my sister, I presume will call a remnant of virtue."

"Oh Claude, Claude."

May burst into tears, and flung herself upon her brother's neck, sobbing with a convulsive energy that sufficiently shewed how highly wrought must have been her feelings. Mr. Hammerston was affected, and took a huge pinch of snuff, which he pretended made him sneeze ferociously.

"Calm yourself," said Claude, "calm yourself."

"Can you ask me?"

"Yes, and wish it too. Why you were once one of the most courageous of girls."

"I was, but that was when I felt no shame in——"

"Let me complete the sentence for you—in your brother."

"Well, really," put in Mr. Hammerston, "this is a most distressing affair. I must say that it has altogether taken me so much by surprise, that it seems more like a dream to me than anything else. Could you not make it convenient, Mr. Duval, to alter your mode of life."

"Oh yes, yes," cried May, with frantic energy, "urge him upon that point, sir, and may the eloquence of an angel hang upon your words."

"No, no—forbear!" said Claude, "forbear!"

"Do not forbear," cried May, "to urge him upon such a point.—Claude, Claude! you know not who are your best friends. Do you fancy there is no room for reformation, because you have hitherto carried on a reckless career?—Oh, sir, speak to him, your voice may be more potent than mine."

Claude Duval waved his hand to bespeak silence, and then, in a voice which commanded attention, he said—

"Hear me once and for all. I cannot, and do not for one moment deny but that I am pursuing a desperate course—a course which must end in my destruction—nor am I disposed to doubt the purity of the intentions of those who would dissuade me from it; but I have learned a truth in my intercourse with the world, which both of you seem to be ignorant of, and that is, if you make one deviation from the ordinary routine of correct living, you are lost.—Do you think that I, the notorious Claude Duval, a man whose name has become a terror and a by-word, could ever be received among the smooth-tongued hypocrites of society on a footing with themselves? No; I say, emphatically, it is too late, by far too late. I have taken a step from which there is no redemption, and although I might humiliate myself, I cannot save myself."

"These words are terrible," said May.

"Truth frequently partakes of that character," added Claude.

There was a slight pause, and then, before any one could make another remark, the highwayman sprung to his feet, and assumed an attitude of listening.

CHAPTER XX.

AN ALARM, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THE listening attitude assumed by Claude soon found imitators in May and Mr. Hammerston, the attorney; they heard nothing, but, as their eyes were directed towards Duval for an explanation, he spoke—

"My ears," he said, "are accustomed to catch slight sounds; it may or may not be a matter of any moment, but I distinctly heard the creeping of footsteps in the passage, and wherever I have found secrecy and caution, I have likewise generally found danger."

"You surprise me," said the lawyer, "indeed, I am convinced that no one is up in the house but myself."

"You forget your clerk, and as yet we know not what he may have listened to."

"That is true; and yet I hardly think he would dare—he's one of the most timid of men——"

"And therefore," said Claude, "one of the most dangerous. I tell you frankly, sir, that my impression is, that he has overheard most of what has passed in this room, and, among the rest, the all important fact of whom I am. I regret this, as it may produce confusion and bloodshed in your house,"

"Bloodshed?"

"Yes. Do you think I am going to be taken while I have arms in my possession? No, sir; woe be to those who have temerity sufficient to stop my progress."

"What is to be done—what is to be done," cried May. "I did not bring you here, Claude, to expose you to danger. Mr. Hammerston, I call upon you to protect him; it is in some measure your duty so to do. He has come under your roof trustfully, and it is your duty, sir, to see him depart unharmed."

The attorney stood irresolute, and seemed somewhat confounded by what was passing around him. After a few moments, however, he recoverod himself.

"Hush—hush!" he said, "for God's sake don't speak so loud. I will soon ascertain if there be any danger—remain here in peace, and expect my return in a few moments, and above all things, do not harbour the remotest idea of my playing you false. I should detest myself if I were to do so, as well as considering I should rightly earn the detestation of every honest man."

With these words, he left the apartment, and during his brief absence not a word passed between Claude and May—they were both too far intent upon listening for the attorney's return, to indulge in any conversation which might have the effect of preventing them from hearing of the first indication of his approach. At length he came into the room, and his pale face showed that something must have happened to discompose him greatly. He trembled as he closed the door hastily behind him, and turned the key in the lock.

"You are right—you are right," he said, "and probably in an emergency like this you can best say what it will be desirable to do."

"I guessed as much," said Claude. "Now, sir, tell me the precise danger."

"Back and front, the house is guarded by men who are no doubt anxious to claim the reward for your apprehension.

"And your clerk?"

"Is on the step of the front door, rubbing his hands in glee, in anticipation of his share of the profits."

"On the step," mused Claude, "on the step.—Is he close to the door—could a hand stretched out grasp him, think you?"

"Unquestionably it might, as I saw him. There is a small window, as you must have observed when you first came here, on each side of the door, and through one of those it was that I saw him."

"It is necessary," said Claude, calmly, "that I should speak to him, probably I shall be able to make terms with him—wait for me one moment, the attempt is worth the making."

"Oh, no, Claude," cried May, "you will not be so mad as to venture into the street; recollect, that although you may succeed in taking several lives, that fresh enemies will momentarily crowd around you, and you cannot resist a multitude—be merciful to me, and rush not into too great danger—Claude, Claude, I pray you be not over reckless——"

"Time is precious, sister, each moment is of more vast importance than its predecessor. You are desirous of but one thing, and that is, I should save myself. Permit me, from my more extended experience to judge, what is the best mode of accomplishing that object. Be tranquil for the present."

There was such a tone of command about Claude, as he uttered these words, that May did not dream of resisting them, and as for Mr. Hammerston he looked on with the air of a man, who was so bewildered by the rapidity of passing events, as to find it alike impossible to stem the current, or thoroughly to comprehend all that it was significant of.

Claude then did not hesitate another moment, but leaving the room, walked rapidly to the street door, where he made it his first business to inspect the fastenings, and having satisfied himself that they might have been securely put up within the smallest possible space of time—he no longer hesitated about what he meant to do. Opening the door a short distance, he said in a whisper—

"Hist, Hist! are you there?"

"Yes, yes," cried the clerk, who was so anxious to serve him so scurvy a trick, and rushing forward he presented himself at the aperture with eagerness.

To stretch out his arm and grasp him by the collar, and drag him into the passage, as though he had come suddenly under the influence of tremendous velocity, was to Claude the work of a moment, and then the street door was closed again, and a chain and bar appended to it, before the bewildered individual exactly knew where he was.

"Murder, murder!" he cried, but Claude clapped his hand upon his mouth, with an energy that loosened all his teeth, as he said—

"I would strongly recommend silence."

Hurrying him then along the passage he passed in another moment to the astonishment of Mr. Hammerston, into the apartment which he, Claude, had so recently quitted.

"Gracious Heavens!" said the attorney, "is that you, Samuel?"

"Yes," said Samuel, "and I'm a dead man. Oh, sir, I didn't mean to do anything. I've not the least idea that you are Claude Duval, the great highman, and as for catching you, sir, that never came into my mind."

"And yet," said Claude, "you have caught something, if it's only a Tartar."

"Spare him," said Mr. Hammerston, he is three parts a fool."

"And the fourth a rogue," said Claude, "but it is no business of mine to care what he is, and as to putting out the small light of his existence, I should take shame to myself for the attempt."

"Thank you, sir, oh, thank you," said Samuel. "I'm too contemptible, sir, and always was. I've been kicked five times, and pumped upon twice, if you please, and I have quite lost count of how many times my nose has been pulled."

Claude Duval looked at the animal before him, for some moments with an expression of undisguised contempt; and even May, gentle and indulgent as she was to all the faults of humanity, shrunk with something like contempt, from the contemplation of such a specimen of human nature.

"Ah," said Mr. Hammerston. "I certainly had not the very highest opinion of your courage, but what you state of yourself now, transcends what ever I should

have imagined. Is it possible you can be so debased; at the same time, Mr. Duval, I hope," added the attorney, turning to Claude, "I hope that you will not put yourself out of the way to exercise any vengeance upon such a person this."

"Not in the least, not in the least," said Claude, "I thank God I cannot accuse myself of having taken vengeance on any one, but I can truly say that I have had forbearance where few would have had it; and where attacks have been made on my very existence, I passed them over lightly, as though they were nothing, conceiving as I did that the line of life I was leading specially called upon me to run such risks; be under no apprehension, therefore, sir, that I shall exceed moderation in dealing with such a man as this."

"In spite of my reason," said the attorney, "in spite of my profession, in spite of all my prejudices, you win upon me, Claude Duval. I am sorry for it, but I cannot help it."

"Say no more," interrupted Claude, "time is precious."

"Then you ain't a-going to do anything to me," whined Samuel, "then you ain't a-going to do anything to me?"

"Upon one condition," said Claude, "you are safe."

"Oh, sir, name it—name it, what am I to do? Am I to tell you who is waiting for you, and how to get the better of them—only say what I am to do, and I'll do it in a moment."

"And so betray the very people," interposed Mr. Hammerston, "you have given notice to of Claude Duval's presence here."

"I do not ask him so much," said Claude, "my question is a simple one, if he answer it not the consequences be upon his own head."

"Oh, speak—speak, sir," cried Samuel. "I'll answer it as if I were on my death-bed, and a respectable clergyman was called to hear my last dying-speech and confession, only speak, sir, and I'll answer you in a moment."

"You'll have little trouble," said Claude, with a sneer of contempt. "Where's my horse, that is the only question I have to ask?"

There was a silence for a moment, and then the clerk in a whining tone, replied,—

"He was taken to a livery stable on the other side of the way, and they were told not to give him up unless a gentleman of the name of Park came for him."

"And who is Park?"

"A constable, he lives in the next street, and when I heard that you were here, I thought I'd run and get him."

"I'm obliged truly, and now, Samuel, I wish you to stand up, for I wish to see how tall you are. You look a long, shambling, ill put together piece of goods, and I want to see if you are near enough my height, to be for once mistaken for a better man than you are."

Samuel stood up with fear upon his countenance, he was trembling in every limb, but by a significant nod Claude Duval seemed to say that he was satisfied, and turning to the attorney, he said,—

"I believe, sir, you justly consider you are under sufficient durance by my presence here, as not to be able to oppose what I may choose to dictate?"

These words were accompanied by a side glance at Samuel, which sufficiently informed Mr. Hammerston they were intended to provide against any ulterior consequences that might arise from his aiding and assisting him in escaping the fangs of the law, and Mr. Hammerston fairly understood the side glance, replying judiciously at once to it, by saying,—

"I am acting entirely under durance, and therefore cannot be accused of comforting and abetting a felon. What is it you wish, Mr. Duval?"

"A coil of rope, if you have such a thing."

"In the upper part of the house, I think we may accommodate you."

Claude nodded, and then taking a grasp of Samuel's arm, which to that individual felt extremely like as if he had been suddenly caught in a vice, conducted him from the apartment, followed by the attorney, into one of the upper rooms of the place, then taking Mr. Hammerston aside, Claude let him know what were his in-

tentions, and as they will best show themselves in their progress and result, we shall proceed to detail them.

The attorney pointed to a small flight of stairs which led to the roof of the house, and at the same time produced from a cupboard a small coil of rope which at various times had been used for the purpose of cording trunks and other heavy packages.

Claude still kept a firm hold upon the arm of Samuel, and so conducted the trembling coward up the flight of steps, closely followed by May and Mr. Hammerston, who were curious and excited spectators of his proceedings.

By this time it may well be supposed, that the morning had made progress, and indeed a clear and distinct light had broken in upon all surrounding objects—the haze of twilight having completely disappeared, thus it was that Claude knew very well that any object from the roof of the house would become a very clear and distinct point of observation, he took the coil of rope in his hand, and made his way to the parapet, and looked over into the street.

A loud shout from the officer to whom the alarm had been given of his presence in the house, sufficiently testified to the fact that he was seen, and then in that direction his object was accomplished, proceeding then to the back of the house which looked into some mews, he made a similar transient appearance and was greeted by another shout, then he turned to Samuel and spoke in a low but decisive tone.

"I cannot disguise from you but your position is one of danger, that is, provided you but make the smallest resistance to what I require of you; if you do not you are perfectly safe."

"Save my life," said Samuel, "save my life, but take all my property. Oh good God, you are surely not going to hang me. Oh Mary Ann, Mary Anne, what will you do on Sunday afternoon."

This remark about hanging, arose probably from the fact that Claude had made with great rapidity a sort of running noose at the end of the coil of rope; he returned no answer to Samuel, but flung it over him, and drawing it tightly under his arms, and then dragging him to the verge of the parapet of the house, he said,—

"One advantage of a light weight is that a slight cord will suffice as a support; now Samuel by your own confession you are used to being kicked, but probably those operations have been used to be performed upon level ground; circumstances constrain me to introduce a variety in the performance of that operation—I am now about to kick you off the roof of a house."

Samuel was too much dismayed to answer, and Claude Duval had fairly wrapped round the terrified clerk his coat, and placed upon his head the rakish looking hat, before poor Samuel could come to any conclusion as to what was to be the object of such a transformation.

In another moment he was launched over the parapet and dangling by the rope.

"'Hurrah! hurrah!" cried the officers, from below, "here he comes, call all the fellows from the front, we'll have him, hurrah! hurrah!"

Claude continued to let down Samuel until he was about half-way—he then fastened the other end of the rope to some beams that were close at hand, and still preserving his stooping posture, so that he could not be seen from below, he spoke to May and to Mr. Hammerston.

"I do not wish," he said, "that even such a person as Samuel should run any great risk for my safety's sake, nor do I think he will by dangling there for a few minutes, during which time if he be mistaken for me, by virtue of my hat and coat, my object will be accomplished, and now May look over the parapet and tell me if the officers are congregating at the back of the house."

With anxious eagerness May obeyed the trembling behests of her brother, for she began to comprehend exactly how it was he intended to effect his escape, and that he should succeed became to her a chief and prime object of existence.



As soon as she withdrew from the parapet she informed Claude that nine men were assembled at the back of the house, but that the front was quite clear. He instantly bade them a hurried farewell, darted down the staircase, and at once made to the open gate of a livery stable, where he made no doubt he should find his mare. "Mr. Park has sent for the brown mare," he said to a man lounging on the spot. It was brought, and with a sudden movement Claude sprang into the saddle; and then, to the astonishment of the man, on went horse and rider at a pace few would have attempted to rival—the mare seeming to catch a portion of her rider's spirit.

Green fields and tall trees soon met the grateful sight of Claude, and the town, where he never entered but from sheer necessity, and never left but with gladness, gradually disappeared behind him.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STORM.—THE UXBRIDGE WAGGON.—THE SPECTRE AGAIN.

CLAUDE galloped on, until he had left far behind him the canopy of smoke that hangs like an evil dispensation over London. The morning was advancing—birds went twittering from tree to tree, and there was about the air that wild, fragrant freshness, which is so grateful to the senses of all who have not become actually callous to all that is beautiful and natural.

It was not for some time that Claude began to notice how low the birds were flying, and that, although the morning was evidently advancing, it more resembled the coming on of night, for a deep gloom began to gather over the face of nature, and then when he scanned the heavens, standing as high as he could in the saddle, to stretch his gaze far and near, he saw that masses of heavy clouds had piled themselves up, and a low rumbling sound of thunder, announced to him that some war of the elements was about to ensue.

"A storm—a storm!" he cried. "We must seek some shelter, Sue."

He had branched off from the western road, considerably to the right, so that the low neighbourhood of Kilburn, Wilsden, and Neasdon, was close to him.

This district, however, seemed to be pregnant with disagreeable associations, for Claude abruptly turned his horse's head, and again made for the Uxbridge Road.

By this time, however, the storm had begun to do its worst! Vivid flashes of lightning darted from cloud to cloud, and the thunder, although not remarkable for loudness, was almost incessant. Occasionally too, a deluge of rain would come, and then as suddenly cease; so that the state of external affairs was about as disagreeable as could be for a horseman, who had so little to protect him as Claude. No wonder then, that an anxious desire for shelter soon found a home in his breast, and upon gaining an eminence on the western road, and which commanded a view of it, he glanced around him with a hope of finding some habitation, where with safety he might remain, at all events until the worst fury of the tempest was over.

While thus occupied, he observed a couple of horsemen, well dressed and mounted, but perfectly bedraggled with mud, slowly emerge from a green lane, from the opposite side of the road. Their attention seemed to be directed to something which was following them, and presently a small, closely shut-up coach made its appearance, driven by a boy, from whom the rain was pouring in torrents. One of the horsemen made an impatient gesture with his riding-whip, to hurry on; but the horse appeared to be exhausted by dragging the vehicle, small as it was, through the deep clay of the lane, but would not proceed but at an ordinary jog-trot pace.

Another object was soon added to the group, and that consisted of the Uxbridge waggon creeping slowly on towards its destination, through the mire that lay at least a foot thick in the road.

Claude might well wonder what all this meant, and as from the favourable position he occupied, he was an easy spectator of what was going on, he resolved for a few minutes as he was to notice how the various parties would dispose of themselves.

The two horsemen noticed the waggon, and then after a brief consultation they spoke to the boy who drove the vehicle, after which, dismounting from their horses,

they had their bridles fastened to the tail of the waggon, and then ingloriously took shelter beneath its capacious canopy, and the whole affair proceeded like a procession, the carriage which the boy was driving, bringing up the rear.

Claude's curiosity was strongly excited, he was quick at resolves, and in a few moments made up his mind what to do, as an adventure of any kind under the present circumstances would he thought tend greatly to withdraw his mind from a too keen perception of matters which otherwise pressed heavily upon his spirits. He took a flying gallop along the meadows until he reached a point of the road about half a mile higher than the waggon, and there he awaited its slow arrival beneath the spreading branches of a lime, which in some slight degree saved him from the fury of the now rapidly descending rain.

Slow as was the pace of the waggon, but a very short time had elapsed before it had reached the point of the road at which Claude had stationed himself; he then trotted out, and the driver, seeing a mounted man, stopped his team, when Claude propounded to him a desire for a similar accommodation to that which had been accorded to the two horsemen who had so snugly ensconced themselves in the vehicle.

The only difficulty that presented itself to the carrying out of this request consisted in the attachment of a third horse by its bridle to the tack of the waggon, but that trouble was soon overruled by Claude, who in a few moments more found himself an inmate of the cumbrous machine, which performed its periodical journies between Uxbridge and London.

The rain continued to descend in torrents, so that every available piece of canvass was so placed as to exclude it, and this had the effect of course of considerably darkening the interior of the vehicle. Indeed it was some minutes before Claude, suddenly coming in out of the daylight, could distingush one object from another, but at length the forms of the various persons began to be dimly perceptible to him, and ensconcing himself in the straw, as well and as quietly as he could, he listened to a conversation which was pending the moment he entered.

"Highwaymen, madam," said a somewhat affected male voice, "highwaymen—oh, certainly, I have met a highwayman in my time, but I always give them such a warm reception that they don't wish to meet me again."

"Well," said an elderly lady, who was surrounded by an immense number of packages, "well there's one comfort in travelling, at all events, you are not likely to have your throat cut or your pocket picked."

"There, my dear madam," said the former speaker, "you are quite wrong for if any highwayman were to see my horse, which is attached to the tail of this waggon, he would at once guess there was a gentleman who had something to lose, and then there is no knowing what the consequences would be, that is, if it was anybody else but myself, for I make short work of these things."

"Well, that's a comfort." said the old lady.

"Oh, you've no notion, ma'am, how often I've had brushes of this kind. I believe I may truly say that for several months, I drove the well-known Claude Duval off the western marshes."

"You don't say so, sir?"

"Yes, it is a fact. I was travelling on horseback, and heard a cry of distress near midnight. The cry was in a female voice, and of course that was enough for me, I clapped spurs to my horse, and gallopped on, when what should I see but two young ladies and an old gentleman being robbed by a mounted highwayman."

"But how could you see, sir, at night?" said the old lady.

"He had his spectacles with him, madam," said Claude.

"Eh? Who dared speak to me in such a way? Who was it that made that dreadfully audacious remark? Of course I saw very well, for the moon just peeped from a cloud at that moment, and enabled me to do so,"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Claude, "pray go on, sir, I long to hear the rest of the story."

"Very goods if anybody begs my pardon, that's enough—otherwise—but no matter. Well, as I was saying, I gallopped up, when the fellow called out to me 'Stand off,' or take the consequences, I'm Claude Duval.'

"'Are you,' said I, 'what's that to me, when I hear the voice of a female in distress;' that was the way I spoke to him, do you see, when what did he do, but pull out a large horse-pistol, and fired it at me, blowing my left whisker all to atoms. I grappled with him, and down he went, so I made him beg pardon of the old gentleman, and the two young ladies, and likewise of me, which he did upon his knees in the mud, and ever after that he was so afraid of my being upon the road, that he scarcely touched anybody for a month."

"But perhaps it was not the celebrated highwayman," said Claude.

"Oh, yes, it was. I made him write his name upon the fly-leaf of my pocket-book, and I have got it here; besides, my friend here, Mr. Smithers, knows it's all a fact."

"Why, yes," said the boaster's companion, "yes, it's all right enough."

"May I ask, gentlemen," said Claude, "what sort of wild beast you've got in the coach at the back?"

"What's that to you, sir? We are upon duty, charitable duty too, and if you must know, we are conveying an insane young lady into the country."

By the rustling of paper, Claude could well perceive that the fellow was endeavouring to substantiate his story of the meeting with the highwayman, by actually writing the name of Claude Duval.

Clade had now an opportunity, as the weather cleared a little, of seeing exactly how many persons were in the wagon, and he found they consisted of a quiet working man, who had not spoken, three females, who had not yet spoken, and who now admitted to the nature of the contents of the single horse carriage driven by the boy.

He made his determination in a moment, and rising from the corner in which he had ensconced himself, he said,

"I shall never believe that story of the highwayman, unless I really see his name in your pocket-book, sir."

"There it is then," said the fellow, and he handed Claude a leaf which he tore out, and on which was written in great scrawling characters, "Claude Duval."

"A forgery," cried Claude.

"A what? a forgery! how do you know?—that is to say, how dare you?"

"Of my daring, you shall soon have proof, and as regards my means of knowing, I ought to be the best w tness in the world; I deliberately declare, I never wrote these words."

"You never wrote——"

"Certainly not, and yet I am Claude Duval, the highwayman!"

The old lady uttered a shriek, the younger ones looked deeply interested, the friend of the gentleman who had told the boasting anecdote, had contrived in a moment to hide himself completely among the straw, while the individual who had committed himself by such open and advised speaking, seemed for a moment paralyzed with terror, then recovering himself, he shouted,—

"Murder! murder! stop the waggon—stop the wagon! Murder! murder!"

"Yes," cried Claude, springing to his feet. "Stop the wagon, and there may be murder too, if you will have it."

She waggoner hearing the confused sounds and cries of alarm from within his vehicle, stopped the horses, upon which Claude called out to him,—

"Hark you, waggoner, you must do as your betters have done under similar circumstances, be quiet for your safety's sake. I am Claude Duval, and whether you've heard the name or not before, matters little, I have but to warn you that your safety lies in submission.

"Oh, help, help!" cried the old lady, "we shall all be dead in two minutes. Fire—fire."

"How interesting," said one of the younger ladies.

"And not at all a bad looking man," said the other.

"Ladies," interposed Claude, "be under no alarm; it is certain I am Claude Duval, and it is equally certain that I feel indignation at the vile fabrication concerning me which has passed the lips of a person in this company. That indignation, however, has its sole foundation in the mistatement that I was attacking two ladies and an elderly gentleman. No such circumstance occurred as my meeting this person on the road, but since he is anxious to have an anecdote of Claude Duval, he will be most abundantly gratified.

"Spare my life," said the man. "Spare my life, it was only a joke; there's my purse; ladies, ladies, give up all you've got quietly, don't make any resistance, or we shall all be murdered. I assure you, sir, it was only a joke."

"Well," said Claude, "we will take it as a joke, and end it as one. I must, however, have my little jest as well as you yours, and now, sir, for fear you should show this little scrap of paper to any one else as the hand-writing of Claude Duval, I will trouble you to swallow it."

"Swallow it? did you say swallow?"

"I did."

"Oh, Lord, but you don't mean it. Why, it's an uncommonly stiff bit of paper. I could not do it. Help, help! Oh, dear. I can't and wont."

"You can and will."

"Oh no, no. Young ladies say a word for me. Good, kind young ladies, don't let me be murdered before your eyes."

"These young ladies," said Claude, "are too beautiful to interest themselves in such a person as you are. Besides, they know very well that the swallowing of a small piece of paper will not be the death of you. If you will not by fair means go through the ceremony you must by foul, and I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of ramming it down your throat with the barrel of a pistol."

As he uttered these words, Claude handed the paper to the vain boaster, and after a little further reluctance, he made it up into a small a space as he could, and fairly swallowed it, to the great amusement of the younger ladies, and the great alarm of the elder one, who thought to be sure that choke he must.

"Now," said Claude, "you may pursue your journey. The storm is over, and I no longer require the shelter of the vehicle. But beware how you again trifle with my name, for I may not be always in the humour to make a jest of it, as I have done to-day. Ladies, for any alarm that I may have given you, I beg you ten thousand pardons."

"Oh, we are not at all alarmed," said one.

"Oh, dear no," cried the other.

"I am rejoiced to hear you say so," added Claude, "and now suffer me to bid you good day, and to wish you a pleasant journey."

As he went down the waggon, he purposely trod upon the cowardly passenger. who had hidden himself in the straw, and a howl of pain succeeded.

"I was not aware that any curs were in the waggon," remarked Claude, and then after a hearty kick he left the fellow, and sprung into the road, where Sue was with some degree of impatience, awaiting the arrival of her master, and in her way testified her joy at seeing him.

The value Claude set upon his steed was so great, that pleasure always beamed from his face, when after a brief period of absence, he patted the neck of the beautiful animal.

"My Sue," he said, "we must be away to more stirring adventures, we are not doing the kind of business which will suit us. Come, my noble creature, let us to the road once more.

Claude was about to mount, when he suddenly recollected that he had expressed an intention of seeing who was really the occupant of the one horse carriage that had been under the escort of the two persons so signally defeated by him in the waggon, and yet he hesitated a moment, for he dreaded lest he might be haunted by some pale spectral looking face, devoid of speculation. It was but the impulse of a moment and he might have been off, but his feelings ran the other way, and he strode to the door of the vehicle.

The boy who drove the carriage, hearing or seeing that something was amiss, was crouching down in an attitude of fear on the driver's seat, the blinds were closely drawn of the vehicle, and the handle of the door seemed to be secured in some way, so that Claude was forced to use force to get it open.

When he did so, the bright light of day shone into the carriage, and there he saw a female form apparently prostrated by grief, for the face was hidden by the hands, and deeps sobs burst from the labouring breast.

"Fear nothing," cried Claude, "if you have been persecuted, I am not one of your persecutors."

At this sound of his voice there came a shriek from the lips of the unknown, the hands were withdrawn from before one of the sweetest faces the world ever gazed upon.

It was Cicely Brereton.

CHAPTER XXII.

ADVENTURES IN A RUIN.—THE HUNT FOR A HIGHWAYMAN.

This most sudden and unexpected appearance of Cicely came upon Claude with all the stunning effect of an apparition. Full as were his thoughts now continually of her, he would have as soon expected to see again in life his own father, as at such a time and at such a place, to look upon the face of her who was his best beloved.

Joy, suprise, aye even fear, for at one moment he thought that he must be going mad, and nothing but a deranged fancy could have raised up such an apparition, struggled for mastery in his countenance.

But if surprise during this species of mental excitement were visible upon the countenance of Claude, how accutely were those feelings reflected in the face of Cicely. She too looked for a few moments like one newly awakened from a dream, but yet she was the first to break the spell of silence, which had fallen upon them both.

"Save me—save me, Claude Duval. Save me and protect me," she cried. "Indeed I am not mad."

"Protect you," he shouted, "aye, with my life; tell me who has dared to place you in this position."

"I know not. Except that our cousin Tom Brereton has something to do with it. Save me I implore you, do not let them drag me to a mad-house. As the thought is too—too horrible."

"Be at peace, be at peace Cicely, there is no danger. I am here to protect you."

"But you know not your foes—they are armed with what they call authority to drag me to a civil death. Oh, if you would save me, take me to some place of safety."

Claude Duval knew sufficient of the world to be quite aware that the most frightful and notorious iniquities were enacted under the mask of authorities, and in conformity to the precepts of the law, and although he felt that while Cicely was dependent upon him for protection, he was actuated by a thousand haunts, still he felt that all he could do was to die in her cause, and as to live in it, was a far more blessed condition, he determined upon hastening from the spot and seeking an asylum, where at least he might have the dear felicity of talking to her alone, and perhaps even in those moments of dread and danger, telling her how truly he loved her.

He passed from the vehicle in the direction of the waggon, and then he saw that the two persons, over whom he had obtained so recent and signal a victory,

had clambered up to a steep bank upon the side of the road, and were waving their hats, as though they saw some assistance near at hand.

There was not a moment to be lost, Claude shut the door of the vehicle, and secured it as well as he was able under spur of the moment, and then springing upon the coach-box he took the boy by the collar, and placed him in the road as gently as was consistent with rapidity. Again then reaching terra firma, he sprang upon the back of his own horse, and with his right hand grasping the bridle of the animal that drew the chaise, he went off at a quick pace, forcing it to a speed, which in truth it was seldom in the habit of exerting.

This was a state of things however, which could not last, for not only was it extremely inconvenient both to Sue and to Claude, to be thus yoked, as it were to the animal in the chaise, but it was quite evident the latter could not keep up anything like speed which was failing each moment.

Claude paused, and raising himself in his stirrups took a long view around him. A pang, perhaps the first he had ever felt shot across his heart, as he saw in the distance about a dozen horsemen, headed, he felt convinced, by the two persons he had already so signally discomfitted, making after him at a rapid pace.

The chance would have been a short one under its present circumstances, but Claude was both fertile in devising expedients, and rapid in carrying out the suggestions of his ingenious fancy.

"For once my Sue, you must carry double, and you will feel but little apprehension from the light and sylph-like form of her, whom you must take in addition to your usual load."

Once again he sought the carriage door, and having opened it, he said in tones of emotion.

"Miss Brereton there are many pursuing us, and I am but one. I could die in your defence, but then you would be without an arm to protect you. I think you would rather fly with me to a place of safety, than await the issue of so desperate a conflict."

"Oh, yes—yes!" cried Cicely, "a thousand times over."

For the first time Claude Duval clasped that lovely form to his heart, and even at the moment he could not help asking himself, what he had done to deserve so much happiness—placing her then as gently and tenderly as a mother would her babe, upon his steed, he sprung up behind her echoing the words of the old romance, he cried in tones of joyous exultation—

"Away, away my love, they'll have fleet steeds who follow."

For a moment Sue gave a curvetting bound, Claude touched the generous creature lightly on the neck, its ears were thrown back, its nostrils expanded, and off it flew with its double burden like the wind.

Fright no doubt, induced poor Cicely to cling closer to Claude Duval then she otherwise would have done, but he would not have exchanged the joy of that embrace for kingdoms.

At the rate they were proceeding, anything in the shape of conversation was quite out of the question, and yet Claude could not help telling himself, how strange a thing it was that he should be in his present situation, and how oddly fate had made him the defender of her, for whom he would gladly—oh, most gladly, have sacrificed his existence.

There were moments too, in which he could not help asking himself, if it was real, and anything else than some vision of his slumbers, but then again when he felt that she was really with him, his heart bounded with new born exultation, and for once Claude Duval was really happy.

"Hark, hark!" cried Cicely, after a time. "Oh, hark, they come. They come!"

"Fear nothing. Are you not with me?"

"Yes. But you do not know the horrors to which they would drag me. Oh, save me, save me."

"You cut me to the heart, Cicely. Do you think it possible that I could desert you?"

"No, no, and yet—and yet——"

"Yet what?"

"Your enemies are so numerous. Oh, I have much to tell you—very much. You will not believe that I am mad."

"Never, never!"

The clatter of the horses feet of those who were pursuing them now came most distinctly upon their ears, and Claude urged the willing steed he rode to renewed exertion. It was probably fancy, or possibly the fact that Sue was not accustomed to carry double, but Claude certainly thought that he had never found her lag as she now did to his perceptions, and yet the speed she really made, burthened as she was, amounted to something prodigious. It was the imagination of Claude which outstripped her.

"Are we distancing them?" whispered Cicely.

"Yes, yes. You see yon cluster of trees?"

"Yes. It seems a little forest."

"To the eye it is. If we reach them I think I can procure you more safety, than in this headlong flight."

"Those are happy words."

There was a cross road now close to them, and as evil fortune would have it, there issued from the cross road, a man on horseback. Claude saw him, and from the moment that he did so, there was a something about the fellow's countenance which told him that he saw an enemy. A dull, brutalised look was about the stranger's face until he heard the shouts of Claude's pursuers, and then he became more animated, as he cried,—

"Oh, so you are running away, are you."

"Out of my path," cried Claude.

"Indeed, you don't mean it?"

"By heaven you know not your own danger! Clear the way."

"Not till I have stopped you. There's a reward, perhaps, and I have no sort of objection to a good morning's work. Come on."

Every inch of ground was of importance to Claude, and yet rather than chance an actual collision with the stranger, he swerved from the high road to endeavour to pass him, but that was a manner that the man would not permit of, for drawing a large horse pistol from his saddle he presented it, crying,

"I am never without one of my little bull dogs. Come, resistance is as useless as it is foolish. Stop, I command you."

"You will have it then," said Claude.

"Have what?"

"That!"

As he spoke, Claude drew from his breast the small pistol he always kept there for a last extremity, and upon which he knew he could well rely, and fired at the stranger. Almost at the same moment, the harsh report of the large horse pistol came upon their ears, and Claude felt the ball whistle past his ears. There was a cry though from a human voice at the instant, and when Cicely opened her eyes again, for she had momentarily closed them in terror, she saw that the saddle of the stranger's horse was empty.

"Such is the reward of folly," said Claude.

"What has happened—what has happened?"

"Nothing—nothing, but what was absolutely necessary," said Claude. "I regret such things, but they must be, and now my Sue to your work again."

Once more the gallant animal that had carried Claude through so many dangers, started on in its headlong career. The little wood he had alluded to was still about a mile distant, and his great object was to reach it, and plunge into its recesses.

Short, however, as was the time which had elapsed during the encounter with the imprudent stranger, it had yet sufficed to enable the pursuers of Claude, to gain considerably upon him, and the consequence was, that they now with no doubt the hope of intimidating him, set up shouts of triumph as though their



victory over him was sure. These shouts alarmed Cicely, who urged him still to increase his speed. He endeavoured to re-assure her, when she suddenly exclaimed:—

"Who are those men in scarlet? Why should we be hunted?"

"Hunted!"

"Yes—yes. There are men in red coats, and hark!—what means that cry?"

"Yoicks! yoicks! tantivy!" cried a loud, cle[illegible] voice, and in an instant Claude's path was crossed by other hunters, who, seeing that he was pursued, endeavoured to stop him. He drew rein, presented a pair of pistols, and said,—

"Now, gentlemen; who among you will give up their lives for the satisfaction

of feeling that the survivors have a chance of stopping me upon the king's highway."

"Oh, come on—come on," said a portly personage.

"Thertainly," said a young gentleman, with a lisp. "I don't come out to be shot, not I."

They one and all turned their horses' heads on one side, and left a free passage for Claude, who as he passed them, said,—

"Gentleman, I thank you, and I think you will none of you repent this act of courtesy towards one who, whatever may be his errors is right for once. Good day, gentlemen."

Cicely was as much astonished at this, as the small-brained gentleman who could find nothing better to do than to scamper after a hare, and before those who had called upon the gentlemen who had been coming to stop the fugitives, Sue was, with her master and Cicely, fairly beneath the umbrageous trees.

"Cheer up, cheer up," cried Claude, "the worst of our danger is past."

"All past?"

"All that need give you any disquietude."

"But what are we to do here?—for how long can such a place as this afford us any shelter? Oh, what will become of us?—into what danger have I led you, who have made such efforts for me, I ought not—indeed I feel I ought not in this manner to have thrown myself upon your hands."

"Fear nothing."

"It is not fear, but regret that I feel."

"Ah, do not regret that you have made me so happy."

"Happy?"

"Yes, most happy in the dear joy of being able to say to you that I have saved you from your enemies, although who they are, who can be the enemies of such as you are, Miss Brereton, I cannot devise.

"I will tell you all."

"Not yet—not yet. Let me first place you in absolute safety before you commence your narration."

"But how can you do so?"

"Hush—hush. We may have listeners."

Claude dismounted, and led the horse by the bridle for a considerable distance, until suddenly they arrived before an ancient residence, that at any other time would have much interested Cicely to look at.

"We are safe—we are safe," cried Claude. "Do not weep, Cicely, I—I should say Miss Brereton."

"Call me what you will," she replied, "so that you complete it with an assurance of my safety."

"I can so complete it," said Claude, "and now let me ask you, can you, and will you entirely trust me?"

"With all my heart."

A glow of pleasure and of pride came over the countenance of Claude, then it was seconded by a look of unutterable woe, as he thought what a chasm his own acts had created between him and Cicely. There was no time, however, just then, for regretful thoughts. Actions were required, and he assisted Cicely to dismount from the horse, at the garden gate of the old mansion, close to which they were.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RUINED VILLA.—A SEIGE AND A DEFENCE.

THERE was a moment's pause after dismounting, and an uneasy feeling crept over Claude as he held Sue by the bridle—a shade of anxiety passed across his brow as he looked at the beautiful animal, for the thought came uppermost in his mind that his own and Cicely's safety was scarcely more necessary than that of his mare.

"Without you, my Sue," he said, "we should be prisoners here, and with but a poor chance of getting away, and though I have hidden you safely ere now, yet the numbers in chase of us are so great, and the certainty of our whereabouts so great among them, that the search will be more rigid and lasting."

"Shall we be safe here, Claude," inquired Cicely anxiously, as she saw there was a moment's hesitation in his manner. Can we not fly further?"

"Scarcely, with a chance of getting off clear, Cicely—but my thought was for my horse, because she is necessary to our safety; but I am no longer doubtful, there is no time for that, I will not leave you here for a moment, lest my retreat be cut off to you by any accident."

"No, no," said Cicely, "I will not leave you, Claude. I shall be safer with you than by remaining here even for you."

Claude's only answer was a gentle presure of his hand upon the waist, around which his arm yet lingered, and they moved away, Cicely supported partially by Claude with one arm, and with the other hand he led Sue.

Instead of entering the old mansion by the main entrance, Claude Duval led the way across what had once been pleasure walks and flower beds, but bed and walks were now alike undistinguishable. No sign remained of the once level gravel, and trim and neatly kept borders, or the smoothly raked beds, where once choice flowers grew and beautified the spot with their fragrance and their colours. Rank vegetation grew and overspread all around, and it was with some difficulty they could force their way through the thick and entangled mass.

Here and there they would indeed feel a hard soil underneath, and that told them they trod on the gravel walks, and again Sue's hoofs would sink in the soft mould, which informed them they were crossing what had once been flower beds, and thus they passed over more than an acre of ground.

How great was the change, and were those to see it as it was at that moment, and as it had been in the days of all its palmy glory, when youth and beauty have graced those walls—when music and feasting added to the gaiety of that place, which had of itself been extremely beautiful, and had all those charms to set it off that nature and art could bestow—could any one have seen the two conditions, then indeed, such could have known and understood the contrast, but the imagination is too faint and feeble to pourtray the contrast.

"Great changes there have been here," muttered Claude "yet sunk as the old mansion is in its estate, it will afford us shelter, and I hope to make it good against those who follow."

Claude came to a wild and dessolate spot, it was difficult to tell what it had been used for—but there were many aged willows growing around, and there was a large pool of stagnant water, covered by that species of aquatic herbage called, by some the "green mantle of the pools."

"This has no doubt been at some time a fish pond and fountain—the fountain has long ceased to play, and the water become stagnant and unwholesome, and I have seen dead animals floating upon it—it is a lone spot, but here is a place where I can place Sue with safety."

"In that water," inquired Cicely, looking up in amazement.

"No, indeed, Cicely, but there is some brushwood by that water, it seems as

f it were all surrounded there by water, that they in fact grow out of water; I must wade to get to them knee deep, but no matter for that, there is a dry spot there, like a ca ve or chamber, which I suppose has been used in connection with the fountain there is room enough there for Sue. You had better remain here, Miss Brereton for a short time. You will be safe here, but to reach the place of safety for Sue, we must pass through the water."

"Do not be long, Claude," said Cicely, "do not leave me for long, for I am fearful of being alone,"

"But a moment," said Claude, who led Sue through the stagnant water, to a spot which rose again, and then entered an unseen excavation in the bank, the entrance of which was quite grown over by rank weeds and creepers, and thus hid the entrance so completely, that none could detect the spot by the eye, and had it been detected there would have been no known entrance, save through the waters of the pond.

The excavation did not appear larger than was necessary to admit the body of the mare, and then having secured her by the bridle, so that she should not push her head out from among the green herbage and thus betray herself. Claude Duval sprang back to the bank, and to the side of Cicely Brereton.

"Now Cicely," he said, "we have no time to lose. I think I can hear their voices among the trees, but yet they are at some distance from us, the wind brings the sound to us, and makes them seem nearer than they are."

Then half supporting the fragile form of Cicely Brereton, he hurried her from the spot across some other flower beds, or rather what had once been such, and then entering at an ornamental shrubbery, he approached the back part of the old villa.

The building was evidently in ruins, and yet there was much in its appearance that denoted solidity and strength, and if it were possible to secure the entrances, it would be possible to hold out successfully against a very formidable force.

Approaching the villa by a terrace, he reached one of the large windows which opened upon it—being glazed—but now every vestige of glass was gone; scarcely, indeed, did any memento of the glazier's art remain; through one of these openings he assisted Cicely to enter, and then Claude followed, still giving her the support of his arm.

"Will they not enter by the same means, Claude?" she inquired, pointing to the open window or door.

"Yes, Cicely—they will. There are shutters, but they are of no use, the hinges have long since become useless, the weather has rusted them, and they have been broken for a long while, but the entrance will be of no use to those who follow—the doors of the room remain yet good."

Claude Duval now left the room he had entered, and shutting the doors after him, he by means of much exertion contrived to turn the massive but rusty lock, and then the door was secure.

"There," he muttered, "that door fits too well, too close, and is too strong, to be easily forced; no human strength will, I think, accomplish the feat, though if aided by the contrivances of man, it might be done, but they are unprepared for such a thing; if they get in, it will be from some more assailable point."

Turning away, he entered a small and more secure apartment, there was a seat—an old chair—one that had probably been used in the hall, or garden, for it was a rough piece of workmanship and yet strong.

"There Cicely," he said, "you had better sit there for awhile, you must need rest, and while you remain here, I will go and secure all the approaches that can be secured, against the admission of our enemies; then I will return to you, and while I live you shall not be torn away from me.

There was a look so full of gratitude and deep confidence in him, that Claude for the moment forgot his purpose to look into the beaming eyes of Cicely—then remembering himself—he hastened away to execute the necessary, but somewhat difficult task, of making good all places of ingress against the enemy without, who would now, he felt convinced, soon be upon them.

"They shall neither take me, or harm her, while I live," he muttered, "to die at such a moment, and in defence of one so beautiful and so injured would be an act that I might well covet, and one I will not shrink from."

There was an air of firm, but melancholy determination about Claude Duval, that bespoke his sense of the danger, and his willingness to meet it, and at the same time sadness sat upon his heart when he recollected that Cicely must share it, and if he fell what would be the result to her.

"My life," he said to himself, "will be forfeited if I fall, or if I am taken, but her's will be too horrible to think of, to be immured in a madhouse for life,—horribble, horrible! My life is sought by every man who knows my name, but her's only by those who call themselves her friends. And if I succeed, I save Cicely; let every other thought be banished—my reward must be in my own approving mind, 'tis hard—but there is a gulf between us—I will not think of it."

Claude Duval now strode to the front door—this was fast and secure against all attempts to force it—at least all such as could be made by the mere bodily strength of those who were coming against it, then he examined the other and less secure doors, and one by one made them as fast as the means at hand enabled him to do.

Turning aside from the hall, he went to the more indefensible portions of the building; that part of the building which had been allotted to the offices and for the domestics were not built so solidly, and much of the wood-work had completely rotted away, and one small door was entirely gone.

"It is an easy entry," he muttered to himself, "but it must be secured, for if they find it, and find it out they are sure to, for there will not be a hole that is not found out when they find they have been barricaded out of the place, and I must have as few places that I am called upon to defend as possible, for being but one, I can scarce defend more than one or two places at one and the same time. Ah! this will do."

This exclamation referred to a large butt that stood in the place, as if it had been once the receptacle for water, but now it was empty, and had long been so, this, he, by some exertion rolled to the empty doorway, and then raising it up, he propped it up, so as ro fill up the aperture.

"That," he said, as he looked at it, "would keep them out, if it were heavy enough to resist their efforts, but wanting that, I must try and add something to it."

After a short search about, he found some heavy stones, which he threw into the butt, and bricks—besides piling some old lumber across, and placing it so as to strengthen the position.

Claude was now beneath the surface of the earth, and his practised ear at once told him that the enemy was not far off, he could hear the tread of men and horses at a distance, he could feel the earth move, as if it conveyed the motion by waves. He sprang up.

"I must to Cicely," he said. "I must to Cicely; to live with or die for her is my only hope, and my full determination. Heaven grant I escape this bout, more on her account than my own; but for her my situation would not be so desperate, ad if they press me, their position is as desperate as mine."

He left the place, and sought Cicely, whom he found where he had left her, seated in the dark room.

"Hark! she said, listening. Do you hear nothing, Claude—do you hear no sound as of some one approaching us."

"Yes, Cicely, yes I do, but do not be alarmed—I have secured the old villa as well as I am able, it will resist some time at least of itself, and it will be my part to assist in making it more difficult of approach."

"Where will you stay, Claude," said Cicely, with a forced calmness, and trying to listen to catch every sound.

"Dear Cicely," said Claude, taking her hand, "I will not tell you falsely that there is no danger, there is, but we may rob it of some of its terrors, and even render it less imminent by courage, and by throwing off the fear that will sometimes cling to us. I will protect you while I have life.

"I know it, Claude, but oh, what a fearful risk have I brought upon you—without me you would not have been sought after thus."

"Say nothing of it," said Claude, and a cloud of sadness passed over his brow, "say nothing of that, danger is welcome to Claude Duval, so that he can save Cicely Brereton; it will be a white page in my life; but let us leave this place, the rooms above afford us a greater security, because if they get in they must come up the stairs, and that gives me an advantage."

They now ascended the stairs carefully, for strong as they were, or had been originally, they had in places become decayed, and it was not upon every spot that appeared to be secure that they dared to place their feet with perfect confidence and security, for some places crumbled beneath them.

"There will be more inaccessible places than this," remarked Claude, as he looked down the flight of stairs that led directly to the hall, "and even here, where we have come up in safety, they rushing up headlong many together, will so damage the place as to endanger their own safety."

"They will get in then, Claude?" said Cicely, enquiringly.

"I hope not, but yet it is possible, but it must all depend upon their efforts and ardour, they are strong in numbers, and yet if they have not much courage, one man may cause more mischief than they would like to encounter—but hark! I think I hear them. I will see what means of observation I can find above here. This will be a safe place for you to remain in," said Claude, as he pointed to the stairs that ran upward, "there you would not be seen and reached, unless any one entered the house, and ascended.

Cicely acquiesced in silence, and while Claude entered the various rooms on the floor, to see what positions he could take for defending the various entrances below, she sat upon one of the stairs, endeavouring to assume as much calmness as her strength enabled her.

Claude Duval saw at a glance that there were ample means for defending the place, had there been enough of men inside to put one or two in each room, but that while he defended one place, another might be assailed, therefore, the chances were much against his prospect of defence.

CHAPTER XX.

THE INVESTURE OF THE OLD VILLA BY THE PURSUERS.

The pursuers when they came to the wood, paused for a moment, not because they doubted the way which the fugitives had gone, or the propriety of following them, but it was a question whether it would not be a better plan to spread round the place, and thus beat about as they would for game.

"Go after them," said a stout-looking countryman on a grey hack, "go after him, and don't lose time, he's got a devil of a horse that'll go anywhere, and if you give him a minute's time the game's up."

"He's a sly old fox," said another, "and if you go straight after him in cover, he'll double and get behind you."

"He can't do that well, the scent's too warm. I'm for going right in at 'un at once," said another.

"Why not surround the place?" said a third. "Surround it by all means, and then we all meet in the middle."

"And leave Claude Duval only one man to meet him at a place?" said one of the officers, "no—no, that would never do, you might as well think of his being coaxed into a trap—no—no we must go to him in a body; he's only a man, I know,

but he's got the devil's luck, and that makes a great difference, you know; spread open if you will, but keep in each other's view, if you would be safe."

This proposal was apparently relished by most of the individuals present, who, though valorous enough, and even quite willing to meet anybody on earth who wore two legs, and yet somewhow, save one or two countrymen, they all kept close together and did not spread themselves too much apart.

"Dang Claude Duval," said a young farmer, "there be as good men as he, I'll warrant, though he may have killed his man. I've got a pistol, too, and if he fire first, or has a better eye than I have—why he'll not be taken by Sam Hodges, that's all."

"Push on, and don't spend time and breath to no purpose," shouted one of the officers, who were present, "push on, I say, the more time they have the harder it will be to unkennel them."

"They will make for the old villa," shouted one, "and try to make a stand there—follow me, we shall soon be there. See, here are the footmarks of his mare."

They now all pushed forward, following pretty closely the first who led the way, and this was the more necessary when they got in, for the wood was close and tangled, and there was no room to ride about, for the horse and rider could not find room in which to do so.

There was less need either for their doing so, since there was plain and evident traces of Claude's progress through the wood—the open path was one sign, and the footmarks were another, for the soil had been so soddened by the rain that the marks were many and distinct, besides this, there was the sure fore-knowledge that they possessed, that he would make for the old deserted villa, and there make a stand.

The two horsemen who had the charge of Cicely were incessant in their endeavours to urge their companions onwards. They were too fearful themselves that if they separated from the main body, they might again meet Claude, and then what might happen made either shake in his saddle, so that there was great danger of a fall.

They passed through a great portion of the wood, until they came to the grounds which environed the villa, and as the trees were not quite so close and thick, they paused a few moments to allow their whole body to come up, and then hold a council of war.

"Now," said one of the officers who had before spoken, "now we are altogether, let us determine upon our course of action. The man we have to deal with, is a daring and determined fellow, and whoever takes him will be no cur, I can promise; but we must support one another."

"Yes, yes, that is understood."

"Then let us secure our nags here, in the event of our wanting them in a hurry; if we take them closer to the house, why we may endanger their safety, at a time too when some one may most require them. Secure the nags, and then we will walk up to the house—no doubt they are there, and we shall have to search the place."

"No doubt he's there," said one of the pursuers. "I know the place, I have been here before, not lately, but years ago, and I know then I could have made it good against a regiment of soldiers."

"Aye, but the bats can fly in and out now; but we shall soon know now, if he be there or no by the place being secured against us. That will be a good sign, lads. Come, come, let's waste no more time, push on after me, and then remember the reward."

There was some necessity for reminding them of that, as the near approach of hostilities seemed to have quelled the spirits of some of those who were hasty and hot at the entrance of the wood, and yet being all in a body, there was no great want of courage or determination, but the tone was subdued, as they approached the old villa to reconnoitre.

"It's been a fine old place," said one of the horsemen.

"Aye, quite a palace,"

"And would be one now, if it were in good order, only they would have to make a mile or two of road to get to it."

They now walked up to the door—the main entrance; the steps were covered with herbage and green moss, which had accumulated and given food and root-room to much vegetation. They surveyed the door, and then tried it, but it resisted their efforts.

"It is useless to try there, that door is sound and strong."

"We may as well wake them at all events," said one or two who had come up, and they began beating the door with their heavy riding whips, and kicking it with their boots.

"We shall not get in here," said one of the officers; "there are other places not so strong behind. Come round this way.

"We had better have one or two on this side, lest he attempt an escape unseen," said another.

"Yes, let two of you stay here, while we go round the angle—one at each corner, so that you can assist each other, and see yet down the sides of the house—give tongue, lads, if you see a mouse stirring."

"Aye, aye; keep a look out at the windows, Bill," said another. I expect every moment to see the muzzle of a pistol popping out somewhere or other, taking a cool aim."

Thus they left two men while the main body turned the sides of the building in search of some more accessible place in the old villa, where they hoped to get in at. They saw, however, that every place had been secured—not a loophole but what had been barricaded.

"He is here, lads, of that there can be no doubt, none at all. The old ruins were never left thus."

"No, no. I have been in here before to day, and I know the place was open; any one who chose might enter it."

"Hurrah! hurrah! then we have earthed the fox at last. Now, my boys, we have only to get in, and then you know the value of Claude Duval's head."

"Aye, we have only to get in—aye, lad, something more than that either. We have to get in first truly, and then we have to take the lion, no easy task, and yet we can do it, or I would not make one in the attempt. We can run him down, and walk over him if we keep together."

"One and all lads," said the officer.

"But where are we to get in," enquired one of the horsemen who had been so defeated by Claude Duval. "I see no opening unless you climb up to some of those windows."

"No, no, that will be the last place to attempt; but see, here are some windows on this terrace that appear most likely to offer us the means of entrance."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FORCED ENTRY INTO THE OLD VILLA AND ITS CONSEQUENCE

A SHOUT announced that they had found a means of entering the old villa—all rushed to the spot, where it was seen to be the same rooms that Claude Duval himself and Cicely had entered, and had left them in the same condition as he found them, because there was no means of securing large glass doors and windows that opened from the floor, and the shutters of which were decayed, and quite unmanageable for the purpose of defence.

"Ah!" exclaimed one of the foremost. "He must have forgotten this, or as

all events he could not secure it. "Push on, lads, no hanging back now the time's come for action; we shall soon be at it."

The men soon gained access to what had once been the banqueting hall: they made a rush to the door, but it obstinately resisted their efforts to stir it. When they found themselves thwarted one of their number proposed to smoke them out, but it was objected to, everything being so damp from the previous rains. Claude stood on the stairs, listening to this converse and to any



sounds that might indicate their entrance. There was a sound of heavy blows against the wall and the door, and at each blow the place shook violently. They continued this battery, and Claude continued to watch its effects with great anxiety. "It will never stand that long," he thought, "and if something be not done to prevent them forcing it, they will soon be here in a body; but there is no place where I can overlook these fellows; if there were they would not continue that game so uninterruptedly."

Claude had scarcely formed this reflection, before the door split, and its pieces gave way.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the men, "now for Duval's head! now for a prize! hurrah for a highwayman hunt."

Claude Duval bit his lip, and a shade of paleness came across his brow as he heard the cries of the mob of men who so savagely thirsted for his blood.

"If I have broken the laws," he muttered. "I have hurt no one of these meddling fools, whose appetite for bloodshed must be satisted amongst themselves, for while I have arms and life, they shall not touch me, much less shall they lay their unhallowed hands upon Cicely Brereton."

One man was about to step over the broken fragments, and rush along the passage that divided him from the main staircase, on which stood Claude Duval, whose voice suddenly arrested him.

"Hold—hold," he cried.

The man paused in the midst of a step he was about to take, indeed his leg was lifted, and he stood in that posture for a moment or two, as if enchanted.

"Hold!" again cried Claude, "any man who attempts to pass into the house is a corpse, keep back for your lives. I never miss my aim."

There was a dead silence for near a minute, and then a rush was made by those behind, who were not likely to be touched by Claude's bullet upon the unhappy wight in front, who, had he the desire to recede, would not have been permitted, for his rear supporters thrust him forward, shouting,—

"On, on, 'tis Claude Duval. On—on—capture him—don't let him escape. hurrah! hurrah for the reward!"

The man in front thus urged on, found himself in the passage, and the next moment the sharp report of the pistol was heard, and the foremost man staggered, groaned and fell all huddled up in a heap, while some kept back, and some rolled over him.

"Fire for fire," exclaimed one of the officers, who levelled his pistol at Claude, and fired, but Claude seeing so many men in the passage, knew that he exposed himself needlessly as a mark to all, for all no doubt carried fire arms—it was usual to do so—therefore, he now hastened to the side of Cicely, who would require all his care.

There was a momentary pause among those below, and it seemed that Claude's retreat was only effected in good time, for more than one pistol had been drawn, and no doubt they would all have been discharged upon him, had he remained.

"Poor fellow," said one of the besiegers, as he assisted to bear the fallen man away, "his time is come—he's quite dead."

"Is he dead," enquired one of the two horsemen, who had been the cause of Claude's pursuit, and shuddered and shook from head to foot,

"Yes, quite dead, but go on up stairs, and help to take Claude Duval, for he will not be taken without a little blood being spilt; go up, and take your share of it."

This advice did not seem to be agreeable, nevertheless the individual addressed did go forward, but it was after many others had gone up and screened him. The stairs we have said were old and rotting; though many of the main beams were good and secure, and made of oak, yet the water occasionally streaming through the house, and laying there, had rotted much; still they continued to go forward, not without some accidents of rather a serious nature—from slips, and holes being forced through, and a man's body disappearing up to his waist, while his legs appeared below the flooring, and but for being quickly extricated, he would have disappeared altogether, at the cost of his bones.

"Ah! Claude, Claude, save me," said Cicely, in a low, trembling tone, as she almost sunk in his arms. "They come for me! they come for me!"

"Hush! Cicely—hush! and do not be alarmed; be courageous, and all may yet be well—we have many chances, prudence and caution may yet save us

through all; but I ask you to keep up your courage, Cicely, and do not despair, or feel terrified at what you hear or see."

"I will trust all to you, Claude, I do trust in you. Do but save me from these men who would bear me away to a living death. I will but see and hear you, Claude."

As Cicely spoke she placed her hands upon his shoulder, and looked so imploringly, and yet so full of confidence upon him, and yet seemed to dread the coming conflict, in which she feared so much for Claude as well as for herself; she hardly knew how to express her feelings to him, but he saw the tears course down her cheeks, and saw her generous emotion, and the endeavour to suppress it—and in a moment of ecstacy, he pressed her to his bosom, saying,—

"Dear Cicely, do not doubt, do not fear. I will run no unnecessary danger; my life is dear to me, because without it, I know what a sad fate awaits you—be confident, and all may yet I hope be well."

Cicely turned her lips nearer Claude, as if she were about to say something in reply, when urged by the opportunity, and the feeling of the moment, Claude's lips met those of Cicely. She shrank not, the terror of the moment, and her confidence in Claude was so great that she resisted not, but was passive, and her clear blue eyes looked eloquently into his.

A thrill of pleasure that Claude had never before experienced, shot through his veins, and he felt for the moment giddy with excitement, but was quickly recalled to the full sense of his situation by the shouts, and the sounds that kept approaching him nearer and nearer.

"We must fly this place, Cicely; when we pass across the head of the landing, hasten up without me—I will keep them back until you are safe, and I will rejoin you."

As he spoke, he passed out of the room in which he had been listening to the sounds of the besiegers below, but he had scarcely done so before he felt a hand grasp him by the throat, and a pistol thrust into his face.

"Surrender, Claude Duval, surrender—you are my prisoner. I have taken you, and you die if you resist."

"Take that, then," said Claude to this individual, who declared he had taken him, and at the same time he dealt the man such a blow on his head with the butt of his pistol, that the adventurous man relaxed his hold, dropped his weapon, and fell backwards down the stairs, overthrowing two more who where hastening up to his assistance, and this impeded all who were behind.

Claude Duval then hastened up a flight of stairs higher, but these were very precarious, and but for his rapid steps he must have fallen through the crumbling boards; once upon this landing, he paused, and after casting a glance below, he examined some of the rooms, and then appearing satisfied, he placed Cicely in one, saying as he did so,—

"Do you remain here, dear Cicely; I will not leave you, I shall be but on the landing, and when they have got so far, I shall come to you."

"I will not leave," she murmured. "I will share the danger—you shall not expose yourself to this peril for me, and yet I shrink from it—no, I will watch with you."

"Nay, you can but increase the danger; Cicely, by myself, I can take care of myself, without other thoughts distracting me; but hark! I must back to the stairs, I hear them coming."

Claude rushed back to the landing, and found that the enemy had got up the stairs, and were within a short distance of the top, and he was about levelling his pistol at them, when from their too great numbers the place gave way, and several were precipitated down below, causing much confusion and dismay among them, so much so, that a short cessation of hostilities took place, and the officers who were present, spoke out—

"Come, my lads, do not hang back, or be daunted by one man, encumbered with a woman; we must have him, and I call upon you all in the king's name to assist me to apprehend him, alive or dead. You all know the reward you will

get, and in addition, you will rid the roads of a scourge, and perhaps save yourselves from some future attack."

"But we cant get at him," said one.

"Oh, yes," replied the officer, "where there's a will there's a way. We must go up these stairs one at a time."

"One at a time, and he will pick us off," said another.

"No," replied the officer, "that must not be. While you are making your way we must be on the watch, ready to pick him off if he appear. One party to go forward, and another to fire if he shows his face, that at all events, will ensure our getting close to him, and he can but fire once before we rush upon him, and he is then our own."

This seemed so feasible, that it was agreed upon all hands to adopt it, and having seen blood flow, they were warmed to their work, and felt determined not to be baffled by one man; the desire of vengeance was now added to avarice, and they at once prepared to follow out the plan devised by the Bow-street runner.

CHAPTER XXII.

FATAL ENCOUNTER IN THE OLD VILLA, AND NARROW ESCAPE OF CLAUDE FROM BEING SEIZED AND SHOT.—THE VAULTS.

Claude Duval, who had stood upon the stairs, and overheard the whole of the dialogue, felt convinced that now was to come his greatest danger. It was not not that he shrunk from any conflict, however unequal, for his boldness and good fortune had been proverbial, and they even yet gave him confidence; but if he fell he felt how forlorn was the situation of poor Cicely; his troubles would be ended by his death, but that was not the case with Cicely, whose terrors would but date their recommencement at his fall.

"I have faced worse and more imminent risks," he thought, "and I have escaped, and why, now I have a good cause to back me, should I fail? but they shall pay a dear price for me, ere they say they have taken Claude Duval, or before they shall convey Cicely Brereton to a madhouse."

The thoughts of the last peice of barbarity nerved his arm, and leaning over the rails, he perceived his enemies were coming on slowly and cautiously one after the other, and others were waiting pistol in hand to shoot him, and thus they progressed towards him. Stealthily he stole upon them, and exerting great strength, he overthrew a door which went over with a noise little less than thunder, and completely stayed the onward motion of those below, for, a loud groan proclaimed that there was much mischief done.

Indeed, several men had been knocked down, and one nearly crushed to death, but ere Claude had got back to the door of the room which he had left Cicely in, a bullet from one of the party below whizzed past him, and the report reached his ears simultaneously.

"After him—follow him close," shouted the officer. "He will pay dearly for this; some of you behind look to those who are hurt. I will keep a look out for him; my shot did not miss him by much."

The door had not destroyed those who were nearest to Claude, but only some of those who were lower down, among whom were several who received severe contusions, and one man was carried away completely disabled, and thus the party, strong as they were, had been weakened by the fall of several of their force, but yet they had gained the next landing, and were now on the same floor with

Claude and Cicely, and a desperate attempt was made to force the door, but without any success in the first instance."

"Fire a bullet through," said one. "You may chance to hit him, or at all events make him keep clear."

This was done, and a small hole in the door soon proved that it had found its way through; but they saw nothing, and began anew to kick at the door, the panels of which soon gave way, and then the remainder of the woodwork, thus weakened, fell in also with a loud crash.

In another moment they were in the room, but the bird was flown. Another door at the opposite end at once explained the reason, and this was soon forced open, and then another room was before them, but the boards had in many places given way, and they could see the room below. It would take some trouble to get across without a fall, but it was possible.

Scarcely, however, had the foremost got three parts over the rafters before a bullet from the pistol of Claude stretched him on them—balancing for some seconds, and then pitched head foremost below.

There was a momentary pause—the dead man fell without motion, and lay like a heavy log upon the floor, and those behind looked upon him, and then at the place where the pistol was discharged from, and then again hesitating. But those behind were too far advanced to retreat, and those behind thrust those in front forward, and thus a rush commenced, and they reached the door, and then a small flight of stairs led upwards into a small room.

"He is a dead man who attempts to follow," said the voice of Claude. "There has been bloodshed enough for one day."

"We have lost too many men, Claude Duval," said the officer who had before spoken. "'Tis my duty to persevere, and I will. Upon your head will rest the blood that has been shed—so surrender."

"When I lose the desire of self-preservation. And as I fight but for life, and shed blood but to preserve my own, and you for the sake of money, why I shall not surrender—so die!"

Again the pistol of Claude was heard, and another man fell; and ere the sound of the discharge could have ceased, two others were fired at Claude, who, however, had just shifted his position, and thus escaped by the narrowest chance.

"Onward! forward!" cried the officer. "He cannot yet have loaded; besides, his ammunition must run short. In the king's name, I charge you all to aid and assist me in capturing a highwayman."

"Yes, master officer," said one of the countrymen; "yes, but do you go first a bit now. We'll help you, but you mustn't expect us to do all the work, and have all the hits to ourselves."

"Are we not forward?" said the officer. "Have I not exchanged shots with him several times?"

"I won't deny you've fired, but we have caught the bullets. However, I hope we shall have most of the pounds. But I'm willing enough to help to get him, if that be possible."

"Possible—aye, more than possible," shouted the officer, as he sprang past the speaker up the stairs into the room above, which was empty, and then across a small room, through two or three more, until he came to another door, which he found open, and displayed a flight of stairs, or rather steps, which had been broken down, and thus all communication from above was cut off.

"He has gone this way; we must be down after him. The distance is easily dropped. Keep a look out while I get down, and if you see anything move, fire at it immediately," said the officer.

In another moment the officer had dropped down on the flooring beneath, without any injury to himself, and he was speedily followed by the others, and again a chase was commenced from room to room, from floor to floor, after Claude Duval, who could be seen occasionally as he strode from place to place,

as he found them indefensibles, and so he deemed it too hazardous to remain there.

They were now on the ground floor again, but they had got in quite a different part of the old villa. It was growing dusk now—the sun had set, and darkness was creeping over the scene—for some time had been consumed in making the attack, and following Claude from room to room, stair to stair, and from floor to floor.

"If this will but last another hour," said Claude, "we may yet succeed in escaping, Cicely. When darkness comes we may, indeed, have a chance of leaving them behind."

"Oh! Claude, what terrible dangers you have run. When will they cease—when shall we be safe?"

"Speak not of it, Cicely, You are my dearest care. All that man can do shall be done. When they cease to pursue then we shall be safe. I do not hide our danger; but all you need do will be to arm yourself with fortitude and patience, and all yet may end well."

"Shall we get out into the garden now, Claude?" said Cicely, as she pointed to a window that looked out into the shrubbery.

"No, we cannot; our egress is barred—besides we should be a fair mark and we should be taken—besides we have not time; this way Cicely. Go to the bottom of those stairs, and there stand, for I hear them coming."

Cicely went down slowly, feeling her way along as well as she could, while Claude levelled his weapon at one of his foes, who fell, making another pause in the pursuit.

"Now," said Claude, as he pulled and secured the door after himself, "we are safe for a short time, this door they will be unable to burst open suddenly, and then among the many passages here, they will not be able to distinguish the one in which we may shelter ourselves, but Cicely the place is cold and damp, and is indeed such that might well occasion you a shudder."

"Any where with you Claude, for safety," said Cicely, "any where, save me from these men, Claude, and my lasting gratitude will be yours."

"Dear Cicely, do not doubt my will or my endeavours, it must go hard indeed if they tear you from me," said Claude, "but I fear your strength, Cicely, I fear what you have gone through—the hours of exertion, and of intense fear and anxiety, must render you almost incapable of further exertions."

"Nay Claude, while we are in danger I feel no fatigue."

"Bear upon me," said Claude, "and I will take you over the rough ground, we have got to go over. Ah! they have broken open the door already."

In another moment, the pursuers were pouring down the steps. Claude looked around him, he saw a door, opened it and drawing in Cicely he closed it, and quietly and quickly bolted it without being seen or heard by the pursuers, who were now in utter darkness.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW FRIEND OF TOM BRERETON, AND HIS ADVICE.—THE CHANGE OF LUNACY.

It becomes absolutely necessary now, in order to the proper understanding of the various, and in some instances complex circumstances surrounding those of our characters in whom we have the greatest interest that we should for a very brief space of time leave Claude and the beautiful Cicely Brereton, while we relate to the reader how it was that Tom, her cousin, with all his folly came to

hit upon the notable scheme to her detriment, which has been so happily frustrated by the gallantry and chivalrous conduct of Claude Duval.

When we last introduced Tom Brereton to the readers of this most veritable narrative, that individual was in anything but a pleasant situation, for he was being carted off to Newgate in the chest, where, by the boldness of Claude, he had been confined.

That such a mode of transit through a great portion of the metropolis was anything but pleasant, may be readily guessed, and after the cart had proceeded some distance, Tom Brereton began to think it was high time to make some effort in order to obtain his release.

Now there may be circumstances under which it is pleasant and advantageous to be mistaken for some great character, but then, again such a mistake may have its advantages, and certainly in this instance to Tom Brereton there was little in the shape of gratification, to be extracted from the fact of his being mistaken for so redoubtable a personage as Claude Duval.

The officers had a full and hearty appreciation of the prowess of the redoubted highwayman, and when they had him, as they thought, in so very secure a position as the great chest afforded, it was not likely that merely for the sake of a personal conflict they should let him out.

Suddenly, however, Tom made what our gallic neighbours would call a demonstration within the chest, and which consisted in making a rather violent effort to escape from it.

At the same time too, he called out as well as he could.

"Murder! murder!"

"He's a making a rumpus," said one of the officers.

"What does he say, Joe," asked another.

"Murder! murder!" again cried Tom.

"Why, don't you hear him, he says he'll murder us if we let him out."

"Does he?"

"Yes. There he goes again. My eye, its a good thing that the sides of the chest are thick and strong, or else he'd pretty soon be out of it. Whip on the horse, and let us get him to Newgate as soon as we can."

The horse which drew the cart was urged to increased speed, so that Tom Brereton gained nothing by making a disturbance, but a good deal of additional jolting over the stones with which Holborn was paved.

One of the officers, however, was still fearful that he would make good his exit from the box, and for greater security he sat down upon the lid of it.

Now it had so happened that there had been at one time a large nail driven through the lid of the chest, and afterwards extracted, having a small aperture through which Tom Brereton had received air, and a small ray of light, but when the officer sat down, both of these advantages were in a moment extinguished.

This was a state of things that the prisoner by no means approved of, and at once guessing the cause of them, he set about devising in his small ingenuity a remedy for them.

What that remedy was, will best be seen in the result.

"He won't get out now," said the officer, who had taken his seat upon the chest. If anything is more easy to break open than another, its the door, and I flatter myself I have got that pretty fast now."

"All's right," said another, "only remember that we share the reward among us. Let's have fair play."

"Who want's anything else but fair play?"

"Oh, of course; nobody, I only mentioned it, that's all.

"Well you needn't have mentioned it."

"No offence."

"Yes, there is lots. Aint we gentlemen? I'd sooner have jumped out of the cart bang into the road, than said anything about the money."

"I should like to see you, you are too good a judge for that."

No sooner were these words, which sounded so innocent in themselves, spoke

than, as if they had possessed some magical power to accomplish their own behests, up jumped the officer from the chest, with a loud shout that terrified everybody who heard it, and fairly went over the side of the cart into the road.

"Murder! murder! Fire!" he cried.

The horse reared, and the other officers swore, but nobody knew, very well, what it was all about, until, with a woeful countenance, the officer got into the cart, and said something about the confounded fellow in the box poking a long pin through the lid of it, and then the other officers could not contain their mirth, but roared with laughter, and the lid for the remainder of the journey remained untouched.

"I think I had somebody, then," muttered Tom to himself. "It was a lucky thing I fastened one of my sleeves with a pin."

Nothing further of moment occurred until the party reached the Old Bailey, and then, when the cart drew up, one of the officers ran forward to announce to the authorities of Newgate, the important capture they had made.

At the name of Claude Duval, all was excitement and confusion in the lobby of the prison, and the governor himself was hastily summoned from his private apartments to be present at the production of such a guest.

The greatest care was of course thought requisite to the unkennelling such a personage, and the governor betrayed considerable excitement, when one of the officers with a dubious shake of the head, had said to him,—

"We thought it best, sir, if you please, as we had him safe in a box, to keep him there, until we got here, for you to tackle him, sir, for perhaps he's got a double-barrelled pistol in each hand, for all we know."

"You don't mean that?" said the governor.

"Yes sir, we do."

"Oh—hem! Let me see. Dear me, I should quite rejoice to drag the fellow out myself, but I think I have got a letter to write that somehow can't be delayed. You can let me know when you have got him all right, you know."

"Yes sir, but——"

"But what? How dare you speak to me? A pretty thing, indeed, that the Governor of Newgate is to be told by a turnkey, that he must not write a letter."

The governor in a great affected huff, bounced out of the lobby, and sought at once the comfort and security of his own apartments.

The officers winked at each other, for they fully understood that the governor was not one of the most valourous of mankind, and from the first, they had never expected that he would wait until the chest was opened.

"Now Bill," said one, "you be ready to pounce upon him, and clap on the darbies as soon as the chest is open."

"All's right. Here you are," said Bill

"Stop a bit," cried another. "Let Watkins have his blunderbuss ready. Who knows what may happen? I like to be on the safe side."

No one was so fool-hardy as to negative the proposition concerning the blunderbuss, and Watkins accordingly took up his position with that formidable weapon, perfectly ready to blow the supposed highwayman to atoms, if he should make any very violent or unexpected onslaught upon the authorities of Newgate.

A ring was formed around the chest, and the officer who took upon himself the fearful task of opening the lid, with great ingenuity adopted a mode of operations which he thought would have the effect of thwarting him completely, should he attempt any very great violence.

"Now, are you all ready," said one.

"Yes, yes," was the response.

"Is the gate fast?"

"Oh yes, all's right,"

"Now for it then. A—hem! Mr. Duval, I hope you will be so kind as to listen to reason, and not kick up a row. You are in Newgate, recollect, and here

are about a dozen of us well armed and determined fellows, ready to nab you as soon as we can. Don't resist, I beg of you." The speaker paused, expecting an answer; but no answer came, much to the chagrin of the officer. Expectation was now on tiptoe, and the nerves of all present were on a flutter. The lid was made loose and slowly opened by him who had stationed himself behind it. A rush was made forward by the others, and in the flurry Wilkins drew the trigger of the blunderbuss, and lodged some hundred slugs in the opposite wall, and then Tom Brereton made his appearance, with his eyes starting from their sockets, and his hair on end with fright



The officers were so enraged at their disappointment, that they drew their prisoner forth by the collar, and bestowed on him some hearty kicks and cuffs, and there is no knowing where it might have ended if a superior had not arrived in time to rescue him.

We return, now, to the fortunes of Cicely. Claude Duval had only saved himself and Cicely by the narrowest chance imaginable, and it was only through the darkness of the place, for the officers had come out of a partial light and were almost blinded by the utter darkness of the

place; the little light that came in, come from them to him, and enabled him to shut the door unseen and unheard, for the noise they made, would have drowned any he might have caused in bolting the door.

In another moment, they heard several men rushing by them, and a shot was fired by some of them, for the purpose of securing their progress, and in the hope that in the dark a stray shot might take effect; and another reason was, the flash enabled them to see where they were.

"Be silent, dear Cicely," said Claude, as he felt her tremble and shudder, when the report reached her ears, and the place struck cold and damp to them both.

Claude paused a moment or two, and then feeling his way with his hand, he led Cicely away, until they had got several yards from the spot—he then came to a shelf in the wall and found a bottle, he felt it over and over, it was corked, and covered with dust and cobwebs, he took it gently, and then placed it in his pocket.

At a more convenient opportunity, he thought, I will ascertain what it contains, it may be a cordial, and if so it is welcome indeed, after many hours of abstinence, danger and fatigue.

Again he made his way onward in the same manner as before, until he came to some wood work, and upon examining it he found it was a door, he paused and listened, he heard no sign or sound beyond it, and then feeling for the lock found it was secured, but it was so rotten, that but a slight exertion enabled him to destroy it, and open the way beyond.

There was a cold noisome air exhaled—earthy and moist, so cold and so chill that even he, Claude Duval, paused ere he went farther, and Cicely completely shook from head to foot so violently, that Claude knew not what to do; he recollected suddenly the bottle which he had picked up, and at once made up his mind to use it, before going any further.

"I have," he said, "got a bottle of something here; it may be wine, Cicely. I will open it, and as well as the means will allow, if it be what I suspect it is, you must partake of its contents—you are exhausted, and these cold shudders will do you much mischief, unless you have a remedy."

Cicely made no reply, and Claude Duval who listened a few seconds, then struck the neck off the bottle against the brick-work, and then from the broken fragment of the bottle he tasted it.

"It is some of the finest port I ever tasted," he said; "Cicely this will recall some of your strength, and enable you to withstand the effects of the cold and damp; do not fear it, it is necessary that you should taste it."

Cicely, as well as her trembling hands enabled her, tasted of the wine, and at the entreaty of Claude she swallowed several mouthfuls, and refused any more, but Claude himself, who had suffered much from hunger and thirst and fatigue, was not so sparing—he knew that much depended upon his courage and strength, and at once drank freely of it; then throwing the fragments of the bottle away, he said—

"I hear them coming through the passages again. I cannot tell where these passages lead us to, but it is not improbable they will lead us to some spot, that is not guarded by our enemies."

"I will go wherever you lead, Claude. Wherever you lead, do but take me from them, and my life is yours."

Claude pressed the confiding and gentle creature to his bosom, and then whispering words of endearment into her ear, prepared to lead the way.

They advanced and but slowly, for the passage into which they had gotten was low and damp; they had to stoop their heads as they went onwards, to avoid the brick-work, which in many places was destroyed, and fallen down.

But beneath them as they walked along, they felt little more than wet and soppy earth, with here and there a pool of fetid water, broken and decayed bricks, and substances which they did not stop to examine.

In the meanwhile the pursuers were at fault.

"Which way have they gone?" enquired each man of his neighbour. "Which way have they gone?"

"Aye! which way have they gone indeed," said the officer. "We want lights, and then we can tell, but without lights we are not likely to find them, for there are so many holes and cellars about the place, that we should never hit upon them, save by chance."

"Can't we get lights?"

"Yes, but not here; some of the party had better take horse, and go to the nearest town or house, and obtain lights, and if possible more assistance."

"There are enough here," remarked one of those present, "to take him, and eat up the reward too, if you will."

"Well lads, I don't want any more, but we must stop in the old villa till we obtain lights."

"'Tis quite night," said another, "and before they can return, there will be an end of the chace, I think."

"How so?"

"Because Claude Duval will creep out of the house, when it is dark."

"That can be avoided; we can place each other as sentinels all over the lower part of the house, each room, each staircase and passage can have its man, and I defy the devil to pass without being seen, by some one amongst us, much less can a man and woman do so?"

This was so apparent that the plan was adopted, and every one was placed at a post, the doors thrown open, and the windows, so that there was ample means of communication from man to man in a moment.

The whole of the lower story, and a great part of the passages and cellars were thus occupied, so that not a mouse could stir without being seen.

"And now," said the officer, "let me advise you all, to be as still and as quiet as you can, you will then be better able to hear if anything be going on, which we cannot see. He cannot have got out—he has to do that if he can, and I have no doubt he will make the attempt, the darkness and silence he will think favourable to his object, and if you listen, you may detect by sound, what you cannot see in the dark."

This was at once acknowledged to be good counsel, and each man stood still at his post.

"And now if you three," said the officer, to one of his companions, and two of those who had joined the chace, "if you will ride and procure lights, we will hunt him out yet before daylight begins."

"Aye, or burn the old place about his ears," replied another.

"Well, I would not object if we cannot find him by any other means, and if we can set it on fire all well and good, but if not we must patiently set to work with pick and shovel till we beat down every door, and break a hole in every wall, and in every cellar or passage, till we riddle the whole place from one end to the other, and then a few more winters will bring the old villa down with a crash, and a crumbling heap of ruins it will be."

"That will be hard work," remarked one.

"Aye, but it will be paid for. I don't like burning until when all other means fail—then indeed, we may try it, but if he be in, he would sooner be burned than come out, and that you know would not answer our purpose, for a few blackened cinders could not well be sworn to as belonging to Claude Duval, and then where's the reward to come from."

"Aye, or where is it to go to?"

"That's easily settled, it wont go anywhere; but we must wait the return of our comrades.

While the officers where thus patiently awaiting the result of deputing a small party to obtain the means of searching below in the dark, Claude Duval, and Cicely Brereton were making their way through several long and tedious passages.

Nothing could be more disgusting and uncomfortable than their route, which lay in what might be truly called the accumulated muck of years, which had col-

lected in long forgotten and underground passages, where nothing but slime and darkness could ever penetrate.

More than once did Claude whisper words of comfort to Cicely, so chilled and so damp, and so noisome was the air they breathed, that he himself felt it could not be borne for any length of time with impunity.

However, they had been an hour in endeavouring to get out of this long and apparently interminable labyrinth, when suddenly he came against an impediment that somewhat startled him.

He suddenly came to a place which was high, and he was able to stand up in, and then he came against something warm, and a whinneying sound told him in a moment that he had strangely enough come out in the very place where he had secured his mare.

"Sue," he said in the first moment of his surprise. "Sue, we have, indeed, met! Cicely, Cicely, we are saved, we are out of the old villa—my horse—if now we can get away without being seen, we are saved."

"Thank God!" cried Cicely, in a low fervent tone.

Claude Duval patted the neck of the noble creature, and then he paused to listen at the entrance of the cave, but could hear nothing, and in a few moments more he quitted it to reconnoitre.

"The coast appears clear," said Claude, as he came back, "they are no doubt, now busily engaged in searching the old villa, the darkness is now complete, and they cannot see any distance from them; I will lead Sue out of the cave, and then I will fetch you, Cicely, and a few moments more we shall leave them behind us as busy as they please to remain."

Cicely remained passive, and Claude Duval led the mare outside the cave, and then taking Cicely in his arms, he followed, and placed her upon the saddle, saying as he did so,—

"Sue will keep you clear of this stagnant water, and when once out of the villa we shall be safe."

"But will they not see us—is there not light enough left?"

"I think not, and if there were, these willows are a good screen from them, and moreover I shall take the nearest copse, and by passing through that, I shall gain a path I think they know nothing of, and then we are safe from immediate pursuit."

"And then, Claude?"

"And then," said Claude, mounting Sue behind her, and holding Cicely in his arms, "and then, Cicely, I know a place where I can place you in safety, and where you can have that rest and refreshment you need—the people may not be of that kind that you have been used to—but kind treatment and safety are insured."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RETREAT.—AN ADVENTURE.

Cicely was too well pleased and thankful for her escape from her pursuers not to feel joyful at this proposal of Claude's, and assured him how amply grateful she felt at the prospect that was thus opened to her of some retreat.

They now were silent, Cicely clinging to Claude, and Claude pressing her loved and confiding form to his heart, while he slowly directed his horse towards an opening in the forest that surrounded the ruined pleasure grounds, and then they entered the wood.

"And now, Cicely," said Claude, "I think we may breathe while we canter

through the wood, a short ride and we are upon a cross road leading to another part of the country."

"Thank Heaven," exclaimed Cicely, "thank Heaven then we are free from the many and immediate dangers to which we have been exposed, and oh, Claude, to what danger have I not been the cause of bringing you, and how ever shall I be able to ——"

"Nay, Cicely, I am rewarded by the knowledge that I have assisted you in a moment of need; it will be to me a dearer reward than any other you could imagine. You are saved! What is there I'd not willingly risk to secure your liberty and happiness. A life would be well lost in such a cause; but, dear Cicely, I say I am rewarded in being able to bear you away thus in my arms, from danger and horrors."

"Yes, Claude, horrors, that make me shudder to think of."

"Think of them, no more, Cicely, forget them all—forget those who were the the authors of your intended misery, and remember that liberty at least awaits you."

"Thank you, Claude, how much it lightens my heart to hear you say so, but I never can forget this night, and all the varying and changeful chances that have so thickly beset it."

They had soon quitted the wood, and came out upon a cross road, and when once fairly upon the road, Claude Duval put Sue to her paces, and in about an hour a number of miles had been passed over, and the scenery of the country had quite changed.

"We have not far to go now," said Claude Duval. "I will dismount and lead the horse, while you ride, Cicely. Do you see yoder hill?"

"Yes," cried Cicely, "I do."

"Well, before you come there, we shall arrive at the cottage I speak of, It is kept by a worthy old couple, who are somewhat indebted to me for some little benefits I have conferred upon them, and they will take as much care of you, Cicely, as if you were their own child."

"Thanks, thanks," said Cicely, and she held out her hand, which Claude took, and then pressed to his lips, "this will be adding to the benefits you have already conferred upon me. What a change, Claude, the horrors of a madhouse for the quiet cottage."

"Yes, this is a change, Cicely; but you have not told me, why you have been thus used, and whom it was who was thus acting so infamously towards you. How did it happen."

"I can hardly tell you; it was more like some horrible dream than a reality; but it happened that while at home, I was seized under the pretence that I was mad, and authority having been obtained to incarcerate me in some place—a madhouse—I was suddenly seized, and despite my entreaties, I was thrust out of my own home, and thrust into a carriage which was standing at the door.

"I was quite unable to resist, and entreated to be spared the horrors that awaited me, but they were deaf to my entreaties and prayers, and the door was shut upon me, and one of the men said to me in a low voice, as he thrust me back,—

"'If you choose to marry Mr. Thomas Brereton, you will be set free.'

"Then he looked very hard in my face, and paused a moment as if he anticipated I should make some reply.

"'No, no,' I said, 'and you do not, cannot act so basely as to——'

"'Then you must take the consequences of your own act,' and so saying he slammed the door with great violence, and secured the handle on the outside, and in another moment I was hurried away.

"Then indeed I felt all the horrors of my situation, and nothing but the most intense grief swallowed up every other feeling.—I fell back in the carriage, and submitted to my fate—tears and prayers alternately formed the sole means left to express my terror and desolation.

"So deep was my grief, that I heard not the opening of the carriage, and but

for feeling the cold air, I should not have known who it was that opened it, but looking up, I saw you."

"And you are now safe," said Claude, "for the present at all events—but there is some infernal plot hatched by the brain of Tom Brereton. Of that I am convinced."

"I fear so," said Cicely.

"We have now arrived at our destination," said Claude, as he paused before a small garden.

"This is the cottage," said Cicely.

"Yes," replied Claude, "here it is—it is a pretty and retired spot, and they have but few visitors—they can spare you a bed and board, and will do so for my sake willingly, and when they know you, Cicely, they will do so for your own."

"Oh Claude," said Cicely, with a sweet smile, which lit up her face, and caused a thrilling sensation to run through him. "Oh! Claude, how kind it is of you to say so."

"Nay," said Claude, "I speak from experience—but let me aid you to dismount, and then come into the porch, where you will escape some of the cold wind that blows after the rain."

The cottage was one of those humble but sweet abodes which are but now and then seen—it was near the road side—surrounded on all sides by a pretty and somewhat spacious garden, save on the approach to the door, which was open and guarded by a hedge-row on either side—and protected by a porch with two seats, and a small gate a few feet nearer the pathway.

To this gate Claude Duval secured Sue, and patting the animal's neck he conducted her up towards the porch, and then he knocked gently at one of the bedroom windows, which he was able to reach with his riding whip. The window was one of the old-fashioned sort, a lattice one, and if there was not an air of wealth, there was one of comfort and of much beauty, for it was surrounded by ivy of a luxuriant growth.

A few moments passed, when a man came to the window.

"'Tis I, Johnston—'tis I, Claude Duval."

"I will be with you in a moment," replied the man, who had just opened the window in time to hear Duval mention his name, he shut the window again, and after a short interval, they heard footsteps approaching, and in a few seconds the door was opened, and Claude conducted Cicely into the passage, saying as he did so,—

"Mr. Johnston. I have a favour to ask you."

"You know, Mr. Duval, how happy I shall be to grant anything you can desire—I owe too much to you to feel otherwise than glad to be able to oblige you."

"This young lady, from circumstances which I will hereafter explain to you, has need of an asylum and secrecy—will you take charge of her and treat her as your own child—for a time—great oppression and injustice have been used towards her, and indeed but for an accident it would not have been in my power to defeat a scheme of the greatest villany I ever heard of."

"Ah! Mr. Duval, let people say what they will, you are the good genius that defeats the evil, and relieves the oppressed—be assured sir, I will not fail in my part towards the young lady."

"I am sure of that, Johnston."

"Walk in, my good young lady. What we can do for you we shall be happy and proud to do. You will stay, Mr. Duval."

"No, I must be elsewhere, beside, my mare is outside. I cannot leave her. I shall return in as short a period as I can — in the meantime all I beg of you, is, to take charge of Cicely, and you will indeed make me your debtor."

"You may be assured of it; I will call my wife, and she will at once see to her comfort."

The old man departed, and Claude took the opportunity of taking a tender leave of Cicely, and whispering a few words of consolation and love in her ear, and inspiring her with confidence, and then shaking hands with the old man and his wife he left the cottage, and once more mounted Sue, and turned towards the road, and rode away at a brisk rate for some miles, intending to seek an asylum for himself, where he and his mare could remain in security.

It was late, the time was making rapid strides towards midnight, and Claude Duval began to cast about for some secure locality, where he and his mare could repose in safety. The road was a lonely one, tall trees shaded it on both sides, and the road was so dark, though the moon was not absolutely hidden, that Claude had more than once to trust to his good mare, to pick her way, without any guidance from him, but this he had done before, and felt no new emotion at doing so now. She did it with confidence.

"Sue," he said, "your instinct will teach you what my reason cannot just now, you can travel safely, where I cannot see a step before me, take it easy, take it easy, and we will jog on together in safety. Adventure lies before us, we follow in the wake of fortune, and meet whatever she pleases to place in our way; we are all the creatures of circumstances."

These thoughts crossed his mind, and he uttered them aloud, or we might say that he was thinking aloud, for such was the fact, when Sue suddenly shewed signs of disturbance.

"Eh, lass," he said, "what now—the moon is behind a cloud, cans't not find thy way, or has a rabbit crossed thy path."

At that moment, the moon which had been hidden behind a mass of clouds, now shone forth, and Claude Duval saw a saddle horse standing across the road, without any rider.

"Ho! ho!" said Claude, looking warily around. "What has happened now. Something has been done here."

He drew his bridle, and pausing, he gazed about for a minute or two, but he could make nothing out of it. There was the horse, a curiously marked creature, black almost, with singular markings of white, hardly enough of the latter, to make it a piebald, but there it stood quiet enough.

"This is a stray animal, that has lost its rider, either from being thrown, or he has met with some other accident; he would hardly have stopped here, if the horse had thrown his rider, he would have gone on, but I must be cautious and ride on. Come Sue, pass him my girl, pass him."

Claude pushed on gently, looking over the hedge rows, and examining the road as he went along, the horse followed him, as if the animal did not at all like being alone, and the company of a stranger was preferable to standing melancholy in the road at midnight.

However, Claude had not gone far, before he thought he heard the sounds of a human voice or voices; he pulled up and listened, and heard some one in angry contention with another.

"An adventure, I suppose," thought Claude, "well, it cannot much matter what it is, so that something comes of it; the air is still and cool, I'll ride quietly towards those voices—I will just ascertain what is the matter, and then interfere if I deem it necessary; and should there be necessity for doing so, and danger near, you, my Sue! must bear me away to safety."

He turned his horse's head towards the spot whence the voices came, and he found that they came from the road-side—from a place where there were several haystacks and labourers' cottages. The gate stood open, and Claude entered at a walk, and then made towards the haystacks.

The moon was obscured, and the tall trees under which he was riding would have been enough to have concealed him, had any one been suspicious or on the look-out, and, added to that, the sound of his approach was not to be heard, for the horse trod softly and silently upon the turf, and the noisy clamour of two men in dispute rendered it very unlikely that he would have been overheard had the sound of Sue's footsteps been more audible.

At length he arrived at the haystacks, and, by standing up in his saddle, he could see two men seated upon some loose hay, and in angry discussion with each other; while near by lay a third individual, who was, however, secured by a rope, with his hands behind him.

This last was watching, with a rueful and anxious glance, the two men who were sharing his personal property.

"Now, I tells yer what, Spanking Jemmy, you may say as what yer like, but you ain't a honest cove, for to go for to cheat a comrade of his fair share of the plunder."

"No gammon, Out-of-town Bob," replied Spanking Jemmy, who was a huge specimen of humanity.

"Nor does I give you any," replied Out-of-town Bob, "nor am I going for to take any—you wants to take advantage of me, and I won't have it, Spanking Jemmy, and I means to tell yer as kindly on't as I can."

"Thank yer," said Spanking Jemmy. "The lesson is to be taken, recollect, not given—I ain't a going to be done——"

"Who wants yer?"

"Then why don't you give me a fair share of the cove's plunder—ain't he got six-and-thirty guineas?"

"Well, and what of it?"

"Well—I'm entitled to eighteen of them.'

"Who wants to deny it, Bob? Not I—take your share, man, take your share. I always acts on the square."

"Not so fast, my gentleman pad, not so fast. I'm country all the world over—but I'm York, and not to be be done by any leary cove from Lunnun."

"Well—what now, my pig poker?"

"None of your joking—it won't do—haven't you got the watch? don't tell me you can't get ten guineas for that."

"No I can't; but if you value it at that, give me five for your share, and you shall have the watch. Come, that's fair, anyhow."

"No, it ain't fair."

"Then what is——"

"I'll tell you: when a man acts up to his bargain—that's fair—when he shares his plunder with his comrade, and lets him have the full value of his dues. You know you promised to take the trinkets, and let me have my full share; and here you want to offer me five pounds for what you'll get, at least, thirty for——"

"I tell you I shan't—what, Out-of-town Bob, do you think I'd do a comrade? No; I'd lose the whole spoil first. I'm willing to let you have the chance of getting as much upon the watch as you think I shall—I can't do more—I can't act fairer."

"Yes you may, yes you may; why now look here, that gold watch was never made under sixty guineas—hark how musically it sounds the hours and quarters—you know where to plant these things, I do not, and that's why you agreed to take the articles as your share."

"Then it comes to this, Out-of-town Bob; that I must take them according to our agreement, at your valuation? No, no, I'm d——d first!" said the ruffian. "I'll not do it—I'm not such a pig-headed flat as that—as if I could get the sum that it cost, if I fairly sold it, much less can I get a tenth of it from the fence—no—no; do as you will—either you or I take it at the same valuation."

"Well, Spanking Jemmy, my turn will come next, by-and-by; take it now; but we don't do things on this plan any more, I can tell you, so your harvest won't be a very long one."

"May be not, but it will bring enough to my granary, and I own I don't like doing business with a dissatisfied pal. And now, about the prisoner, what shall we do with him?"

"Oh, ah! I had forgotten him—he has heard too much, he will tell tales, an

we are sure to be nabbed for this if he live—he must be settled, and that at once and no mistake." As they spoke, they both cocked their pistols and aimed them at the breast of the unfortunate traveller. Meanwhile, Claude Duval had dismounted, and throwing his bridle over the rails, he drew a large stake, and crept up to the scene of action and stood behind the two villains without their being aware of his vicinity, or even the traveller seeing him. "Infernal villains," said Claude Duval, "is it thus you would treat an unarmed man who has not resisted you?—let that be your



reward," he said, as he dealt repeated blows, which felled them to the earth senseless. "Now, sir," said Claude, as he released the traveller. "Now, you had better take what is your own." With many expressions of thanks, the stranger remounted his horse, and rode off with Claude until he pulled up, and told him that the town lay before him, when the traveller desired to know to whom he was so deeply indebted for his life and property. "Oh, my name," said Claude. "Well, you shall know it. I am Claude Duval!" and as he spoke he turned his horse's head, and left the spot, before the amazed traveller could speak.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL VISITS MR. MARKHAM BRERETON IN NEWGATE.

After leaving the stranger whom he had thus saved from death, petrified by the knowledge of whom he was, Claude Duval turned his horse's head, and cantered towards London, where he arrived about an hour after midnight, perhaps later—but it mattered not to Claude, who well knew the road, and the quarter of the town where he could with safety put up his Sue, for she, as well as himself, felt the need of rest.

The air was cool, and the roads heavy—though perhaps not so bad for a saddle-horse as they were for wheels, and Claude always took care to ease his mare whenever an opportunity offered, and cantered her over the turf when such was to be had, or some part of the road was better than another, that part would invariably be Sue's—unless in great haste, when pursuit was hot, and even then it was not always neglected.

It was with no regret for himself or his horse, that Claude drew his bridle, and walked up the ride to an old inn, where he had often stopped before, and dismounting, he led her up to a stable-door, at which he knocked with the butt of his whip, and whence appeared in a few moments a groom half clad and but half awake.

"Joe," said Claude. "I want to put up my mare, have you got a spare box by itself for about five hours."

"Yes sir," cried Joe, who no sooner heard Claude's voice, than he was thoroughly aroused; "come in this way," he added, pushing open the door, and holding up his lantern.

"Have you many persons in the house?"

"Yes they are pretty full," replied the man,—"most of 'em from the country, and some of them I think, will soon be returning—here is a nice bed for your mare—she will roll about on the straw—you'll feed her yourself."

"Yes, Joe."

"Then you know where the oats are—there's some beans in that sieve yonder. I dare say she's been over some ground."

"Yes Joe, she has. There, Sue my lass, is a good supper for you," said Duval, as he patted the beautiful creature on the neck, "and now Joe, I shall be glad if you will brush and rub her down, it will lessen her fatigue—and she will be more refreshed than if she rested at once."

"It shall be done," said Joe, who busied himself with executing Claude's orders, and the latter went into the kitchen as if he knew all the arrangements of the place, and procured what refreshments he required, and then sought his bed, and in a few minutes more had fallen into a deep sleep.

The day was somewhat advanced, ere Claude awoke, and then jumping up he dressed himself hurriedly, and then sought the stable in which his mare had been placed the night before.

Joe had not neglected her, but had betimes fed her and groomed her well, even to Claude Duval's thinking, so taking a half-crown out of his pocket, he said to the groom, who took it with a glistening eye—

"Now Joe I'm going to breakfast, in an hour's time let the mare have her saddle and bridle on, and ready to start at a moment's notice."

"It shall be done," said Joe, patting the mare and dusting her coat, "she shall be as bright as a duchess's daughter before that time. She's been fed, and hasn't quite cleared out her manger yet."

"That will do, Joe," said Claude, as he gave a look of satisfaction at her appearance, and then he returned to the room where he was to take his breakfast, and listened to the conversation of the travellers.

Claude then left the inn, and went to a house not far from Fleet-market, where he purchased some clothes, and then returned to the inn, and dressed himself in them, so that he was of quite a different appearance when he went out, and none but those who knew him intimately, would have known him again.

A new coat, waistcoat, and hat were the chief articles he had put on, and added to which was a large neckcloth, which was so contrived with a large brimmed hat, to conceal the greater part of his face, and so to alter the other, that he considered himself safe anywhere.

"And now for Newgate," he muttered, as he looked down upon his disguise. "Markham Brereton is there, and I will visit him. Yes, I'll go to Newgate of my own will, but little will the authorities think whom they have within their walls. It may be," he added, "I shall see my end there; as matters have turned out though, I should sooner have found my death on the highway from a bullet, rather than in such a place, but Markham Brereton shall not fall from my deed."

He quitted the inn a second time, and then walked towards the jail of Newgate, it being about the hour at which visitors were admitted to see the prisoners.

He walked along until he came to the large building, which he surveyed for a moment or two, and then he walked up to the wicket, and then knocked, as the man who kept it was not at the moment there, the cause of his absence however, was easily explained, as he came smacking his lips, and evidently disturbed in some pleasing occupation, connected with the science of gastronomy,

"Well sir, what do you want?"

"I want to see Mr. Markham Brereton."

"Ah" said the wicket-gate keeper with a deprecatory groan. "Mr. indeed. We have people who calls themselves many things, but very few misters, and they are only called so by themselves. I'll go bail, the governor's receipt aint for any such article, as a mister, at any rate.

"Is the person I enquire for here?"

"You know he is," said the irate wicket keeper, opening it and locking it again rather ominously. "Here Sam, somebody wants to see your gentleman tobyman, and calls him mister."

"My friend," said Claude Duval, to the gate-keeper, "the next time I come I will not trouble you, but simply call upon the governor, since I can meet with nothing but impertinence from his jailors."

"Well, I'm blest," said the man. "You must be the secretary of state—but it's no business of mine, here Sam, just tell the tobyman he's wanted, by a pal I 'spose. I'm tired."

And with that the wicket-gate keeper sat down, and wiped his lips, as though so much talking had made him hot and thirsty, but which really arose from the fact, that he had been imbibing more than prison allowance, and of a much stronger nature, than anything which is allowed to come openly into the prison.

In a few moments more, Claude Duval following the steps of Sam, was conducted to a part of the prison, where he was requested to wait a moment, and then a door was opened and the name of Markham Brereton called aloud, and in another moment there were heard approaching footsteps.

"You are wanted, Markham," said the turnkey. "A friend wants to speak with you. You can come into this little side room if you please."

"Thank you," said Brereton, who was then left alone, and in another moment Claude Duval was informed, he could go into the little room and speak to the prisoner. Claude entered, and saw Brereton standing by a window, the only one that admitted light, he was pale but collected, and examined Claude as he advanced towards him with a scrutinizing glance.

"Mr. Markham Brereton," said Claude, "you may be surprised at the intrusion of a stranger, but I come with a good intention, and from no idle curiosity. You are here in consequence of an accusation of Mr. Thomas Brereton."

"Yes, that is true," replied Markham, looking very suspiciously at Claude, "but what may I owe this visit to?"

"To sympathy sir."

"To sympathy," repeated Markham, "I am a stranger to you, and I know of nothing in or about me that can excite your attention. Allow me to enquire your name, and your object."

"My name you shall know before I go, and as to my object it is to assure you that on your day of trial, you shall not sink as a guilty man, for I know you are innocent."

"I know I am innocent," replied Markham, "but how you are aware of it, I don't know, and as to your assurance respecting my trial, I can gain but little additional comfort. I am innocent, and the only consolation or hope I have, is in that fact."

"I know you are innocent, Mr. Brereton, because I am the person who committed the robbery."

"You?"

"Yes, I. You see I have ample confidence in your honour. I run much, very great risk, in coming here, a proscribed man as I am—one for whose head a heavy sum is offered, but should all things go wrong, should you be in real and imminent danger on your day of trial, I will step forward and admit that I am the man who stopped Tom Brereton, and took his papers."

"But would the judge and jury take your unaccredited statement?"

"Yes, there can be no doubt, they especially, when I bring other proof, and above all, when they hear my name."

"And that is ———"

"Claude Duval," said Claude, glancing around. "I pledge my word to come forward and save you if you stand in danger."

"But they would hang you," said Markham Brereton, after a pause, and gazing upon the highwayman with wonder and admiration.

"They would, but it will not prevent my doing so; in the meantime, have no unnecessary fears, or feel any unnecessary want of confidence, in my sincerity you may put every trust, I have given you an earnest of my truth by coming here and placing myself in your power."

"Of that confidence I can take no advantage," said Brereton, "you have confided in my honour, and I will do the same in your's."

"And you will do right. I will not deceive you. At the eleventh hour you may depend upon my stepping forward—if such a step be absolutely necessary—if not, you will know that I do not desire to throw away my life except in a case of great emergency."

"I understand you, and feel fully the greatness of your sacrifice, and cannot in any way expect any unnecessary risk on your part, when so few would make any, but I hope something may yet turn up to expose the falsity of my cousin's accusation against me."

"You are accused to keep you out of the way, I have no doubt," said Claude; "he would be glad to sacrifice you."

"He does not appear unwilling to do so," replied Markham, "I am sure he had no reason to suspect me."

"If you please," said the turnkey, putting his head in,—"time's almost up. I'm sorry to disturb you."

"I must begone," said Claude, "farewell, and you may depend upon my promise."

"I do depend upon it, though it is more than I can reasonably expect of any man, however, guilty he may be—but my time is up, farewell, and get clear of this place as quickly as you can."

"I am safe; farewell."

Markham Brereton held out his hand to Claude, who eagerly grasped it, and then the jailor again entered the little room or cell, saying it was time, and he re-

conducted Markham Brereton to the ward in which he was confined, and then turning to Claude he said,—

"And now, sir, if you will come this way, I will shew you the way out."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RECOGNITION.—THE ESCAPE.

CLAUDE DUVAL followed the gaoler through several of the tortuous passages through which he had been brought in the first instance, but which now seemed to have grown longer.

"These are queer places," thought Claude, "how many poor fellows have stepped along these passages for the last time—well 'tis no use in being sad, but I sometimes think, that this business of Markham Brereton's will cost me some such walk, and yet I should try to prevent it."

They now came across a gateway which had been opened to let some prisoners into that part of the prison. Suddenly one of them stopped, and casting a scrutinizing eye upon Claude, who returned the gaze, but felt uneasy at it, when suddenly the former said aloud,—

"Claude Duval, by G—. What caught at last!—the pitcher that oft goes to the well, will be broken at last."

"What are you talking about," enquired one of the turnkeys.

"I say, there is Claude Duval."

"Where?"

"There, that fellow alongside the turnkey, coming this way—the tall man—with the big neck-cloth——"

"Claude Duval."

"Aye, to be sure."

"Why, he is a visitor."

Ah," replied the man, "he! he! such a visitor as I am, I suppose you mean, a visitor upon compulsion—but I'm sorry now I've said anything about the matter if he ain't known; I thought there were none of you but who knew Claude Duval."

"We have all heard of him," replied the turnkey, and he added, turning to Claude, "we must detain you for a short time—only a few minutes, and if it is all right, you won't be kept long."

"Kept long," replied Claude Duval,—"kept long—do you imagine I shall be detained at all. I will submit to nothing of the kind, and if you offer this molestation to me you may depend upon it that neither you nor your employers will escape without severe punishment."

"Oh," said the turnkey, "the punishment will fall upon him, if we are wrong, and upon us, if we don't chance it."

"What do you mean," said Claude, taking a rapid stride or two towards the little room, through which he had to pass to get to the wicket.

"Here Ikey—Nightingale, lend a hand.—An escape."

In another moment, the two men appeared, and Claude rushed forward—but he was seized upon by the man behind him, who hung upon the skirts of his coat, and impeded his progress, and enabled the two men hastening towards him to bar his exit.

Claude turned round, and in an instant laid this man low, with a blow from his riding-whip, which he carried about him, and then threw himself upon the other two, who were big burly men, and who appeared nothing loth for the encounter, and a desperate struggle took place.

The whole were strong men, but Claude had the advantage, for his sinews were hard end, and his breath good, and he was much more active—but then he had two men to deal with, and assistance at hand.

"Help, help!" shouted the turnkeys who had felt the vigorous blows of Claude's riding whip, and the blood flowed in many places; nevertheless, they hung upon him, and if one was stunned and brought to the earth for a minute, another took his place, and kept Claude in work—but each fall caused them to remain longer on the stones.

Suddenly by one great and vigorous effort, he completely released himself from them, and then he made a rush at the wicket, but was met by having the door of the little room slammed, and the key turned, before he could do anything to prevent it.

"Ah," said the wicket-keeper, who had performed this feat of dexterity, and who presented himself to defend the passage. "Ah, so I thought you could be no good—I thought you were a tobyman when you seemed so precious high—it's all sham—and you'll have a——"

"You'll have that," replied Claude, dealing him a heavy blow on the head, which left him senseless on the floor, but seeing his progress barred in that direction, he turned round, and seeing a door open, which led into the governor's house, Claude at once entered it, and closing the door after him in time to elude the turnkeys, who made a rush after him, Claude secured the door, on that side, but not before an alarm had been given, and loud cries uttered his name.

"Ah," said Claude, "you may shout, 'Stop him—stop Claude Duval!' as loud as you will, but Claude Duval will not be so easily stopped; and now for a new way out."

Claude turned round, and was somewhat startled to see a man dressed in black with a white neckcloth, a blanched countenance and an eye that seemed as if no speculation had entered there, he was terror-stricken, and was as unable to speak as move.

"Well," said Claude, "what brought you here?"

"Oh," said the figure with a groan, "my legs—that is——. Oh lord, have mercy upon me, good Claude Duval."

"Oh, that's it, is it," said Claude, "well then as you came here upon your legs, just show me the way out upon them, and depend upon it you will fare worse than you can imagine, if you only attempt to play me false."

"Play!" repeated the terror-stricken ordinary, who smelt strongly of wine. "Play, I play—oh dear no."

"Well, then, where does this door lead to?"

"To the governor's room, from whence I came, thinking it was the governor, and whom I came to meet, but I found it was you—don't kill me."

"Lead on," said Claude, who did not choose to lose a moment's time, knowing how valuable it was to him, and that life and death hung upon the difference.

In another moment they entered the governor's private room, where they saw nothing but papers, and a table upon which stood one or two empty bottles, and two wine glasses.

"This, I suppose is your private confessional, where you remain at devotion, eh?" inquired Claude.

"Sometimes we do come here."

"And how were they emptied?" inquired Claude, pointing to the glasses and bottles.

"By drinking," replied the drunken chaplain.

"Now show me the way out," said Claude, who could hear the alarm bell ringing furiously, and knowing that no time was to be lost, and yet not wishing to precipitate anything, for he wanted to get out without any hue and cry after him, otherwise he felt some suspicion that he might not get clear off at all

events he had few moments of irresolution arising from not having it in his power to decide upon his course at once.

He was much inclined to seize upon the ordinary and secure him at once, there was something so sinister and treacherous about the face; notwithstanding the drunken gravity, and the fear that seemed to sink deep in his heart, yet he feared he would do any act that would cause Claude to be secured.

"You must lead the way to the door."

"Yes," said the chaplain, "yes," and he moved towards the door, which they had just come through.

"But not that door," said Claude, sternly, "that is the way we have just come from, and you know I intend to go out at another—that which leads to the street. You know who I am—you heard my name mentioned, you pronounced it yourself. You know therefore what I am capable of doing. Now listen to me.

"Yes, most worthy sir, I do. Amen."

"You appear to me to be treacherous. I may do you wrong—but if you attempt the slightest act that will bring suspicion or notice upon me, I will fell you like an ox with the iron butt of my riding whip, and you will hardly get up again."

"My good Mr. Duval, I am the Lord's minister, and your servant, do as you please, I will be obedient, but do not attempt anything concerning the iron-headed riding whip."

"Mind what I tell you then, or be assured that the first word or sign you make, by way of a signal, will be your condemned sermon."

"Have mercy!"

"As you deserve it—so now put on your hat and come with me. I intend to honour you with my company a short distance, and I shall require you to be very particular in your conduct."

The chaplain with a trembling hand, put on his hat, but so much awry, that Claude, not wishing to attract observation, pushed it on in a more becoming manner, and then, with an admonitory shake of the heavy headed horsewhip, pulled him towards the door, whispering,—

"Now lead to the street-door, and mind when you are outside, you do not look at any one, but straight before you."

"Yes, yes, depend upon me," he said, "depend upon me—but the iron-headed horsewhip gives me the headache."

"It won't trouble you, if you act as I tell you; otherwise, it will be a cold application to your brains."

As Claude spoke, he led the way out of the room, and through the passage, and in going along, they met one of the servant girls who curtsied and then opened the door, as they were going out, thinking that the chaplain had a visitor, and at the same time, she thought there was a strange look about the chaplain she had never before observed.

They now emerged into the street, and at that moment there was a crowd of persons coming out of the prison entrance, and Claude at once divining the state of matters, pushed the chaplain straight across the road, and then hurried down one of the lanes leading to the old Fleet Market.

"Come, sir, don't look so scared, or you will frighten any one; you must recollect it is Claude Duval who has the keeping of you, you must have your wits about you."

It would seem that this was not likely to be the case, for the chaplain was about overcome with fear and drink; Claude immediately pushed him into a low public-house, saying to the servitor whom he met,

"Here, my friend is very ill—take care of him—put him into a private room for an hour, and you shall be liberally paid, mind he is a little delirious, and mustn't be let out till he is quite calm; but I'll call for him in an hour's time."

As Claude spoke he put a crown into his hand, and quitted the house, first seeing the chaplain pushed up stairs without any resistance on his part, by the pot-boy, who locked him up in the room, despite all remonstrance, for all he said was put down to the score of insanity.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ARREST OF CLAUDE.—THE ESCAPE FROM THE LOCK UP AT HENDON.

To some extent, Claude now felt satisfied that he had done all that it was his duty to do as regarded the very painful situation in which Mr. Brereton was placed. Whether he, Claude, would have taken so much pains, had there not been such a being as Cicely Brereton in the case, it is scarcely our business to enquire, but certainly, the bright eyes of Cicely were the magnets that attracted him, and upon her breath for the future depended all his happiness.

Hence, of course, he could not but feel that it was as direct a road out of her affections as he could possibly take, were he to abandon her brother to the unjust charge made against him by Tom Brereton, and his bad advisers, who, no doubt, ultimately would make him, Tom, a sufferer, while they enriched themseves with the proceeds of the Guildford property.

And that the acquisition of that property from all parties, was the main spring of the man's actions who was advising and urging on Tom Brereton, there could not be a doubt.

Claude found no difficulty in again procuring the companionship of Sue, and having mounted, he cast but one glance around him to see if he were followed, then urging the gallant steed to an increased pace, he made for the northern suburbs of London.

Claude Duval seldom took any one particular direction without an object, and now in going northward of the metropolis he had one.

That object now, was to make enquiry concerning the fate of him who had suffered from the first pistol shot he, Claude, had ever fired, and likewise a strange and growing desire had been for a long time coming over him to visit his old home, the home of his infancy, where he had known so many joys and so many sorrows. He thought he should have liked his sister May to have been with him, but as that was not possible, without considerable difficulty and danger, he had given up the idea, although for a time it had held a place in his brain, and he had reasoned upon it to some extent.

At the period when the stirring incidents of our tale took place, London was so contracted in its limits, in comparison to what it is now, that it was a much easier task to get into the suburbs. Camden Town was hardly in existence, so that soon after leaving Holborn, Claude found himself among gardens and hedge-rows.

Sue when she came to sniff the cool, balmy, country air, gave a short cry of pleasure, and in despite of Claude's wish to proceed leisurely, she started on for a mile or two at a rapid pace until the hill of Hampstead was before them.

Then, as Claude had anticipated, she slackened her pace.

Claude looked around him upon the beautiful country in which he was making his way, and some of the blissful feelings of his early youth began to steal over him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "what place, be it ever so fair, is to the imagination so beautiful as the scenes which we have known in those happy days when the cares of the great world appeared to be too far off ever to reach us. What was I then? Alas, what am I now?"



CLAUDE DUVAL PURSUING THE PHANTOM.

For some time he rode on in silence, as if mentally contrasting his present position, as an outlawed man, one proscribed by the laws of man, and hunted down like a beast of the forest, with his happy lot when he had a tender and loving parent, who provided for his every want; and a gentle sister, into whose ears he poured forth his little troubles, and who was ever ready to soothe his young spirit. But alas, how altered was the time now. His father had been dragged to an untimely fate by an unscrupulous baronet, and his sister, though living, he could not approach with safety, for the instruments of that law he had spurned were always ready to pounce upon him with eagerness.

When he had ridden on some distance, he was attracted by observing a placard upon a tree, and upon riding up to it, he found to his dismay that it was headed by the following words:—

"£300 Reward, for the Apprehension of Claude Duval."

The placard then proceeded to detail that the above named sum would be paid to any person, or persons, lodging the notorious highwayman in any of His Majesty's jails, and a further sum of £200 upon his conviction.

"Well," he said, "I shall not be deterred from proceeding by this bill. Let those who have a desire to earn the money by my capture, take me if they can, and the danger of the attempt may recoil upon their own heads."

Still, notwithstanding he did not feel inclined to place so much importance upon the notification for his capture as to allow it to stop him, yet it was considered by him as desirable to be cautious.

A little way out of the main road was a house called the "Antlers," and it was towards it that Claude now directed his steed.

This house had not been always devoted to its present ignoble purpose, but at some period of time, considerably anterior to that concerning the events of which we write, it had been a superior kind of farm-house. Now, however, one portion of it had gone entirely to decay, while the other was used for the purpose of providing, as the sign indicated, "Good entertainment for man and beast."

When Claude got sufficiently close to this hostel for the sound of his horse's hoofs to be heard upon the road, a lad ran out to reconnoitre the traveller, and to him Claude beckoned, and when he was close at hand, he said—

"Does Mathew Larkin still keep the 'Antlers'?"

"Oh yes," said the lad. "He's my grandfather."

"Tell him then, that an old friend wishes to speak to him."

"Won't you come in, sir?"

"Not till I have seen and spoken to your grandfather."

With this message then the boy went into the house, and the result was that in a few moments a portly individual made his appearance, and hurried towards Claude, with some curiosity in his looks, but he did'nt seem to recognise him, for the fact is, Claude had thought it but commonly prudent, under his present circumstances, and in broad daylight, as he was, to make what alterations he could in his costume.

"Well, Mathew," he said. "You forget me."

"The voice I knew in a moment. You have quite given me a turn. Good God! what brings you here, Claude? Surely you don't know your own danger?"

"Yes, I know all about it."

"And yet you——"

"And yet I brave it. The fact is, Mathew, I had an irresistible desire to see the old neighbourhood, and let the danger be what it may, I mean to see it. Yet as I don't want to throw a chance into the hands of the Philistines, I think if you can give me shelter, that I would rather wait till night."

"Well, well, it can't be helped. Come along, and between us, we will put up your horse, somehow, without troubling any one else."

Claude was always sensibly touched by anything in the shape of kindness, and he could not help pressing the hand of the old innkeeper, as he said,—

"If all the world had treated me as you treat me, I don't think I should be what I am."

"Claude," said old Mathew, with an almost solemnity of manner, "Claude, I don't shut my eyes to what you are. You are a highwayman, and I know it, but you never stained your name by any act of cruelty, that I ever heard of, and you never, let your necessities have been what they might, stooped to take from a poor man his hard-earned mite."

"So help me Heaven!" exclaimed Claude, "I never did."

"I know it. Now come on, my boy, and you shan't want for shelter so long as old Mathew and the Antlers are above ground. Come along with you."

Claude had dismounted, and he now followed the old man into the public-house, the porch of which was most picturesquely over hung by clustering ivy. Indeed it was, take it altogether, a place of great natural as well as artificial beauty.

And there was scarcely a tree in all that neighbourhood which was not known to Claude, and as is always the case when the mind is full of recollections of the past, a strange and settled sadness took possession of his spirits.

This Mathew saw, and after Sue had been properly housed in a stable, the key of which Claude took possession of, the innkeeper took him by the arm, and led him to a parlour sacred to himself and his most esteemed intimates, and then closing the door, he said,—

"Now in order to place you completely at your ease, and to show you that in case of any alarm, your escape may be certain—look here."

As he spoke, he opened the lid of an old fashioned window seat, which, as is common enough in old houses, made a chest likewise, and within there appeared some litters merely. It was soon apparent, however, to Claude that a more admirable mode of escape from the room could not have been contrived, for upon touching a small concealed spring the whole bottom of the window-seat dropped like a door upon hinges.

"There," said Mathew, "below is a little staircase and a passage that leads you to the window-seat of another room by which you might escape. No one in this house knows of this place but myself, and you are the first to whom I have shown it."

"I am most grateful to you," said Claude.

"Pho—pho! don't mention that. Come now, we will have a cheerful glass, and you must recover your lost spirits."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE APPARITION ON THE HEATH.—THE CHASE.

A BOTTLE of wine such as mine host of the Antlers only reserved for special people, and for special occasions, tended in a great measure to dispel the gloom that hung over Claude, and at all events he soon got into a better conversational turn than he had been in for some few hours, and was able to speak with some degree of hilarity.

"You will think it odd, Mathew," he said, "that not having seen you for so long, and really taking the pleasure that I do in your society, I should now ask to leave it for a time."

"Leave it? How do you mean?"

"For three nights now, I have had no repose."

"Is that possible?"

"It is indeed, Mathew. One event and another has kept me in a constant state of watchfulness for some time past, and the consequence naturally is, that I am worn out. The sight of a sofa in the room, here, is too inviting for me to resist stretching my wearied limbs upon it, and tasting the sweets of oblivion for a few hours."

"With all my heart, Claude. Sleep as long as you like."

"No, let me beg of you as a favour to awaken me at sunset. I then will pay my visit to the heath, and those well known spots where my boyish footsteps have so often strayed, and then I must on the road again, for I have obligations now which must be met. There are others now dependent upon me."

"Why you have not a wife, have you?"

"No," said Claude, as he flung himself upon the sofa, "no, not yet, Mathew."

In a few moments he was sound asleep.

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Mathew paid strict attention to the injunctions of Claude, to awaken him at sunset, and scarcely had the golden luminary sunk below the hills, when he touched Claude's shoulder.

The highwayman, whom a touch would always awaken, was in an instant on his feet.

"What is it?" he cried. "Keep off!"

"Why it's only me."

"Oh, you, Mathew, I think I was dreaming. Is it sunset?"

"Yes. You told me to awaken you and I have, but you were starting and uneasy in your sleep; I fear your mind, sleeping or waking is but ill at ease, sometimes you would moan, and sometimes you would cry out as though you were engaged in some life and death conflict, such as you have, I daresay, had many of in your time."

"Ah," said Claude, "if I had my time over again."

"Well, what then?"

"Why, I think I would——Eh! What noise is that?"

Claude sprung to his feet, for he thought—nay, he felt quite certain that a chair, or some such article of furniture, had been thrown over by some one in the adjoining apartment. Old Mathew took the pipe from his mouth, and listened intently.

"Did you not hear?" said Claude.

"Yes. Something I heard, but what it was, passes my wits, for the room has been empty, for Heaven only knows the time. You remain here while I go and see."

"Nay, if there is danger—"

"Oh, pho! There cannot be danger.

"But in case there should be, I will accompany you. I cannot permit that you should be running any risk, while I perhaps, was sitting here in peace and perfect security."

"Come on then."

They both rose, and advanced towards the door of communication between the two rooms, but on attempting to open it, it was found to be fast.

"A plague upon it," said Mathew, "the key is on the other side."

"Which is a difficulty," said Claude, "easy to be remedied."

"As how?"

"Thus."

As he spoke, Claude dashed himself against the door, and it burst open in a moment. He and old Mathew at once entered the chamber, the latter bearing the light, but nothing was to be seen, nor was there any article of furniture in the room, upset or standing, which could have made the noise Claude had heard.

"This is very strange," he said.

"Ah," said Mathew, "you may think so. but I, who am used to the old house, think nothing of it. Lord bless you, if I was to pay attention to all the odd noises I hear at times here, I should have nothing else to do. They say the place is haunted, but I never yet saw anything, whatever I have heard."

"Well," said Claude, "it's only once in my life, that shadows have appalled me."

"Once,—when was that?"

"At some more convenient time ask me, Mathew. Now I wish to go out upon the heath, for I see the gentle moon is rising. I know where to find Sue, and you may expect me back again in about an hour's time from now."

"You will find your supper ready, and another choice bottle of claret; but let me assist you with the horse, and good luck go with you."

Sue was soon saddled, and Claude in a few moments, was upon Hampstead-heath, with the cool breeze blowing upon his face.

The night was just such a one as Claude loved to be abroad in.

It was not dark, and yet it was not moonlight, for the bright and beautiful luminary was yet young, and there were drifting clouds, which occasionally came over the fair face of it in such a manner, that at periods of some minutes in duration, you could not see your hand before your face.

Then again through some small crevice the young moon would just take a peep at the world, shewing its fair face, like some coy beauty, to be admired and then withdrawn.

A gentle dew was falling, which imparted a freshness to the air, and a crispness to the grass, while a nightingale with its soft melancholy notes made the night zephyr full of melody and beauty. Take it for all in all, it was a gentle and delicious night.

Claude, who knew the heath well, sought an elevated position upon it, where he could command a view of many well-known objects.

He waited until the young moon peeped out to shew him the tree and house that the years of boyhood had so often looked upon.

"Ah," he said, "if I could but have remained in some spot like this, and been happy!"

It was too late now for the gallant knight of the road to turn sentimental, so Claude shook off from his spirit as best he might, the gloom that seemed inclined to settle upon it.

"It is fate," he said. "It is fate. We have each our mission to fulfil, and I am fulfiling mine. Destiny made me what I am, as destiny I suppose might have made me an archbishop, not but what I doubt if in the latter case I should have been a whit honester, as the world goes than I am now."

Claude's reverence for the church was never very great.

A slight canter, of about a quarter of a mile, brought him to the cottage which had been occupied by his father. The sight of it brought such a torrent of fearful recollections, that after regarding it for a few moments in silence, he turned his horse's head, and fairly gallopped from the spot, but he did not well heed in what direction he was going, and when he pulled rein and cast his eyes about him, he to his horror and confusion, found himself within a few paces of the still extant gibbet, upon which his father had hung in chains.

A cry of horror burst from Claude, as all the events of that awful night came upon his memory. He would gladly have flown from the place, but a species of fascination seemed to bind him to the place, and he could not move for some minutes.

When he had in some measure recovered, it was to utter passionate exclamations of horror and of indignation, as the thought of the outrage which had been inflicted upon the dead rushed across his brain.

"Oh God! can it be possible, that human justice ever can stoop to pursue those who have been really criminal, after death has expiated all offences? Father,—father,—You were innocent, and yet they put you to a cruel and a shameful end, and placed your bones to blanch here in the winds of Heaven!"

Overcome by the violence of his emotions, Claude leant upon the pummel of his saddle and wept.

This was a mood, however, not likely to last with one of his iron spirit, and indignation soon again got the mastery over all other feelings.

"I avenged you," he cried. "I avenged you! I struck down the villain who falsely took your life, and suborned others to bear false testimony against you. father, I avenged you, and it was—it must have been right in the sight of Heaven, that I should do so. Was I growing to manhood, to suffer your poor spirit to cry out from the tomb for vengeance—no—no—no, they denied you a tomb. They denied you even a tomb. Oh, God, they could not confer upon you even that small boon.

At this moment there slowly emerged from amid a mass of shadow cast by some trees, on the other side of the gibbet to that upon which Claude was stationed, a solitary horseman, and so slow and utterly unexpected was his appearance by

Claude, that to him it had all the effect as if the new comer had risen up out of the earth.

The new comer slowly approached the gibbet, and just as he took off his hat, with what precise object Claude could not guess, the young moon peeped out from a fissure in the clouds which were rapidly careering over its silver disc.

Claude could not be mistaken. It was Sixteen-string Jack!

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Claude sat on his horse, like one petrified, and yet he tried hard, even at that moment of mortal perturbation to make himself think that he must be in some manner the slave of an over-excited imagination.

There was only one circumstance that completely put an end to that feeling, and prevented him from laying such a solace to his mind, and that was, he had before that, in another scene and under other circumstances, seen the figure.

"It must be real," he gasped.

Soon, too, something else, conspired to make him think that it was not a delusion, and that was the fact that the spectre was evidently making great speed to get away from him, which would not have been the case, he thought if his fancy had conjured up the apparition.

Claude was by no means inclined, notwithstanding the horror that had come over him, to give up the chase.

"What," he said to himself, "shall I live all the remainder of my life, be it short or long, in dread of this visitation and its dreadful unknown powers. No —no. Rather let me have the worst at once, than that imagination should make such a coward of me."

With this determination, he touched Sue slightly on the neck, and notwithstanding that faithful animal had with the rare instinct of her nature, comprehended that terror had usurped the place of courage and confidence in her master, she bounded forward after the now rapidly retreating horseman.

Claude, when once he made up his mind to any course, was, as the readers of this most veritable and eventful chronicle of his achievments well know, not exactly the sort of individual to draw back, and it was quite in accordance with his general character that now, as he gallopped after the rapidly retreating horseman, he cried, in stentorian accents,—

"I'll follow you, were it to the infernal regions, and

> Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
> Bringst with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
> I'll speak to thee."

The wind swept the dim clouds over the fair face of the young moon, and rather a moaning sound rustled the branches of the giant trees that were upon the heath, while the only other sound that came upon the ears of Claude was the beat of his own horse's feet upon the hard ground, as with such speed he pursued the spectre.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STRANGE CAPTURE.—CLAUDE'S INDOMITABLE COURAGE.

Claude knew that he was well mounted. It was not from the partiality of affection, or from the vanity of habit, that he had come to consider Sue as almost unequalled, for he had had too many opportunities when life and liberty were at stake, to test the powers of that noble creature, not to feel that she needed not the voice of unfair flattery to fix her as an unrivalled racer, and yet he now fancied that the spectre horseman really gained upon him.

If anything could, more than another, tend to make Claude believe that he whom he pursued was really a something more than natural, it was this apparant fact of his distancing Sue. But his imagination had more to do with such a state of things than anything else.

The spectre horseman took a route across the heath in the northern direction, so that, at all events, it was not likely to be an embarassing one, by getting among houses, for Claude well knew that between where he now was and the little bridge over the Brent river, there were but few mansions, in none of which the retreating man or fiend was likely to find shelter.

"If I can but keep him in view," said Claude, as he glanced up to the clouds which were rapidly, and to him, most provokingly, accumulating over the moon's disc, "if I can but keep him in view, all will be well, but if he once gets out of sight and hearing I shall feel that the night's chase is over, and that I have again to wait until the spectre-horseman crosses my path."

And now a new and most uncomfortable idea came across the mind of Claude, and, although he was certainly not a person full of superstitious imaginings, yet for a time he could not resist the strange impression which this notion produced upon him.

It was this!

"I have heard," he said, "that the appearance of the dead three times to a living person, is at once quite conclusive of the rapidly approaching fate of that person. I have now seen that spectre twice. Perhaps when I see it again I may be breathing almost my last in this world, and the bloodhounds of the law may be sufficiently close upon my track to have me soon in their meshes."

Claude was, like most persons who have led a strange, desultory, adventurous sort of life, much of a fatalist, so that when both reason and imagination were puzzled, he quietly threw himself back upon that belief, and submitted to what he called his destiny.

A more convenient mode of getting rid of difficulties could not very well be suggested. But still it answered its purpose, and, under many circumstances of great danger, when ordinary men would have been perfectly appalled at not being able to find some resource of safety, Claude awaited what he considered the course of inevitable destiny with the calmness of a stoic.

He saw by the darker colour now by the road side, for he had got into a regular road track, that there was a considerable patch of grass close at hand, and he turned Sue on to it, for the purpose of sufficiently deadening the sound of her footsteps to enable him to listen for those of the spectre horseman.

A moment's strict attention sufficed to convince him that the chase was continuing upon the high road to Hendon, and, so long as it did so continue, he considered that the result surely must be safe, for no mortal horse could for long continue a race with Sue, and that the spectre rode upon a mortal steed was surely evidenced by its hard tramp upon the road.

"Things of air and vapour," said Claude, "do not make so palpable a tread upon the green earth, so let us on, my Sue, and see if we cannot terminate this wild adventure."

The sound of Claude's voice always had a cheering effect upon Sue, and in this instance, accompanied as it was by a pat upon her neck, it did not fail. She started off again like the wind.

There had been, however, a slight pause while Claude was listening to the sound of the horse's feet, so that the spectre might be fairly supposed to have got an additional start of him, but, at the rate Sue now proceeded, that start was not likely to last for long.

The clouds, too, that had obscured the face of the moon, were evidently clearing off, and a soft, faint, white light began to spread itself over all objects. It was a strange misty-like light, too, and had the effect of exciting the imagination of Claude still more powerfully than before. However, he was not disposed upon that account to pause again, and just as he reached some high ground, which com-

manded a view of the then little rustic bridge across the Brent, he caught sight of the retreating horseman, standing with his steed apparently motionless upon the bridge.

This was a slight check to Claude, for it looked as if he were being waited for, and after all, with his courage, an interview in so solitary a spot, with a supernatural being, was not one of the most comfortable things to be looked forward to.

The moon suddenly broke through a mass of clouds, and there could be no mistake about the horse and man waiting upon the bridge. Without relaxing his speed in the least, Claude dashed on until he could not be farther from the object of his pursuit than a distance which Sue in a few moments would have most completely obliterated, and then, both horse and rider disappeared over the parapet of the bridge, or through its centre, Claude could not well decide which.

Now, that this was the likely and probable mode by which a spectre should take its leave of any one pursuing it, it came forcibly upon Claude's mind, and he immediately checked the speed of Sue, and with a saddened feeling, for it was dreadful to him, to be thus convinced of the supernatural character of the appearance, he slowly made his way to the bridge, beneath which ran the brawling little Brent river.

"Yes," he said. "There can be no doubt. That was the spectre of poor Jack."

The bridge was soon gained, and Claude stood exactly upon the spot where he had seen the spectre so suddenly disappear from.

The clouds had again obscured the moon's disc, so that he could only hear, without seeing, the waters below, which at that place formed a little cataract, and came brawling along with mimic fury. The trees, and there were many, both tall and stately, cast a deepened gloom upon the scene, while the wailing of the wind among their branches, seemed to him like the melancholy requiem of the dead, or as if the natural elements had been affected by the recent appearance of that apparition.

"This is more than strange," said Claude. "It is horrible.

He shuddered as he spoke, and then asked himself what should be his next step. At one moment, he thought that he had better at once proceed to London again, or cut across the country to some of his old haunts upon the Western Road, and then again he should break his word to old Mathew at the Antlers by not returning.

"He will think something has scared me, and that I dare not come back," said Claude.

This was quite a sufficient motive for him to turn his horse's head in the direction of the old inn, and in another moment he would have been off, but that a most unforeseen accident prevented him.

Just as he was upon the point of touching Sue's bridle, he heard a loud splash in the water, upon the other side of the bridge to that where there was the little cataract.

The splash was one loud enough to make itself heard above all the roar and dash of the water, as it fell down the little fall, and rushed through the narrow confines of the bridge. Nothing but the sudden descent into the stream of some very heavy body, could have produced such a sound. In a moment, it turned the current of all Claude's thoughts.

To fling himself from the back of Sue was his first impulse, and then rushing to the parapet of the bridge, he looked eagerly over into the stream, when he saw, notwithstanding the darkness, the form of a horse and rider stemming the little cataract, and swimming towards the green sloping bank of an estate that coasted the river for some distance to the spot.

Claude watched with the most intense interest the progress of the swimming steed. He saw the creature urged on by its rider, make several ineffectual attempts to leave the water, and climb up the bank of earth, that margined the lawn that was skirted by the river.

The horseman, by both whip and spur, was urging the animal to desperate



THE RESUSCITATION OF SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

efforts, but all was use'ess. The moment it, by a bold plunge, seemed something of a foothold, the crumbling ground gave way, and with a loud splash it was in the water again.

From this secure position upon the bridge, and with the parapet to steady his aim, nothing would have been easier for Claude than to have shot the spectre, for that it was the same form he had been pursuing he did not entertain a doubt; but the fact that, really or falsely, the form was the representation of Sixteen-string Jack, stayed his hand.

"I think," he muttered to himself, "that Sue would make good a footing even upon that slippery grass and crumbling loam."

As he spoke, he saw that the horseman was making use of a very different method to overcome the difficulty he was in.

Throwing himself off his stead, he made himself for the bank, still retaining the bridle in his hand, and thus released of his weight, and assisted by the bridle, the horse soon regained the land.

By this time, Claude had felt himself compelled to come to a conclusion that it was no spectre that he was pursuing, and the only rational way in which he could account for the whole affair was, that some knight of the road who had been intimately acquainted with Sixteen-string Jack, had managed to make up his face head, and figure, in such a way as so closely to resemble the deceased highwayman, that even he, Claude, himself was taken in by the likeness.

At all events, he made up his mind now that he would know who it was that had given him so much trouble and annoyance.

"I will follow this apparition," he exclaimed, "if apparition it be, and if it be not, I will make him, who has so imposed upon me, receive the consequences of his folly."

Whatever was to be done, it was quite clear now must be done quickly, and, accordingly, Claude took Sue by the bridle, and led her by the side of the bridge down a little deep descent that conducted to the water, and when there, he, by the dim light, saw tolerably well what had been the abiding place of the spectre horseman, before, most probably by a mere slip, the horse plunged into the stream.

The stream was not so wide as in periods of heavy rain it was accustomed to be, and so there was just beneath the bridge a small slip of sandy-looking ground, partly covered with ashes, where no doubt he who was pursued had fondly hoped to find concealment for a time.

Claude noted this without making any delay in his progress, and mounting on his own steed, he gently urged it to the water.

Sue could swim like a fish, and was quite as tractable in the water as upon land, so that Claude had no difficulty in guiding her to the edge of the lawn, but he went a little lower than the point where the spectre horseman had made his repeated failures, and close by the roots of a large willow, whose pendant branches overhung a great portion of the stream, Claude found that the horse obtained at once a good foothold.

In another moment he was upon the lawn.

By this manœuvre of going lower down and being completely hidden by the willow tree, Claude calculated that he might succeed in stealing a march, as it were, upon the spectre, and such indeed seemed to be the case, for he saw that personage just slowly walking his horse round the angle of what seemed to be a conservatory, as he (Claude) reached the centre of the lawn.

A moment's consideration decided Claude that now to follow on foot would be the safest plan. He well knew that Sue would not stray from the spot where he might choose to leave her, and indeed the fine soft herbage of the well-kept lawn appeared to be very attractive to her, and therefore, hastily dismounting, he ran forward, his footsteps being perfectly noiseless upon the grass.

The spectre, if we may be allowed still to call the retreating horseman by that name, was mounted again; it was a matter quite evident to Claude that he was proceeding with the caution of one unacquainted with the premises.

"I shall at length," uttered Claude to himself, "I shall at length resolve this question, I presume, and find who it is that by such a marvellous chance, or by such little less than marvellous art, contrives to make himself the very image of one whom I know to be no more."

Some feeling of curiosity to know how far and to where he would go prevented Claude from rushing at once upon the spectre, but he soon found cause bitterly to repent of that amount of forbearance, for upon turning the corner of some flowing tall shrubs, a low fence leading to a paddock presented itself, and in a moment the spectre leaped it, and was off at a gallop.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CAPTURE OF THE SPECTRE.—A SURPRISE.

Claude in a moment turned to mount, and with him this was usually the work of a moment, but somehow or other he was longer than customary; his foot slipped in his haste from the stirrup, and though such a trifling incident delayed him but a moment, yet it gave the spectre an advantage he was rapidly increasing; but a moment more and Claude Duval was on horseback.

A gentle pressure of the spur upon the sides of Sue was enough to induce her to follow the flight of the spectre, and away she flew over the wall in the pursuit.

"Again eluded," thought Claude, "but pursuit is not hopeless. I will be satisfied this night, if it be possible, what the being is who has thus more than once crossed my path."

When he got into the road he reined up, and cast a look towards town, but there were no signs of anything moving, and though enshrouded in trees, yet he could see far up the road; he paused a moment, and turned his gaze in the other direction; he could see nothing there either; but on listening he fancied he heard the sound of a horse galloping away in the distance.

Without a thought more he pressed on in the chase, and after riding a few hundred yards, he came more in the uncertain light of the moon, and thought he could see before him the form of a horseman; but the large trees that grew on either side of the way offered so many impediments to vision that he could make nothing out with certainty.

But he pressed on, and Sue did her duty right gallantly, for she stretched onward with good will, and the ground was passed over so rapidly, that the flitting spectre before them at length came into view, just in time to see him turn to the right, and then he again disappeared.

"Gone again," muttered Claude. "It flits before me like the phantom light in fields and marshes."

Another moment and Claude had also reached the spot where the apparition had disappeared. It was a broad opening, with an inn on the left hand, a smithy, and some small houses, and then it suddenly narrowed as it ran down hill, and was lost among the dark trees and the foliage of some woods and plantations.

Claude in a moment guessed how matters stood, and dashed at once across the green, and into a small coppice at the end, and was soon amongst the trees.

The road was a descent for a few score yards, and then it led a short way up to the right; but here it was a very sharp ascent, but Claude heeded it not, but rode rapidly up that, and then found, when on the summit, a bridle path, hardly deserving the name, to the left, which he took.

This he followed for some minutes almost in utter darkness, for there was a cloud over the moon, and if there had not been, the foliage would have rendered the finest moonlight useless.

However, this did not remain long, for on coming to an opening in some trees he saw the stranger at a little distance ahead of him. It would seem as though the same things that were impediments to Claude Duval's progress became the same to him.

This caused Claude to urge Sue on, and accordingly he dashed onward, but this manœuvre had been anticipated by the stranger, who had urged his own steed onward.

After about ten minutes, they again emerged upon the same road, and Claude could see the same spectre on ahead of him, about a score or two yards. This was vexing, and Claude began to feel something more than the strange feeling with which he had hitherto looked upon the strange apparition.

He began to feel that he had been beaten, and his mare, he was convinced, was as good as the stranger's.

"He can't have a better," muttered Claude to himself, "and if he gets away

it will be a strange thing to me; something more than u ual must be at work. Come, Sue, we must step out again."

As he muttered these words audibly, he pressed his legs against his mare's side, and away she went, the sound of her feet upon the road came in regular and rapid beats. All was still, save this, and the sound accompanied him as he rode through the parish of Hendon.

However, Claude now saw that he was gaining ground upon the stranger, who had made many efforts to escape him, and who evidently had some object in avoiding him.

Was it terror, or was it some unearthly creature, who re-visited the earth with the glimpses of the moon? If it were, it certainly had shuffled off its old habits with its mortal coil, for the old roads and likely spots were its chosen stations.

Could it intend only to levy contributions upon the spirits passing from earth to heaven. If it were so, it surely was usurping the functions of the clergy.

Be it what it might, Claude was more and more resolved to fathom the mystery; the excitement of riding, and the chase, dissipated much of the undifined feelings of dread or awe with which he had before regarded the strange appearance.

They had now ridden some distance, sometimes diving down some of the lanes leading to Edgware, and then, breaking through gaps, and returning across the fields.

This had been done more than once, when they were near an old fashioned mansion, surrounded by tall trees, whose luxuriant growth bespoke the absence of the woodman's axe.

In amongst these trees the stranger seemed to plunge, just as Claude Duval thought he must be within his power, for Sue had overtaken them or nearly so; and to save himself, the stranger dashed into the grounds that immediately surrounded the court-yard.

Here Claude reined up, and entered over a broken gate, and soon found himself in an open avenue of trees.

The moon at that moment shed her light cheerily, though mildly, for a cloud that had long been hanging over partially now passed away, and by this light Claude saw the stranger's horse loose in the avenue, and upon looking further, he saw the same figure entering the mansion we have noticed.

Claude dashed up after him, and when near the door, dismounted, and proceeded as fast as he could to secure the mare to the broken rails that yet stood; this done, he looked up at the mansion as if to ascertain its character before he entered it.

It was a fine old house, substantial but empty.

"Ah!" said Claude, "one that has had many a festive scene in it, I'll warrant; but I'll fathom this mystery, if I live."

As he spoke, he placed his foot upon the step connected with the door, when he met the stranger's face, suddenly thrust out of the door with so much precipitation, and the white moonlight came full upon it, and it looked so ghastly, that Claude for the moment was unable to advance; indeed he took a step or two backwards.

A moments thought, however, suggested to him that the stranger's head had only been thrown out to discover if his horse were safe, or if indeed he were pursued, for on observing him it had been instantly withdrawn from the doorway.

What, however, struck Claude so much, was the certainty he felt that it was the head and face of Sixteen-string Jack.

This for a moment had a great effect upon him; but at length recovering from his surprise and amazement, not to say consternation, he rushed into the house, in search of this mysterious being, and by coming to a struggle to ascertain, if possible, of what character he was, that had so much alarmed him.

As soon as he got into the hall, he found that he was too late, for the spectre, if such it were, was in the rooms above, for he could hear him moving across the rooms overhead.

Up the flight of stone stairs before him, Claude Duval rushed with all the

speed he could, and entered the first room that presented itself, but it was empty.

There was no time to deliberate; Claude saw there was another door, and to that he flew and found another, which led yet further through a small passage into a gallery; here Claude again caught sight of the fleeting object of his pursuit.

Claude had run from room to room, up one flight of stairs and down another, until his breath was nigh spent, but yet he was resolved to hunt down the object that had caused him so much alarm and uneasiness, if he could exert a limb.

At length, he entered a room panting with haste, and had got across the apartment before he was aware that there was no other outlet to it; but on looking round, the stranger had just shot through the very door which he himself had entered, no doubt finding there was no other means of escape.

Claude Duval dashed after him, and they were hardly too paces apart, when some of the woodwork of the stairs gave way under the stranger's feet, and he fell; Claude Duval also fell from the same cause, but he contrived to grasp the throat of the stranger, who was decidedly flesh and blood.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A STRANGE MEETING.—AN OLD FRIEND.

In a few minutes more they lay on the flooring at the foot of the stairs, both half-stunned and out of breath, and incapable of making much exertion. The moon's beams were hidden for a moment, and Claude could hear and feel that the stranger breathed heavily and rapidly, as he himself breathed; he felt he was a living man like himself, and he was slowly rising to gain his advantage of position over the fallen man, who, however, did the same thing himself, and had partially arisen.

The moon's rays now fell full upon them, and Claude Duval's gaze fell full upon the face and features of the supposed spectre, and he now knew them fully as being those of Sixteen-string Jack. The rays of the moon, however, had contributed to throw over them a peculiar pallid hue, and they looked so unearthly that Claude could not help an involuntary shudder, and exclaimed—

"Sixteen-string Jack, by Heaven!"

"What, Claude Duval!" exclaimed the spectre, endeavouring to rise, while Claude, hearing his name repeated in such well known accents, recoiled a little.

"'Tis Claude," said the stranger, "'tis his voice."

"Yes. I am Claude Duval," he said, recovering himself, and rising upon his feet; "but—but—"

"I am Sixteen-string Jack. Are you sorry to meet an old friend, Claude? You sought one?"

"Yes," said Claude, "I should be glad to see Sixteen-string Jack, but I saw him hanged, and you know—"

"Thereby hangs a tale," said Jack, "which I will unfold to you in a more fitting place. I was hanged, Claude, you are right enough. I wish I had known it was you who was riding after me, I would have spared my nag."

"Well," said Claude, "there are some things that we believe, yet cannot understand them. I thought you a dead man, and yet I cannot doubt you live now, though I can't understand how it is."

"That you shall soon, Claude Duval," replied Jack. "You thought me a dead man—well, you were right; I was hanged, and I believe dead; but here I am again. Come, we had better adjourn to a more convenient place than this; you are sure of who I am, Claude, are you not?"

The inquiry was made because Claude still seemed unable to recover his wonted spirits and decision, and continued to gaze upon Jack in a most marked manner.

"Yes," replied Claude Duval, "I believe, though I don't understand; but I suppose there is something behind, that will appear on explanation."

"It will, Claude; and now we will seek our horses," continued Jack; "I left mine loose, and I may have some trouble to find him."

"I secured my horse," said Claude.

"Then perhaps you'll give me your assistance to catch mine, since it is at liberty, though she is very quiet."

"With all my heart, Jack; but where do you intend to go to when you are mounted?"

"Wherever you like, Claude. I am very retired at present, indeed I can't well show myself anywhere where I have been known, lest I should cause what is termed a sensation."

"And scare your old friends from their propriety."

"Indeed, you are right; my supposed death has cut me off from all the benefits of society."

"You are worse off," added Claude Duval, "than if you had not the benefit of clergy."

"Something of the same; but no matter. Where do you live? in what cave do you contrive to elude the friendship of Bow-street?"

"You shall see presently; do you know Golder's-green?"

"Yes, well."

"You know the 'Antlers' there, I dare say?"

"I know there is such a place, though I cannot say I have been often there," said Jack. "I may have been in the house, and indeed I think I have; but it is all strange to me."

"Well, there I am in safety, and it's an easy ride to Finchley or to London, and for the matter of that, it's right for all roads on this side of the Thames, you know."

"Yet there are good roads from London to Edgware, and good cross roads, too; and then you are soon on the Uxbridge, Oxford, and Bath roads."

"Handy for all quarters," replied Claude. "But now, Jack, we may as well get out of this place, since we neither have any business here or any purpose."

They both got out of the place which they had fallen into, and then quitted the old mansion, and walked down the avenue in search of their cattle, with very different feelings to those with which they entered it.

"You must confess," said Claude, "since you showed your heels, that you had no idea the meeting would end so pleasantly by half, when you rolled down stairs."

"I will admit that; but then you will have to admit a little too, for I believe in my heart that you had any notion but the right one as to who I was and what I was."

"Truly, I had no notion as to what you were, for I had more than one doubt upon the subject; I resolved to follow you and discover who and what you were, I was so disturbed at your appearance; and hence it was I determined to run you down."

"And I endeavoured to run away."

"You have escaped once or twice before," replied Claude. "I was so struck with your likeness, that I was unable to act promptly enough to attract your attention."

"And I," said Sixteen-string Jack, "saw in every man a Bow-street officer, one who was about to drag me to that death from which I had been recalled, and which I have no wish to have done again."

"The recovery of the hanging?"

"Neither—I would not desire to be brought to life again if I were again hanged."

"Well, here is my mare," said Claude, "and now for yours. Where did you leave her?"

"In the avenue. I had no time to secure her among the trees as I at first designed. I thought if you passed by you might overlook the mansion—and if not, when once you were in the house, why I could slip out, find my nag, and off again."

"A good plan," said Claude, "a very good plan for an escape; but I'm glad it failed."

"Why, yes, as it has turned out, I am very glad it did fail; you kept so close upon me, that I had no time even to turn, much less to get out and mount my horse."

"Well, we shall have a night of it yet."

"I see my horse, Duval; do you ride down to the entrance, he may attempt that road, and you can then secure him. I've no mind to walk to the Antlers."

"And the loss of a horse may be the loss of a head," remarked Claude, patting the neck of his own mare; "nay, Sue has saved my neck more than once, and I expect she may do so again."

"A good horse on the road, Claude, is half the battle."

"You are right," said Claude, as he trotted down the avenue of trees until he came to the entrance, where he pulled up and waited the coming of Sixteen-string Jack or his horse.

The latter's horse, however, had been somewhat blown, and showed no design of running away, and allowed his rider to seize the bridle, and to bestride him without any opposition; then turning his head, Jack joined Claude Duval at the entrance, and once more quitted the vicinity of the old mansion.

"Towards London?" said Jack.

"Yes, for a quarter of an hour's ride," said Claude Duval, "and then we shall be in safety."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK'S RELATION.

The moon was high and the evening fine, not a cloud remained to chequer the sable expanse, as black as night is painted by poets; but there were thousands of stars; faint, it is true, were their mimic rays; but the moon shone so brightly that she robbed night of half its power, and set a charm upon nature, that those who have seen it alone can appreciate its beauty.

They rode along at a gentle trot, now and then glancing to the right and left, as they gained upon grounds where they could have a full view of the country.

"There is nobody out to-night," said Jack, as they rode along the road for some distance without meeting any one.

"No," replied Claude, "I see none; just now it is as well, unless indeed it were some one who carried a heavy purse."

"Exactly!"

They rode on in silence for about half a mile, and then they came in sight of the "Antlers."

"Here," remarked Claude, "we shall at all events be secure for the night. But we must go cautiously, for old Matthew does not like too much disturbance; he may have visitors, and that might be only to awaken them to the fact that we are come."

"Do as you will," said Jack; "I am obedient to your directions; the promised

rest and friendly intercourse is a boon to me, for I have been compelled to make myself scarce even among intimates."

"I guess as much," replied Claude; "but here we are. I will dismount and give the accustomed signal."

Claude Duval dismounted, and approaching a window, he gave a tap at the pane in a particular manner, at the same time the ostler came out and presented himself.

"We want stable room for two," said Claude; "the horses want well looking to, and to be fed—you understand me?"

"I do, sir: lord love yer, I knows yer ways. I'll feed 'em like princes, and I'll take care of e'em—but step this way, sir, and you shall see the bed I've got made for one of 'em."

"Then make one for the other," observed Jack.

"Ay, ay, sir, I will, in the same stable—no stint of corn and straw here, I can tell you, sir. I'm manager of all that."

"In that case we shall not forget the management, if it's liberal," remarked Jack.

They followed the ostler into the stable, and saw the horses carefully attended to; then they adjourned to the house, in the passage of which they heard some sounds of mirth and jollity, but Claude opening a small door, old Matthew appeared.

"I want a private room, Matthew," said Claude.

"You can have one," said old Matthew, in a whisper.

"Good; now let us have some of your choicest wine, Matthew," said Claude, "for I have a friend whom I wish to honour; let us have a good supper—anything good and quick."

"You may depend upon all that," replied the landlord. "I was waiting for you myself."

"What, is t' ere any one here?"

"No, no, all right—a few in the parlour, but we know them all; but you won't see them."

"Come on then," replied Claude. "Lights and wine—we will have a toast or two before we see daylight again."

The landlord preceded them up stairs with a light, while Claude Duval and Sixteen-string Jack followed into a small but neatly furnished room, where the landlord placed the candle on the table, saying as he walked to the door—

"I'm glad to see any friend of yours, Mr. Duval, and will do my best to entertain him and you too, Mr. Duval."

"I know that, Matthew; you know what good cheer is!"

The landlord left the room, and in a few minutes an excellent supper was set before them, of which they partook heartily, for their ride had given them appetites fit to do justice to a less enticing meal.

When the supper things were cleared away, and the wine placed on the table, Claude Duval in pouring out a bumper said to his companion—

"Jack, I wish you prosperity and a long life—I am glad to see one back whom I had looked upon as dead!"

"Thank you, Claude," said Jack; "all I say is, let the dead alone when once they are gone."

Jack took a bumper, and after quaffing it, said—

"You remember when and where you last parted with me?"

"In Holborn."

"Yes, I was on my road to Tyburn."

"You were," said Claude, "and little did I expect to find you upon any other road again!"

"Perhaps not—here I am, however—I got to Tyburn in due course, and was elevated in the usual manner, and attended by many a gaping fool and admiring brother—the gentlemen connected with the object of the procession; the rope was



CLAUDE AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK BETRAYED BY OLD MATTHEW.

adjusted as they call it, that is, it was put round my throat with due deliberation and regard to immediate choking.

"The next thing I felt was a sudden shock—pain, and a feeling as if the world were swimming away from me.

"The next sensation I experienced was dreadful—or rather it was a compound and collection of all manner of evils that the human body can suffer.

"I felt as if I were on fire; nails were being driven into my body; suppose I had been frozen thoroughly, and then imagine me put incautiously before a large fire,

when part of my members begin to char, the body swells, and the blood begins to circulate with an agony that words cannot paint."

"It must have been no joke," replied Claude.

"Indeed you are right, it was the most fearful moment that ever I felt in my life; I do not desire such another, even to gain life. I think that it lasted a long time; but of time I had no idea: I was suffering a martyrdom, an agony inexpressible.

"At one moment I fancied flashes of lightning were passing through my body from one end to the other. I thought I could see flashes of light shoot from my eyes.

"In time I sat up; I think I made many attempts to do so; but I found myself in a reclining position.

"Life was returning. I looked about. I thought the rope had broken when I had hung a minute or so, and that I was suffering the effects of reanimation and choking; fearful that I should suffer this again, I said,—

"'For God's sake hang me and have done with it; I don't want to be butchered in this way.'

"'Oh, s'help me, Father Abraham,' said a voice, 'he tinks he's got the halter about his neck! Take courage, my tear.'

"I did not understand it all; I looked, or tried to look—my eyes had been swollen, and the light came in too great abundance, and rendered all a mass of confusion.

"At length I discovered I was not in a crowd at Tyburn, but in a small room in which there were lights and a fire, with some strange apparatus. I started up.

"'Where am I?' I exclaimed.

"'Ah, tere's a question,' said the same voice. 'I know now tat he lives. Oh, yes, when a man asks such a question as tat, you may depend, tho' he's abroad a bit, he's alive.'

"The truth was, I had been taken to a Jew chemist, who had resolved to practice some experiments respecting the supposed theory of recovering people who have been dead.

"I recovered; but the recovery was a thousand times worse than the death inflicted. They behaved with humanity to me. I was placed in some blankets, and some strong stimulants administered to me. Indeed, between one thing and another—chemical experiments, and what he called electricity and strong water—I fell bewildered, and completely unable to tell how many lights burned in the room, and fell into a state of insensibility, much resembling a deep sleep.

* * * * * * *

"When I awoke I found it was daylight. The sun's beams broke through a small window, across which were several iron bars. I lay in bed, and there was some attempt at conveniences—mean—but enough for all purposes.

"I got up in bed—I felt that there was something the matter with me—my neck was horribly painful. I immediately recollected the halter, and put my hand up to my neck, when I found a large mark or swelling, at least, it felt so to me."

"An uncomfortable sensation," remarked Claude.

"Very," said Jack—"most uncomfortable, both from the fact and the association, and so I thought at the time."

"You, however, recollect nothing?"

"I do; and what amazed me most was, that the time between the moment when I was turned off, and that in which I came to life again, to me appeared to be one and the same,—there was no interval between them, though, from what I learned afterwards, it must have been two hours, at least, before I survived."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK'S CONTRACT WITH THE JEW APOTHECARY.

"An unpleasant affair, but yet a narrow escape."

"Well," said Jack, "I can hardly call it an escape, because I was put through the ordeal, and I absolutely entered the jaws of the monster, though I live to tell the tale."

"And came out at the other end."

"I certainly passed through all that I could. I could have felt, or been conscious of, no more, had I been left alone for a hundred years."

"That is true," remarked Claude, thoughtfully. "Had a bullet gone through your brain, it would have prevented the possibility of your recovery; but I think you would have been conscious of no more."

"Decidedly not," said Jack; "however, I found myself very feverish, and very totterish. I was weak. I laid hold of the water at hand and drank. I felt myself revived, though swallowing was not accomplished without a slight reminiscence of the halter. I suffered some pain.

"I began now to recollect the past—I recollected Tyburn—I recollected indistinctly, the occurrences of the night before. I began to dress myself, and I succeeded in accomplishing my object.

"When I had walked about once or twice, I was anxious to leave the room, and proceeded to open the door; but here I found myself at fault, for the door was secured. I examined the lock, and found there was no key.

"I was puzzled. I looked again. The key was evidently on the other side.

"Well, thought I, this is a very strange affair. Locked in—the windows barred—hanged and all. Was it a dream, or had aaybody secured me comfortable lodgings in the next world?"

"Ah, that was well thought of."

"Indeed you are right; but I hadn't been thus puzzled long before I heard some one approach. The door was unlocked, and a very strange and mysterious child of Israel appeared."

"Quite dramatic," said Claude.

"Yes, and with your permission, as I have had reason to know, I may add, quite tragic too.

"The Jew entered, and stood for a moment looking at me with a twinkling eye and pleased countenance, in which was a great deal of cunning, mixed with mystery.

"'Ah, my tear, so there you are, peautiful and plooming. Oh, you ish nish——'

"'Why,' I replied, 'I am better than I could expect to be.'

"'Oh, no tout of it, my tear. I heard you walk about, so I thought you wanted your preakfast.'

"'I am obliged to you,' I replied; 'but I have much to thank somebody for, and I don't know yet whom.'

"'Oh, never mind about that, you may tank me—I did it all, you know; but you needn't tell anybody, you know. But come down stairs, and we will talk over the matter. Come along, come along.'

"I accordingly followed him, and we entered into a small apartment, where there was a breakfast laid for two.

"Sit town, my tear, and eat, and trink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die, he! he! he!'

"'Yesterday we did, if you please,' said I; 'but how came I here, I don't know; but nevertheless I can enjoy my food, I think, despite all the inconvenience of a sore ring round my gullet, thanks to the halter.'

"'Ah, never mind, my tear, you are safe; eat, trink, and be wise, that's petter you know.'

"The old Jew locked the door, and put the key in his pocket, saying as he did so,—

"'Now, my tear, we can have a little conversation without any fear of interruption. You know very well you were hanged, do you not, eh, my tear?'

"'Yes,' I replied.

"'Very well. Now listen, but go on with your breakfast; you needn't leave off eating. You were going to say you were very grateful, and all that sort of thing; but never mind, you may show your gratitude if you have any, in a much better way than that, 'cause 'tis all worts.'

"'Very well,' said I, eating very heartily of some bacon, 'show me how, and I will do it.'

"'You know, my tear, though I brought you to life again, yet if I were to let the runners know the least inkling of the fact, you'd soon see Tyburn again.'

"'Yes, but that cannot be your object, else why did you recall me to life to treat me thus?'

"'For this reason, my tear—you and I may do a litttle business, that may be mutually beneficial.'

"'With all my heart,' said I.

"'Well, then, my tear, you know life is worth having, and you will not object to pay me fifteen shillings out of every pound you get on easy terms.'

"'Well,' said I, somewhat startled, 'you mean to say you'll take five shillings out of every twenty!'

"'No, my tear, fifteen out of every twenty—not take, but you'll give—not take at all, my tear—'tis life, and life is very precious, very precious, indeed, and worth it.'

"The terms are hard,' I replied, 'but I will agree to them; but I am afraid that I shall be an unproductive servant, seeing I have neither horse nor means.'

"'All that shall be cared for, my tear,' replied the Jew, 'now you have agreed to my terms; but beware of playing me false, for I have means of knowing things that you cannot believe, or even understand; so let me caution you.'

"'No fear of that,' said I; 'but when do we commence operations?'

"'As soon as you please—to-morrow?"

"'Agreed,' said I. On the morrow I was put in possession of a good horse, suit of clothes, case of pistols, and a purse with some ten or fifteen gold pieces."

"Well, said Claude Duval, "a most extraordinary circumstance; but at what a moderate price you were required to pay for your permission to live."

"Very."

"And you paid it?"

"I did; I couldn't help it. I always found the Jew at my elbow. I once, at Finchley, stopped a banker with about six hundred pounds."

"A good night's work, Jack."

"It was. I made up my mind to quit London for the west of England, and had scarcely set spurs to my horse, when I ran up against my friend the Jew, who was always at hand in this manner, appearing where least expected, how I could not tell."

"He followed you."

"I can't tell; I kept a sharp look-out after him, but never found him doing so; though the road before and behind was open for miles, there he was.

"'Money,' said he.

"'Very well,' said I, and I gave him a hundred guineas.

"'Three hundred and fifty guineas more, my tear,' said he; 'and if you were generous, you'd give me my travelling expenses too.'

"I gave the money; I should have been tracked if I had not, and it's only by paying him that I do not get into the hands of the officers. I don't know which is worst, to get taken and be hanged, or to pay him."

"It must be very irksome, but can't be got rid of."

"It seems not. I would do it immediately if I could, but I can't succeed; what to do I don't know, save it is that indefinite thing, the best one I can."

"And this Jew always attends upon you thus, to receive the money, does he, Jack?"

"Yes, he does, and what is more, he seems always to have some kind of information as to what I ought to give him."

CHAPTER XXXV.

CAPTURE OF JACK AND HIS FRIEND CLAUDE DUVAL.

There was but little time indeed to make anything in the shape of comment upon the extraordinary tale told by Sixteen-string Jack, for events now took place of a nature calculated to obliterate all remembrance of it for a time in the all-absorbing interest of the present.

Claude had just raised his wine glass to his lips, and was about to say something, when old Matthew came into the room in a hurried manner, exclaiming—

"Claude, Claude, there is a travelling carriage at the door. You need not let such an opportunity escape you. Come to the window and you can see it easily. This way; this way. Come along. You are in luck to-night, my boy, I can tell you, for I have already seen a purse well filled with money."

At this intimation, both Claude and Jack naturally enough rose hurriedly from the table and proceeded to the window, where they flattened their noses against the glass in a vain effort to see anything on the outside of the old inn.

All was dim and obscure.

"There's no carriage," said Claude, "that I can see. Why, old Matthew, you must be gifted by the faculty of second sight; as the poet says, you 'see what others cannot see.'"

Scarcely had these words escaped the lips of Claude than he found himself seized by each arm, and upon turning from the window he felt the cold muzzle of a pistol at each of his temples, while a voice said—

"You are my prisoner."

"Prisoner?"

"Yes, make any resistance, and you are a dead man. Our orders and our determination are to take you, whether you be dead or alive, and by Heaven we intend to do it."

"Well, gentlemen," said Claude, who felt the perfect futility of attempting anything at such a moment, "I suppose I need not ask who you are?"

"We are officers, of course."

"Very good, and may I ask if old Matthew there knew anything beforehand of this little projected affair?"

"Yes, he—"

"Hold your tongue, you fool," cried Matthew.

"It's quite sufficient," added Claude. "You have betrayed me, but remember we shall meet again."

"Ah, Jack, so they have nabbed you, too, have they? Well, it can't be helped, and there's no use in making the worst of anything; but you may rest assured, Matthew, that I will settle scores with you."

Matthew tried to laugh, but surely never had anything so unlike a genuine laugh, with any real mirth in it, come from the lips of man. It was quite clear that he positively writhed under the fear that came over him at the threats of Claude Duval.

Had Claude betrayed passion and excitement, he might have had some hopes that in cooler moments the threat would be forgotten; but when such a person with such absolute calmness, announced his determination of settling scores with him, it was enough to make Master Matthew wince.

"You—you—don't mean what you say, Claude?" he stammered. "You will find out that I am not guilty. I have nothing to do with it. How can I prevent the tips from grabbing you?"

Claude disdained to give any answer to this whining appeal, but Sixteen-string Jack, whose indignation showed itself much more boisterously than Claude's, spoke—

"You could have helped it by not peaching," he said; "but beware, for if anything happens to Claude to prevent him from fulfilling his promise to settle scores with you, remember that I owe you a similar debt."

There can be no question but at that moment mine host of the Antlers bitterly repented the part he had played. The heavy drops of perspiration stood upon his brow, and, although he again and again tried to laugh and mutter something about the good of society, he was clearly in a most wretched state of mind.

"Come," said one of the officers, "we cannot stop while you have an altercation. We have only done our duty. You are highwaymen, and we are officers, so as cats catch mice, we catch you."

"You may not find us such mice," said Claude.

"Well, that's as it may happen; but to town we must go to-night."

"I have one favour to ask," said Claude.

"What is it?"

"That you will not place irons upon my wrists."

"Hark you," said one of the officers, "it has been said that, whether you promised good or evil to any one, you never broke your word yet. Now if you will say, upon your honour, that you will make no attempt to escape, you may ride to London with us as comfortably as possible, and with your hands as free as mine."

Claude was silent for a moment or two, and then, in a low voice, he said—

"I cannot promise."

"Exactly," said the officer; "a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse. I did not suppose you would make such a promise, so on goes the darbies."

Claude made no opposition. It would have been madness, and possibly might have resulted in his receiving some personal injury, which would have prevented him from making any effort to obtain his liberty. All he did was to complain that the handcuffs were much too tight, upon which the officer, after finding upon examination that there really was a deep indention upon his wrist, apparently from the pressure of the irons, changed them for a larger pair which he had in his pocket.

As to Sixteen-string Jack, he seemed too much depressed to say anything for a time. The anxious consideration in his mind was, whether he could actually be hung again.

"We have overheard your strange story," said the officer to him, as he was locking the handcuffs. "You ought to have given up the old trade after such an escape."

"If the old trade were to be given up," said Jack, "what would become of you?"

"Ah, that's true enough."

The whole party were soon mounted and at the door of the Antlers, where the thing that gave Claude most concern was, that he was not permitted to mount his own horse, but was placed upon one belonging to the officers, while one of those personages mounted Sue.

Claude smiled faintly as he said—

"You had better let me ride my own steed."

"No, thank you," said the officer.

"Very well. Hilloa! Up, lass—off and away—woa! Chirp, chirp!"

No sooner did Sue hear these cries, than with a snort of defiance she rose upon her hind legs, and then coming down again very suddenly, she made a demi-vault, and the officer lay sprawling in the road, to the great amusement of his companions, who wonderfully enjoyed the joke.

The officer managed to scramble to his feet in some way or another, and then as he rubbed his head, which had received rather a severe concussion, he muttered,—

"Confound the beast, it is as wild as though it never had carried any one. I'll be hanged if I ride it."

"Will you?" said Claude to the other officer.

"No, thank you."

"Then, gentlemen, I presume I may?"

"Oh, yes; confound the brute. Mount it yourself, and see what you can make of it."

Claude smiled, and calling Sue to him, who came with all the gentleness of a pet lamb, he mounted, and to the surprise of the officers, no creature could possibly be more docile than she was.

"We have heard," said one, "much of your mare."

"And let you have heard what you will," replied Claude, "you cannot have heard too much of her excellences. I love her now, next to one other breathing thing, dearer than I love else in all the world. She has saved me many a time."

"Ah, your reign is over now!" said the officer.

"We shall see," said Claude.

Matthew the innkeeper did not show himself again, and now the horses being put to a trot, the whole party went off at good speed towards London.

From that moment Claude dismissed all other objects from his brain, and gave up his whole intellect to a consideration of the means of escaping from the custody of the officers.

In this consideration he felt that he must rather hope to take advantage of circumstances as they might arise, that in any way attempt to evade those circumstances, and he thought that it would go hard with him indeed if something did not take place, even during the course of so brief a journey as was before him, by which he should be able to make some strong effort to free himself.

The next thing he now wished was to get private speech of Sixteen-string Jack for a few moments, but the officers took good care to keep between their prisoners, so that anything of a private character taking place would be necessrily likewise communicated to those ears which it would be most urgent to keep it from.

During these anxious considerations, Claude and his capturers arrived at the verge of Hampstead Heath, and at the moment the party was emerging from the heath, there came upon their ears such a terrific clap of thunder, that it was enough really to appal the stoutest heart.

The officers paused and looked alarmed, which alarm was by no means decreased as a sudden intense darkness swept over the face of nature, and made no object even faintly visible within the space of half-a-dozen yards. Another peal of thunder followed, almost sufficiently soon to mingle with the echoes of the first.

"What is all this?" said one of the officers.

"Only a little storm," said Claude. "Are you afraid? If you are, I and my friend will show you the right way, and take charge of you. You may depend upon us.

"Afraid! No! no!"

"You speak as though you were!"

A flash of lightning, of so awfully dazzling a character, that even in broad daylight it must have been absolutely for the moment blinding, lit up the scene. The officers instantly closed their eyes. The horses reared and showed every sign of fear, but Claude did not even at such a moment of consternation as that, think it worth while to make the attempt that he meant to make. A random shot, and the officers had their pistols ready, might have rather ingloriously terminated his career.

"Steady, Jack," was all he said, and that was in order to let Sixteen-string Jack know that he was fully alive to what was passing around them.

"Spur on," cried the officer, who seemed to be best able to stand the terrors of the storm which had begun with such unexampled fury. "Spur on, and let us get to Camden Town. There is a good lock-up there, and there we can wait till the storm is over. Come on, come on, and remember, prisoners, that I fire at you if you make the least attempt to escape. I am not one who often misses what he means to hit."

Claude made no reply, but accommodated the speed of Sue to the pace at which the officers chose to go, so that the whole party swept down Hampstead Hill, during one of the most terrific storms of thunder and lightning upon record, at a pace that, if any one of the horses had stumbled, it must have hurled its rider to absolute destruction at once.

Horses, however, by some dispensation, seldom stumble when going at a break-neck speed, and the whole party reached the lower tract of land known then and now by the general name of Pancras Vale, in safety.

At that period, fields and hedge-rows upon each side of the way were the only distinguishing characteristics of a spot where now the railway and the suburban villa share all between them. The storm each moment increased in violence, and by the time they had gone half a mile further, and were fairly in the suburbs of Camden Town, a hail shower came on, of such amazing force, that the horses winced under the blows they received from the stones, with which they were literally pelted.

"Ride on, ride on!" cried the officr, as he saw the party were getting scattered a little, "ride on, the lock-up is in sight."

It would seem that Sixteen-string Jack at this moment had an idea that Claude was letting a valuable opportunity for escape pass by him, and being quite unable to control his impatience, he cried,—

"Claude! Claude! remember my fate!"

"Peace," said Claude, "I bide my time."

The officers grasped their pistols tighter, and swore many oaths to the effect that instant death should be the result of the slightest attempt to escape; but Claude said with wonderful calmness,—

"I am fatigued, and quite willing to go to the lock-up."

The exclamation of Sixteen-string Jack had had the effect, however, of putting the officers more upon their guard, so that if Claude had meditated any movement it certainly would have been more difficult than before; but as he really did not just at that time, no real mischief was done.

Luckily for them all, the hail-storm did not last above two minutes; had it kept up with its first fury for any long period of time, it would have been utterly impossible to have borne up against it; it ceased, however, at about a couple of hundred yards from the lock-up.

This lock-up at Camden Town, which in its day had the honour of holding some very celebrated criminals, stood very near the corner of the present Park-street, but it was entirely swept away in the year 1801, when some great changes took place in that locality.

It was a strong compact building of one story, with an immense roof, in which there were small flat red tiles, enough to serve for a whole row of more modern houses. When we say it was a building of one story, we were not counting some lofts just beneath its roof, the height of which was not above four feet at the utmost. The place occupied a good-sized bit of ground, and from time to time so much had been done to make it a place of security, into which might be thrust the footpads and others that infested the North-road, that it was imagined by the authorities to be almost impregnable.

Such, however, was not the case, as we shall see.

"Thank the fates," said one of the officers, as he drew the rein of his horse. "here we are at the lock-up. I never rode through such a storm in all my life."



CLAUDE AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ESCAPING FROM THE LOCK-UP.

"Nor I," said the other.

"I have, frequently," said Claude.

At the abrupt cessation of the trampling of the horses' feet at the door of the lock-up, a man with a red worsted night-cap upon his head, and a pipe in his mouth, looked out, saying—

"Hilloa! any customers for me?"

"Yes," replied the officer. "Here is Claude Duval.'

"The devil! You are Mr. Jefferies, I think?"

"The same. Open the door."

The officials of the place were soon all in a state of commotion. Lights flashed

upon the darkness for a moment, but to be extinguished by the dashing rain that had succeeded the hail, and now came down in one combined sheet of water, and in the midst of all this, Claude and Jack were ushered into the building.

The outer room was long and narrow. A bright fire blazed at one end of it, and above the chimney-piece was a goodly show of blunderbusses, pistols, and cutlasses; but it was not in this apartment that the prisoners were allowed to remain. A door was opened which conducted to what was called the strong room, where the more dangerous class of prisoners were stowed away.

"Here," said the constable, as he pushed through, "you may make yourselves as comfortable as princes, if you only know how to set about it, and if you don't, I'm sure I can't tell you, so you can set your ingenuity to work to find out. Ha! ha! ha!"

The door of the cell was closed upon Jack and Claude.

All was darkness with the exception of a few dim rays of light that found their way through a narrow grating at the top of the door, and that grating, in addition to admitting a dim uncertain kind of light, had likewise the faculty of admitting the converstion of those without.

But if such was the case, it may be fairly concluded by a parity of reasoning, that whatever might be said by the prisoners might reach the ears of the officers—a consummation by no means, to the apprehension of Claude, devoutly to be wished.

"We are lost!" said Jack.

"Say you so?" responded Claude, in a voice which was far from being of a desponding character.

"Yes—what can save us?"

"Silence and discretion," whispered Claude, in the ear of Jack. "Do you not perceive, that by the nature of the arrangements of this place, that any words we may say above the merest whisper will be overheard in the outer room?"

"I did not notice."

"Jack, Jack! you are as different from your former self as possible. Time was when you were so bold and so daring that I was emulous of being like you; but now, if my eyes did not convince me that it was you indeed whom I am with, I should doubt your identity."

Jack was silent for a few moments, and then he said, in a low, dejected voice—

"I will own to you, Claude, that since that horrible day when I was dragged to the gallows, to be made a spectacle of to gaping thousands, I have not been the same man that I was before. A sadness and nervousness has come over me. The shock of that day's proceedings has left me little more than the weak shadow of what I once was!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL'S ESCAPE, WITH SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, FROM THE LOCK-UP AT CAMDEN TOWN.

Some time was passed in silence; Claude Duval remained absorbed in thought, his active and energetic mind was engaged in examining the position he was in, not with regard to any amendment of his condition, but to a total change. Expedient after expedient presented themselves, and were rejected as being impracticable; while his companion, Sixteen-string Jack, was absorbed in thoughts that might almost be called fears.

For this there was a resonable cause, for what Jack had recently suffered was enough to shake the nerves of the boldest and the best; for what between hanging and resuscitation, Bow-street Runners, and a mysterious and omnipresent Jew, he was unable to have an entire command over his nerves or his thinking faculties.

Besides this, they were in a terrible fix: caged in a strong room, which they had no tools to force, and a number of men armed on the outside, where there was the only chance of an escape.

"Well," muttered Claude, between his teeth, "this is a sudden and unexpected change, thanks to old Mathew."

"Yes," said Sixteen-string Jack, "I begin to feel the halter round my neck already—don't you?"

"I never had it there yet," remarked Claude, "and I don't even now think it will be there yet, though I confess we are very securely caged."

"Hush! they'll hear you. I wish it were possible to lay down and die at once. I've had enough to satisfy me with the pomp of suffering—I wish to escape all that——"

"Don't talk of dying," said Claude Duval, "we must encounter the grim tyrant some time, but at the same time, I do not say I like it, and yet I am ready to run my chance among those men."

"What, the officers here?"

"Yes."

"Oh, it would be hopeless—don't think of it, Claude."

"But I do think of it, Jack—you have lost some of your nerve."

"I dare say," said Jack, dejectedly.

"Never mind, Jack—keep your spirits up, man—you are worse now than when I shook hands with you on Holborn-hill."

"Very likely—I've been hanged since then, you know."

"Yes, yes; but listen to the officers, and let us ascertain how the game is to go with them—if we can learn their intentions, then we may be able to make intentions of our own, and, what is more, we may be able to execute them."

Jack offered neither remark nor objection—he was completely cowed by the late events—his nerves were completely shattered, and his spirits had sunk.

Meanwhile the officers were loud and noisy—there was much congratulation and boasting.

"Well," said the keeper of the lock-up, "so you've nabbed the gentleman at last, have you?"

"Yes; and a glorious haul it will be."

"You'll be set up for life."

"Very nearly—a few such hits, old boy, and I'm a made man, and every one of us, and no mistake."

"Did you have much trouble to take him?"

"No. It was a planned affair. The old landlord put me up to the affair—an old dog—but he'll be well paid for it—and I came upon them when they couldn't resist."

"He shall be well paid," said Claude to himself, "he is an old dog, as sure as dogs wear tails."

"Well," remarked the lock-up keeper. "I tell you what, you are an infernal shabby fellow if you don't stand handsomely all round, and make a happy night of it for once."

"I'll do it—but the prisoners must be looked to. I'm not going to lose such a bird for a glass."

"Oh, as to that—we ain't going to get drunk; besides, we can go in every half hour and see if they are all right, that will make your mind easy—besides, they are handcuffed, and there is a strong door between this and them."

This was apparently well relished, and some liquor was sent out for, and as a

commencement, three officers came to visit the prisoners and see that they were quite safe.

"You will be well taken care of here, Mr. Duval," said one of them; "there's little ceremony, tho'—but you'll have enough of that by-and-bye, when your turn is come."

"Yes," replied Claude, "you say very right—but all I can say is, that I am not hanged yet."

"All in good time," said the officer, shutting the door with a bang, and turning the lock. The liquor came, and they commenced a carousal—drinking toasts—singing songs, and every now and then making an examination of the prisoners.

"Now," remarked Claude Duval, after he had been listening to their sounds for more than an hour. "Now the time to make an escape is come. Can you get your handcuffs off?"

"No," said Jack. "And as for an escape, I don't see the time or the means.—it's all up, Claude."

"I never give in, Jack. If you can't get your handcuffs off, I can," and as he spoke he slipped his hands through his irons, which were somewhat too big, and then he examined Sixteen-string Jack's.

The officers came again—but seeing them both as they were before, they returned to their carousal—while the light they brought had given Claude a momentary glance at a piece of iron—or something that glistened on the ground at a little distance from them.

Claude got up and examined it.—It was a key dropped by one of the officers or turnkey—a handcuff key.

"The very thing," muttered Claude, "Now Jack, you handcuffs, let me see what I can do with them."

Claude put the key in, but it was evidently not the key that had been used for them before, but it was something for Claude to have a key at all, that was a great point, for having got it, though the wrong one, yet it was an instrument of which he could make some use, and by dint of using great exertions, he contrived to make an effective use of it, for he forced it round a part of the way, just enough to liberate the ring.

"There," said Claude, "now, Jack, you must do as I do, and when the officers next come, rush upon them, and we must fight our way out."

"It will be desperate."

"Granted, and we must be desperate too; they are more than half overcome by liquor, perhaps fully three parts intoxicated, we are more than a match for any six such men."

Jack made no reply, he followed Claude Duval to the door, where they had not been a minute, before two of the officers, the most active of the lot, came, and not seeing them in the place where they last saw them, they made a rush into the room.

"Jack," said Claude, as he quickly got out, and Jack following, he drew the door to and secured it. "That lessens the number. Now for it, Jack, don't flinch."

The officers inside no sooner saw themselves shut in, than they guessed what was the matter, and gave the alarm. Three or four more presented themselves to prevent their flight, and shots were fired, but Claude flung both pair of handcuffs at their heads, and then flung himself upon them, seconded by Jack, who was rendered active by the prospect of escape, and they speedily overcame all opposition, not without danger or blows, and then when outside the lock-up, Claude secured the door of that also, and in a few minutes more they were some hundred yards from the scene of their adventure.

"Where shall we find refuge now?" said Sixteen-string Jack.

"In London, of course," said Claude. "If you wish to lose your friends, or to evade your foes, let London be your place of refuge; but I am not going without Sue."

"Good God! you will ruin all by remaining merely to look after a horse. Let me implore you to come away at once, Claude, and consider your own safety."

"Do not attempt to advise me on such a subject."

"But listen to reason."

"Jack, you are free to go where you like and leave me. You know I can look after myself. Do not fancy I am angry with you by what I say, for I will meet you were you like in London; but you might as well attempt to turn by your breath the current of the winds of heaven, as now prevent me from making an effort to recover my gallant steed."

"Well, well."

"You will go?"

"No, Claude, no; I will share your fortunes and assist you."

"That was spoken like yourself, Jack. And now let me tell you the task will not be a very difficult one, for in yonder outhouse all the horses are placed."

The door of the outhouse was well secured by a large padlock, but a stone of some half hundred weight which happened to be lying in the road furnished Claude with a ready means of smashing the fastening and opening the door.

"You will not in the dark," said Jack, "be able to pick out your horse from the others."

"There is no occasion," said Claude, "to make the attempt." Then he gave a peculiar whistle, and in another moment there was a bustle in the stable, and out rushed Sue.

The saddle had not been removed, and with a look of triumph at Jack, Claude caressed his steed for a moment; then plunging into the outhouse, he caught the first horse he could lay hands on for Jack, and in another minute they were off and away.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE NOTE FROM CICELY AND THE OPPORTUNE ARRIVAL.

It was towards London that our adventurers took their course, and for more than a mile they galloped on at a speed which rendered conversation entirely out of the question. When, however, they got near to the end of Tottenham-court-road Claude relaxed his speed a little.

"Jack," he said, "you know as many places of safety in London as I do. Only name where you wish to go, and I will soon come to you."

"Can you not accompany me?" said Jack in a desponding tone.

"No; I have some one to make a visit to who is dearer to me than life itself."

"Must it be so?"

"Indeed it must. I am sorry to see you so much depressed. Rally yourself. Come, come, Jack, remember your former reputation. Why, there was not a knight of the road who could come near to you at one time, and now the merest tyro would get the better of you."

"It is true—it is true."

"Well, knowing it to be so, why do you not make a gallant resistance against such a state of mind?"

"Say no more to me, Claude. I wish that I were dead."

"We must talk over this at another time, Jack. In the meantime let me ask you if you are well provided with money, because if you are not, of course my purse is your own."

To Claude's surprise he heard some deep sobs come from Jack, and when he looked closely at him he saw that he was nearly falling from his horse.

"Good heavens! Jack," he said, "what is the meaning of all this?"

"Claude, will you do me an act of mercy?"

"Yes, surely."

"Take one of your pistols then, if you happen to have one about you, and blow my brains out."

"And act of murder, and of folly, you ought to have named that, Jack, and not one of mercy. You must not groan in this way, or you will make me fancy that you have gone out of your senses altogether, and I shall have to be at the expense of keeping you comfortable at some lunatic asylum."

Claude said this in rather a laughing manner, for his object was to rally Jack out of his despondency; but, on the contrary, the mental agony of the latter rather seemed to increase than to decrease, and turning to Claude, he said—

"I will delay my confession no longer. I have something to say."

"Confession?"

"Yes, confession."

"But you have nothing to confess to me."

"Yes, Claude, I have."

"Well, well, go on then. Alas, poor fellow!" thought Claude to himself, "is it as I suspected, his wits have decidedly forsaken him. That hanging business has been the destruction of him, and it is a great pity the Jew doctor ever restored him to life again after he had once shut his eyes upon this world."

"May I speak?" added Jack.

"Oh, certainly. Come now, Jack, tell me that you are having a jest with me, and I shall be well pleased to forgive you for it, although just now, when many cares assail me, it is rather ill-timed."

"Jest!" repeated Sixteen-string Jack, "I shall never jest again."

"For Heaven's sake, then, tell me what you mean."

"There is such a person in the world—as—as—"

"As who?"

"As—oh, Claude, you will kill me."

"Now, Jack, you are positively provoking. What name is it, in the name of all that's troublesome, that sticks in your throat so?"

"The name of Cicely Brereton."

Claude was so completely taken by surprise that he nearly fell off his horse, and as it was he gave such a start that Sue was prodigiously alarmed, and made a bound that would have thrown any less practised rider. But the astonishment of Claude soon took a less exciting course, and in a voice of command, he said—

"What would you say of her? Speak, I charge you, Jack."

"You shall know all."

"Quick, quick."

"I will tell you as quickly as I can. I know you will kill me when you do know all, but better to die by your hands after putting you upon your guard, and so making a sort of reparation, than to live the life of misery which I now live. Have a little patience with me, and you shall know all."

Claude did not speak, and Jack in a hoarse thick voice continued—

"The Jew to whom I owe my life came to me one day, and told me that it was an object to get a Mr. Markham Brereton executed for a supposed highway robbery, and that a Mr. Tom Brereton would pay very handsomely for the job. At first I resisted, but he threatened me with instant apprehension, and I was weak enough to go into his schemes."

"Go on, go on."

"He said he was likely in the whole affair to be foiled by you, and that it was necessary to do a something to render abortive any attempts of yours to save Mr. Markham. For this purpose he wanted a letter in a handwriting so strongly resembling yours that indifferent persons who knew your hand would swear to it as being yours, stating that you knew Mr. Markham had robbed Tom Brereton on the western road, but that you, in consequence of Cicely promising to elope with you, had made up your mind to take the responsibility of the robbery upon your own shoulders."

"Go on, go on."

"This letter was supposed to be written to Cicely, and intercepted so that when you should appear in court, your gallant surrender of yourself would only result in consigning you to Newgate, while it would confirm the story of the guilt of Mr. Markham. They wanted some one to prepare that letter who knew your handwriting well enough to imitate it very exactly."

"And you?"

"I—I—I did it!"

"No, no, Jack, you did not?"

"Oh, God! oh, God! I did, Claude—I did. Will you not kill me now? Do you not abhor me? Do you not look upon me as one accursed?

"No; from the bottom of my heart you have my pity."

"Pity?"

"Yes, I can feel towards you no otherwise. Oh, Jack, how you have fallen off from what you were. I would rather have stood the fire of a troop of soldiers, each intent upon my destruction, than I would have heard such a tale from your lips. Go on, go on."

"This Jew, whose powers seem to be actually superhuman, told me that he had discovered where you had placed Cicely."

"Ah!"

"Yes, he said that he should have her in his power by this morning. He obscurely hinted that you as yet did not know the value of your prize; for that the girl had become, by the death of some one in India, entitled to enormous wealth, which he and Tom Brereton intended to share between them."

Claude stood for a moment, and then placing his hand upon the shoulder of Jack, he said—

"Cicely, Cicely, more of her; can I save her from falling into the hands of that monster?"

"I spoke of making what reparation I could, and I will do so. The letter I speak of is in the hands of the Governor of Newgate, and Cicely is to be met by me and conducted to the Jew's house within half an hour of this time. A sham message from you, accompanied by a suit of boy's clothing, has been sent to her, and she will be at the end of Oxford Street by seven this morning."

At this moment St. Giles's church clock chimed solemnly the three-quarters past six. A crimson flush came over the countenance of Claude, who sat upon his horse like a statue.

"Speak to me, Claude," murmured Jack; "for the love of mercy, speak to me. You said that you pitied me: oh, pity me so much as to say but one word to me."

"Jack."

"Yes, yes—go on, oh, go on."

"I forgive you; but henceforward, between you and I, there is an abyss which I shall never wish to cross, and which I warn you not to dare to attempt. Farewell!"

Claude turned his horse's head up Oxford Street, and, at a furious pace, went towards the spot where he had been told Cicely would meet him. He never looked back to see what became of Sixteen-string Jack, but with his thoughts quite full of Cicely, and the unexampled treachery to which both he and she were then subject, with an anxiety that was almost sufficient to make his heart burst in his bosom, he pursued his course.

At the pace Claude went, the top of Oxford Street was soon gained, and then he paused and looked most anxiously around him, but no figure that he could tell himself was Cicely's met his gaze. And now strange and maddening thoughts came across his brain, and more than once he half suspected that it was but some refinement upon the treacherous behaviour of Sixteen-string Jack, who had told him that he should meet Cicely there, while, perchance, she was falling into the hands of his and her enemies at some other place.

Then, again, the thought did strike him, that after all it was just possible Jack might be insane, and had conceived one-half of the story from his own disordered

intellect; but, upon consideration, there was too much coherency about the whole affair to admit of that solution of the difficulty.

"No, no," said Claude; "it is all true—it is all true!"

There were very few passengers abroad at that hour, so that Claude could see without obstruction some distance down the Uxbridge Road. No one resembling Cicely was visible, and after some thought and some waiting, he made up his mind to walk quietly down the road, in the hope of meeting Cicely.

Scarcely had he got a quarter of a mile on the road when he heard a cry for help, and as some tall trees, just where the raod turned a little, prevented him now from seeing above forty yards in advance of him, he put Sue to a gallop, and soon cleared the distance, and came upon a group of persons most unexpectedly.

Two men were holding a youth, who was crying aloud for help. Could Claude for one moment mistake the accents of that voice? It was that of his Cicely.

To fling himself from his horse was the work of a moment. The strength of twenty men seemed to nerve his arms, and seizing the two ruffians in either hand, he, by one vigorous movement, knocked their heads together with a sound that was quite blood-curdling to hear.

They fell at his feet both of them in a state of insensibility. In another moment Cicely was in his arms, and he pressed her to his heart.

"Oh, I have been so terrified," she exclaimed; "they said you would come."

"And that I am here, Cicely, is something almost like a miracle."

"But you sent for me, Claude?"

"No, dear one, no. But this is no place for explanations. Come, I will take you to where you will be safer than at your last place of abode."

He lifted her on to the horse, and then springing up behind her, he caught the bridle in his left hand, while his right arm encircled the waist of her who was his treasure, and whom he loved with a love that knew no bounds. At a fast trot they proceeded to London.

"What do you mean, Claude, by its being a miracle that brought you here?"

"I will tell you another time," he replied; "but I have now a much more important question to ask of you, Cicely, and it is one which I hope you will answer me at once with candour."

"I will, indeed."

"Will you be my wife, Cicely?"

There was a moment's pause, then it was in a soft low whisper, that Cicely replied—

"Yes, yes."

Oh, what pen can describe the joy that came over the heart of Claude at this moment. He could not speak, but Cicely thought proper to add something to her consent.

"I am already yours, Claude," she said. "My fortunes are your fortunes."

"Yes, Cicely. And with my life I will for ever stand between you and all harm."

"I know you love me."

"As man never yet loved woman."

"Ah, Claude, under what frightful circumstances our union will take place. Are you not proscribed among men? Is there not a price set upon your life?"

"Yes. But with you as my guardian angel, I shall triumph yet."

"We must talk of this, Claude. England must not hold us long. In some other land you may find peace as well as security."

"'Tis a good thought, Cicely."

"It is one that I would have you seriously consider, Claude. What have you to hold you to England? and as for me, has it not been written that the wife shall cleave unto the husband? Where you go there will I go, Claude, and as I say, your home shall be my home."

"Oh, what joy it is to hear you speak."

"But, Claude?"

"Say on, say on."



Claude Duval compels the Bishop to perform the Marriage Ceremony.

h "My brother. You will still save my brother. You will still remember that e is innocent of that which is imputed to him, and although he may for a time look coldly upon us, and deem that I have done an act which should alienate me from his affections, he will think better of it, and we shall not have the loss of his affections. You will save him, Claude?"

Claud's voice, as he spoke, was full of emotion, and the tears glistened in his eyes as he pressed the hand of her who was so dear to him.

"Certainly," he said. "Have I ever said or promised aught to you which I have afterwards failed in proving the truthfulness of?"

"Never, never!"

"Then hear and believe me now."

"With all my heart and soul."

"I solemnly swear to you, that I will save your brother."

A gentle smile played upon the fair face of Cicely, but in a moment it was displaced by a look of exquisite grief, and with a voice of agony, which went deep into the heart of Claude, she said—

"But you shall not sacrifice yourself. No, no, Claude, you must even let Markham perish, rather than your life shall fall a sacrifice to those who will look for vengeance upon some one."

"Be tranquil," said Claude; "all will be well. My life has now a value, which will induce me to take extraordinary care of it. Be calm, Cicely."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MARRIAGE OF CLAUDE AND CICELY BRERETON.

They proceeded onwards now for some time in silence, but it was that description of silence which is in reality more eloquent than any words could possibly be, for heart spoke to heart, and an occasional glance from the eyes of each sufficiently exemplified what were the thoughts passing in the brain, and how weak and inefficient language would be to the expression.

It was Claude, however, who at length broke the silence.

"Cicely," he said, "what say you to a scheme I have now, for the purpose of making you really and truly my own?"

"But am I not really and truly your own, Claude?"

"Yes, dear one; but listen to me. There is a clergyman, who resides not far from here, and who has the power, in consequence of his rank in the church, to marry us, if he had the will to perform the ceremony."

"Would he be induced, Claude?"

"Not by anything we could say, in the way of entreaty, you may depend, Cicely."

"Then it is hopeless."

"Not so, not so."

"How otherwise, Claude?"

"I will tell you. This haughty prelate, for such he is, and I have met before now, and no doubt he has in his mind a lively recollection of that meeting. I am induced to think so from the significant fact, that he has offered one hundred pounds reward to any one who will apprehend me, and lodge me in Newgate."

"Is that possible, Claude?"

"It is both possible and true, Cicely. He has a personal quarrel with me, of no light character, I assure you, and I will therefore take this opportunity of being obliged to him for a favour."

"A favour?"

"Yes. When I want a man to do anything for me, the consequence of which may not be altogether pleasant for him, or tell well for his courage, I go to an enemy; and thus I mean to make this bishop marry us."

"A bishop?"

"Oh, yes. The bishop of Exeter shall perform the service, if he be in London, which I think he is. But it is necessary that I make some slight alteration in my costume."

The back portion of the saddle of Sue had a small recess in it, which was just sufficient to hold some flimsy articles of apparel, chiefly made of silk, so that they should go into a very small compass; but it was quite wonderful, when Claude

had put them on, to see the effect, in the way of disguise, which they had upon him.

A thin silk coat, of a silvery-gray colour, that buttoned quite up to his throat, and then a white cravat, with long ends, and laced, made him look as different as possible from his former self, as any two things could possibly be. Cicely, who was all unused to the many strange disguises in which Claude was at times, during his eventful career, compelled to show himself, could scarcely believe that any human being could produce such an absolute metamorphosis in himself in so short a space of time.

"I should not know you, Claude," she said.

"Except by my voice?"

"Oh, yes, I should know your voice in a moment, Claude."

"Not always," cried Claude.

Cicely started, for in the utterance of those two words he had so completely altered his usual mode of speaking, that she, for the moment, could scarcely think but that some one close at hand had uttered them.

Claude laughed.

"You must always say something," added Cicely, "which shall let me be able to penetrate your disguises, or I shall be very unhappy."

"Yes, Cicely, I will always say something by which you may know me; and be assured, that however I may change and assume many Protean shapes to the world, I will never change to you."

"I believe it—I believe it, and it is in that belief that I will find my joy. Where are we going now, Claude? These are handsome houses."

"Yes. In one of these lives our friend, the bishop, or rather our enemy the bishop, whom we shall make do a friendly act without a friendly motive."

"Ought you to venture?"

"I ought and will. Say nothing now, for we are close at hand; and beware how the name of Claude passes your lips, for any premature devolopment of who I am might be fatal."

They had now turned down a street to the left of Oxford-street, and which conducted them to a square of the most aristocratic aspect and importance. Claude deliberately paused before a large house, the front of which was dignified by a remarkably heavy portico. It was the town abode of the well-known bishop, with whose lady Claude had danced upon Hampstead Heath. Cicely trembled, for she could not but feel that the errand upon which they now were was a most perilous one, and she could not refrain from asking herself what would be her fate if he should be taken from her.

Such reflections were, however, soon merged in the intense interest she felt in what Claude was about, and in watching how he accomplished his object of securing a private interview with the bishop.

The door of the mansion was open, and a footman, with a profusion of powder on his head, was lounging at it, in an attitude which showed what a trouble it was to him to live, and, at the same time, to support the great weight of dignity that belonged to him and the office.

When Claude paused before the door, he scarcely deigned to look at him, and it was not until both Cicely and the highwayman had dismounted and ascended the steps, that the official gentleman condescended to turn his eyes upon them, in an easy sort of way.

"The bishop," said Claude, "is he up?"

The footman seemed so perfectly astounded at the idea of any one coming to see the bishop at so early an hour, that for some moments he could not reply, but continued to stare at Claude as though he had been some remarkable and curious specimen of some unknown animal. This close inspection of Claude's countenance had, however, one good effect, and that was, its producing an impression, even upon the obtuse mind of the footman, that its owner was not a man exactly to be trifled with.

"Ahem!" he said, by way of recovering his mental equipoise a little, "ahem! Did you say, up?"

"Yes."

"Oh, very well; then I don't know."

"Very well. I have a proposal to make to you, which deserves your serious attention. Will you take half-a-crown to go and inquire, or will you have your nose pulled here for refusing to do so?"

"My nose?"

"Yes, your nose. Come, decide quickly."

"Well then, sir, I can only say, that I am not a man to be bullied, or made game of. Nobody ever did that with me; and as to being frightened into anything, it's not in my nature, so if you please, sir, give me the half-crown."

"You are a cleverer fellow than you look," said Claude, "and I improve consequently upon my terms. There are two half-crowns, and now, if you can get speech of the bishop, just say that there is a gentleman at the door, who will place Claude Duval, the highwayman, in his hands, and ask no reward for doing so."

"What, Claude Duval? He they call Gentleman Jack, that robbed my lord and kissed my lady?"

"The same."

"He'll see you, sir, if he were ten times over not up—but I think he is. Just step into that room, and I'll manage it. I dare say I shall get something for myself out of him for bringing such good news. He did offer a hundred pounds reward, and he might have paid it if he had been forced; but didn't it stick in his gizzard above a bit to think of paying away so much!"

"Indeed."

"Lord bless you, sir, yes; and you will be as welcome as flowers in May, if you can save him the money."

"I can and will."

Claude and Cicely were both shown into a handsome reception room to the right of the hall, and there they both waited with some natural degree of anxiety the return of the footman.

"Will this succeed?" whispered Cicely. "It is an adventure full of peril."

"I never ask myself," replied Claude in a louder tone, "if things will succeed or not. It is sufficient for me, if I try my best; in this instance, I do feel pretty sure that I shall be able to give up Claude Duval to the bishop."

Claude looked so significantly at Cicely, while he uttered this, that would otherwise have been a strange speech, that she at once comprehended he had good reason for uttering it. Following, then, the direction of his eyes, she saw a door partially open, and at the foot of it, part of the boot of a man.

They were being listened to; but luckily, Claude had well-framed his answer to the harmless remark of Cicely, and no real mischief was consequently done.

In another moment the foot disappeared.

"That was a moment of real peril," whispered Claude. "Hush! make no remark. All is well as yet, I am quite certain."

Cicely trembled at the danger which had just passed, for without a doubt had Claude made any answer to her, which would have declared their real intentions to be different to what they had stated, a police force would have been sent for, that would have made opposition madness on the part of Claude.

In about five minutes the footman returned, followed by a slim, sleek-looking personage, dressed in black, and with a perpetual hyena-like smile upon his white face, which he intended should be evangelically beautiful. This was the bishop's secretary.

"So," he said, "I understand that you know something of Claude Duval?"

"Much," replied Claude.

"Well, the bishop presents his compliments, and will feel obliged at your giving to me all the information you can."

"About what?"

"The highwayman, of course."

"Give my compliments to the bishop, and say that I will give my information to no one but himself, privately."

"Well, but—but——"

"Exactly."

"Who you are I know not, even the knowledge of your name."

"A state of ignorance in which I remain likewise concerning you."

"Oh, very well, I see we shall have to give you into custody, my friend. We cannot be trifled with in this manner, upon a subject of consequence to his lordship's feelings."

"Now, hark you, sir," said Claude, "I don't know and I don't care who you are. I am here to see the bishop, and to do him a favour, and you threaten to give me into custody for it. No if you do not at once apologise, I will leave the house, and I don't think that just at present there is any one that can prevent me doing so."

The secretary bit his white lips, and looked confused, for the fact was, that all he had said and done was without orders from the bishop, and merely to show his own efficiency. At length he gave a sickly grin, as he said—

"Well, well, wait a little. I will go and see."

"But the apology?"

The secretary had left the room, but Claude added to himself, "I will make that fellow humble, even with all his glorious arrogance, befor I leave this house."

"Oh, Claude, I tremble," whispered Cicely.

"Hush, dear one, hush! All is well—all is well. You may depend upon me. I know well how this affair is going. We shall see the bishop, and after that our difficulties and dangers are all over."

"Think you so?"

"I know it."

The sickly secretary returned.

"His lordship will see you."

"Of course."

"Follow me, if you please. You must not be surprised at our showing some suspicion about strangers. There are so many men about London of seeming fairness, but who are such rank hypocrites and rogues."

"You are right," said Claude. "I have met one myself this morning of the sort you mention."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. A man in shiny black, with sleek hair, and a white face, upon which was a perpetual faint smile."

The secretary shrank back, and looked very uncomfortable at the description of himself, while Cicely was afraid each moment that the reckless courage of Claude would plunge him into greater danger than was at all necessary, even under the fearful circumstances, as she considered them, in which they were now plunged; and yet there was a contagion of courage about the bold daring of Claude that almost at times made her as firm as he was himself.

A handsome staircase was ascended, the balustrades of which were profusely gilt, while the walls were hung with pictures, some of which were of anything but a saintly character. The carpet, too, was so soft and beautiful, that any of the apostles, a humble follower of whom of course the bishop was, would have been perfectly astonished, and thought such things could only be in that world beyond the stars which his faith promised him the enjoyment of in another state of existence. But, then, bishops are so self-denying, so anxious to walk in the footsteps of their great Teacher, as all the world, of course, knows of all the bishops.

To Cicely, whose mind was most intensely preoccupied, these things did not present themselves as they did to Claude, who, now that he made sure of seeing the bishop, also made sure of his own safety and the safety of Cicely, and so was much more mentally at leisure to notice circumstances of an extraneous character.

On the landing was some rare and exquisite statuary, upon which Claude could not help casting a passing glance of admiration, and then a door, the panels of which were of mahogany, and the corners gilt, was opened, and the bishop was found sitting at a table, writing, or pretending to write.

All great men are always found writing or reading by those who visit them. It looks grand, abstracted and overpoweringly intellectual. It is the custom, then, always to look with quite an appearance of surprise, as if the visitor were not at all expected, but had just trotted in out of the streets, without the slightest let or hinderance to reaching the sanctum sanctorum of the great personage who had taken perhaps half an hour to consider whether they should be admitted or not.

The door of the room was opened, and Claude, with Cicely clinging to his arm, was in the presence of the bishop, who looked rather scrutinisingly upon them.

"Can you give me information, indeed, of the notorious Claude Duval?"

"I can."

"And—and—and you do not want the reward?"

"By no means."

"Pray be seated. My time, of course, is rather valuable, and I have to request that you will be so good as to say, as quickly as possible, what you have to say."

"I have as little desire as your lordship can have," said Claude, "to occupy valuable time; I have much to do, and therefore cannot afford to waste my opportunities. Will you lordship tell me candidly if any one be listening?"

"Certainly not. You may proceed in perfect confidence."

"Well, my lord, you see this small, exquisitely-mounted pistol, which never misses fire, and carries a couple of bullets with the greatest steadiness."

"Yes, I—I. Oh, yes. Hold it the other way."

"Well, my lord, I took it from the secret pocket of Claude Duval's coat."

"You did?"

"I did, my lord."

"And did he permit you, or had you previously taken him prisoner—perhaps killed him? I should like to hang the rascal. Oh, that I could see him before me."

"A wish easily gratified. I am Claude Duval—nay, my lord, I shall trouble you to be seated. Remember this little weapon and its qualifications. You wished to see Claude Duval before you without the necessity of paying a hundred pounds, and you have your wish. Remove your hand from that bell-pull, my lord, or I fire."

The bishop hastily enough took his hand off the bell-pull, and sunk back into his chair again, from whence he had suddenly risen in the alarm of the moment.

"Well," added Claude, "have you nothing to say?"

"This overwhelming assurance!" gasped the bishop.

"Cannot be without an object more distinct and important," added Claude, "than merely frightening a bishop. I have a motive far higher. This young lady, for a young lady she is, despite her male attire, has agreed to make me so happy as to become my wife; the only return I ask of you for bringing you Claude Duval without any reward, is that you marry us forthwith."

The bishop looked quite blue and spectral like.

"Your answer," said Claude. "Quick, your answer!"

"I cannot."

"Very well."

Claude deliberately cocked the pistol.

"That is to say, stop," said the bishop. "I think I will, although it is contrary to my usage. I—I really ought not. God bless me I wish some one would come, I never was in such a horrid situation."

"And I never in such a pleasant one."

"Pleasant one?"

"Yes. Can anything be more pleasant than the prospect of an immediate union with this young lady? Come, my lord, delays are dangerous. I will trouble you to proceed at once, and any shuffling at your peril. I am not a man to be trifled with. I tell you candidly, that this is something like a trial of strength between us, and I am determined to have the mastery. Quick, my lord! where is your book, or will you trust to your memory? I am not very particular to a word or two."

The bishop groaned.

"I—I don't think I can remember a word of it," he faltered. "Indeed, I am quite sure I cannot. I don't often marry people; but if I must, I must, so I'll go for my book at once."

"If it be in this room you may get—if in another I will go with you; and remember, upon the least appearance of treachery on your part, or even if I suspect you wrongfully, I will blow your brains out."

The bishop groaned again. Then he rose and went to a book-case, from whence he took a Book of Common Prayer, and that moment, the sickly-looking supercilious secretary came into the room.

"My lord, I—— '

"Will give away the bride," cried Claude, finishing the sentence for him, and at the same time seizing him by the collar, and flinging him into a corner of the room, where he sat propped up by the wall, looking the picture of fright and surprise. Claude now walked to the door and locked it, saying as he did so, "We don't want any one else, so now proceed at once. Cicely is the name of the lady, and with my christian appellation you are already acquainted. Proceed my lord."

"Dearly beloved," said the bishop with another groan, for the idea of being forced to marry Claude Duval was gall and wormwood to him, and his thoughts were wandering to what the wicked wits of the time would say, should the affair get wind among them. More than once he thought of breaking off abruptly in the midst of the service, but as often as the thought came over him to do so, and he looked up from the prayer-book, his eyes were dazzled by a sight of that provoking bright pistol barrel, to which Claude had given such commendations, and with another groan, he would resume.

Thus it was that Claude and Cicely were made man and wife.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE OFFICERS.—NEWGATE AND ITS GOVERNOR.

The ring with which Cicely was married was one that had belonged to Claude's mother, and which he had, until that occasion, worn constantly upon his little finger. The dubious-looking secretary gave the bride away, and then shrunk back into his corner again, where he thought it prudent to remain, until watching his opportunity, he crept under a table, and so on to the door, and fairly escaped from the room.

It may be presumed that Claude did not notice the absence of the secretary till it was too late to prevent it. Cicely saw a flush of colour suddenly visit his cheek, but she did not attribute it to any apprehension. Claude himself, however, the moment he became aware that the secretary was gone, knew his danger.

But with so adventurous a spirit as he was, to know his danger was to know almost at the same moment, as if by intuition, some means of avoiding it.

Turning to the bishop, he said—

"My lord, you have done me a service, and I do not see why you should cherish the unchristian resentment against me that you do. I must, however, despite that, make you useful to a yet greater extent."

Something strongly resembling an oath passed the bishop's lips. In fact, if he had not been a bishop, nobody could have scrupled to own that he said, "D—n it!" as audibly as possible.

"I think I must trouble you," added Claude, "to accompany me down stairs."

The sight of the pistol again stopped all scruples, and down stairs they went together. The moment they gained the passage, the street-door opened, and the secretary appeared looking quite triumphant, although, owing to suddenly confronting Claude, he was a little cut up in his gratification. Duval took but one step towards him; and then looking keenly in his face, he said, in a perfectly calm tone—

"Will they be here soon?"

"Who—who—do you mean?" stammered the secretary.

"Oh, pho! The officers you have been for."

"Seize him," said the bishop.

"Hold!" said Claude, as he held the bishop's arm with a grip of iron—"hold! I know that I shall be taken, because I think you are angry enough now, and fierce enough to sacrifice your life for this object. I have sworn to myself to take your life, or to leave this house in safety; and, by all that is sacred on earth or in Heaven, I will keep my oath."

"Go in peace," said the bishop, with a shudder, "go in peace."

"Order your carriage, then, and come with me. I will do you no harm, but you must say it is a mistake of your officious secretary, and that I am a friend of yours—or—your life!"

"Yes, yes! Oh, dear me, yes."

"Where is he?" said a gruff voice, as two men rushed in the hall.

"Who?" said Claude.

"Duval, the highwayman, to be sure."

"Ask his lordship."

"There is no such person here," said the bishop, "it is all a mistake. This gentleman is a friend of mine, and is going out with me in my carriage. Oh lord!"

"Your lordship seems as if you would enjoy your drive," said one of the officers. "If I catch the fellow, who came round to my house and made a fool of me, I'll make him remember it."

The secretary immediately hid himself behind a statue, and as he did so he made noise enough for one of the officers to glance that way, and say—

"What's that?"

"Only a cur," said Claude, as he gave the secretary some half-dozen heavy kicks behind the statue, which the valorous individual put up with quietly, rather than come out and be put in the dilemma of contradicting the bishop, or admitting he made a mistake in calling the officers.

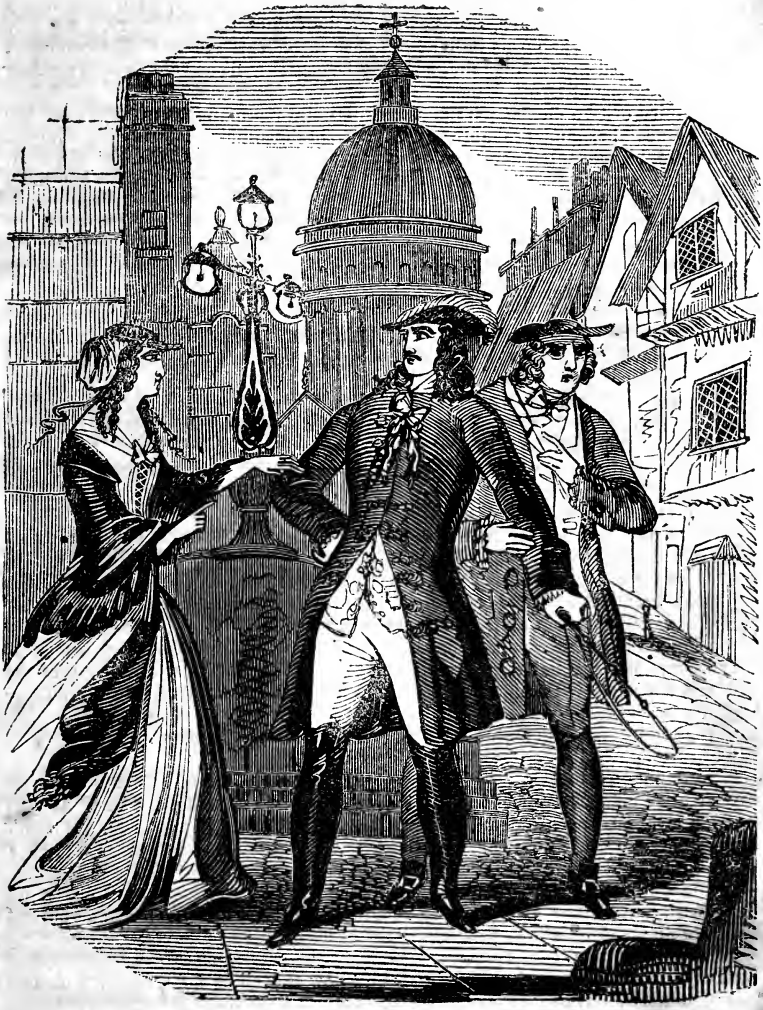
"Order the carriage," cried Claude, as the footman made his appearance.

The bishop repeated the command, and the carriage, which was just about ready, was in a few minutes at the door of the house. Claude whispered in the ear of the bishop—

"You have played your part hitherto like a man of discretion, but circumstances compel me, although reluctantly, to give you some more trouble. You must come with me, until we are in a safer place than this."

The bishop had now no disposition to sacrifice his life, after going so far, and he readily enough complied with Claude's wishes, that he should get into the carriage. In another moment they were all three seated in the luxurious vehicle, that is, its owner, Claude and Cicely.

The footman touched his hat as he shut the door, and lingered to know where to drive to.



THE LAST MEETING OF LUCY AND GENTLEMAN JACK.

"The Cat and Cucumber in Drury Lane," said Claude.

"The what, sir?"

"The 'Cat and Cucumber,' in Drury Lane."

"Yes sir—oh yes.—A-hem! Certainly, my lord. The Cat and—a-hem!—Cucumber, in Drury Lane."

The footman perked up his nose, as though there had been something noxious at the extreme end of it, which he was afraid would fall into his mouth, unless he was very careful, and then mounting behind, he gave the order to the astounded coachman.

There was another person, however, who heard the order where to drive to with some gratification, and that other was one of the officers, who accordingly jumped up behind the coach, resolved to see the end of the adventure. As may be supposed, the bishop was rather ill at ease in his carriage with such company, but he dissembled his feelings the best way he could, and the vehicle soon reached the classic regions of Drury Lane.

An inquiry or two on the part of the still ireful footman soon discovered the Cat and Cucumber, and probably never before in the annals of that establishment, could there be recounted such a visit as was now paid to it. Claude alighted, and handed out Cicely. The officer sprang from behind, and laying his hand upon Claude's arm, said—

"You are my prisoner."

"By what authority?" said Claude.

"The law. I know you are Duval."

"And how came you here?"

"At the back of the carriage."

"That must have been uncomfortable. You shall return inside, which I assure you is as convenient as it can possibly be made. It is not everybody who would do so much for you."

As he spoke, Claude put forth all the extraordinary strength which he possessed, and which only upon extraordinary occasions he called into exercise. Lifting the officer off his feet, he at once dashed him into the carriage, and closed the door. In another moment he was in the public-house called the "Cat and Cucumber," with Cicely.

To the first person he met, Claude said—

"Go to the door. You will find that my horse has followed me, although I came in a coach."

This was literally true. Sue had indeed followed the bishop's carriage, which the sagacious creature had seen contained her master, and now stood waiting for him at the door of the public-house. He had to show himself, before she would allow herself to be removed. The officer, however, by this time had managed, after doing some amount of personal damage to the bishop, to scramble out of the carriage, and, mad with anger and shame at his defeat, he rushed into the public-house.

"What do you want, Fletcher?" said the landlord, advancing.

"Claude Duval."

"You know as well as I do that you can't have him here. Come, come, be wise and be off. Keep what sort of watch you like outside, but here, as you are well aware, it is an understood thing you are not to make prisoners. It won't do, Fletcher, so don't try it on."

"Confusion!"

"Oh, that's likely enough; but you know what's right, as well as I do, so get along with you, unless you choose to come in the regular way, and make yourself comfortable and look about you a bit."

"I must take him."

"Nonsense, you have your regulars, you know as well as I do, so don't make a fool of yourself.—Will you take anything to drink?"

This last was a proposition that had a mollifying effect upon the officer, whose rage had cooled down sufficiently to convince him that a row at the "Cat and Cucumber," for the purpose of trying to make a prisoner, would be the most ineffectual thing in all the world.

He took the something to drink, and left the place.

CHAPTER XL.

THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE'S INTERVIEW WITH TOM BRERETON.

THAT Claude and Cicely, who now so closely united her fortune to his, found shelter and kindness at the Cat and Cucumber, we may well suppose. The course of our narrative carries us now to gloomy Newgate.

In one of the apartments of the governor's house, sat that individual himself, and Mr. Tom Brereton. The latter was explaining something with some amount of vehemence, while the governor looked anything but pleased, and was biting his pen, with which, by the papers lying before him, he appeared to have been writing some letters.

Tom Brereton broke the silence that for some time had been maintained between them, and which the governor did not seem disposed to disturb.

"It it as I tell you," he said.

"I cannot make it out," said the governor.

"No—nor I. I am quite sure she had the note purporting to come from Claude, and I am equally sure, from further inquiries that I have made, that she had no suspicions of its genuineness whatever, but actually set out to walk to London. However, she never reached the spot where my men were posted, to snap her up."

"So it appears."

"Yes, and that's what puzzles me."

The governor shook his head, as he said—

"Ah, you don't know what sort of person you have to do with, Mr. Brereton; I can tell you that Claude Duval is capable of things that would make your hair stand on end only to dream of."

"I know that; but how could he know what we meant to do?"

"Can you trust the Jew?"

"Oh, yes."

"Can he trust his agents?"

"He had but one, he said, in whom he put any confidence or faith, and that one he declared was so bound to him in every possible way, that he dared not betray him, if he were ever so much inclined so to do."

"And yet he must have done so."

"Well, it's a hard case, after all my exertions to do myself some good in the world, to be so thoroughly posed at all points. My plan was a good one enough, too, I'm sure."

"Yes. I never, though, perfectly understood it."

"Why you understood you were to have £500."

"Oh, yes, yes."

"Well, then, I'll tell you the rest. You must know that old Junks, a relation of ours, has died in India, and most unaccountably left me nothing, though he died worth £50,000 they say."

"What was old Junks's objection to you?"

"Why, I have seen the will, in which he says, I have heard something of a relation of mine, named Tom Brereton. He is not very bright, I hear, or very honest, so I leave him nothing, convinced that he is just the sort of person to consign to the care of Providence."

"Humph!"

"What do you say humph for?"

"Why, I was just thinking it was not very flattering to you."

"Well, not very, certainly. Well, as I was saying, he left me nothing, and goes on to divide all his property between Markham Brereton and Cicely, and he says that if one of those should be dead, or die within twelve months, the other shall have the whole."

"Humph!"

"D—n it—why do you say humph always?"

"Oh, that's nothing; it's only a way I have got. Go on."

"Well, don't do it again, that's all. Where was I? Oh, I know; well, when I found out that old Junks had left me nothing, of course I set about seeing whether I could not make something out of it."

"Naturally."

"Of course. Well, the grand thing was, that neither Markham nor Cicely knew of old Junks's death or will—I had that information all to myself."

"A most important point."

"Very. I have something to pay to the Jew, though; but one can afford to do that out of so much money, and I thought to myself that the nicest thing in the world would be to get rid of Markham, so that Cicely should have all the money, and then marry her."

"A very good idea."

'I thought you would say that. Well, if Markham were hanged, of course he is out of the way, you know, most effectually."

"I should rather think he would."

"Of course. Well, as he would not do anything of his own accord to bring him to a bad end, I thought the next best thing was to make others believe he had."

"Exactly. Hence the concoction of that letter, which is to be produced at his trial, if Claude Duval should really be as good as his word, and come forward to clear Brereton."

"You are right; but as regards Cicely, somehow she never saw my merits."

"No?"

"Never, never! So the only way was to get her to consent by some means that had nothing to do with my merits, that she somehow don't or won't see."

"Spoken like an oracle."

"Very well. Don't bother me. I thought of getting her shut up somewhere, and then telling her that the only way to save both herself and Markham, would be to marry me. What do you think of that?"

"Humph!"

"Good God, there you are, saying 'humph!' again."

"Well, where's the harm?"

"Oh, no particular harm—only it's monstrous provoking, that's 'all, and you ought not to do it, considering that you are to have five hundred pounds for helping me."

"Yes, that is understood."

"Of course it is; and what makes it more provoking is, that she has given me the slip, after all my trouble. Where can she be?"

"Ah, humph?"

"Do you want to drive me mad?"

"Well, well, something will turn up, I dare say, to make all right enough; of course the letter in Claude's name will have a great effect, and you will at all events have the satisfaction of getting rid of Duval, for he will be hung to all intents and purposes."

"You really think so?"

"I know so, my friend. But you are, I know, wasting your valuable time with me."

The governor rose as he spoke. It was his only way of getting rid of his visitor, who was not the most welcome guest he could have in the world.

"Very well," said Tom Brereton, "very well. You do the best you can, and I will do the best I can; and if, between us, we cannot get the better of this Claude Duval, it will be a very hard case indeed."

Tom Brereton now left Newgate, and sauntered down the Old Bailey towards

Holborn Hill, but just as he got to Fleet-market, some one touched him on the arm, and upon turning abruptly, he saw, to his amazement and consternation, Claude Duval.

"One word of alarm," whispered Claude, "one exclamation or gesture so as to bring danger upon me, and I will scatter your brains upon the pavement. Take my arm, and walk gently. I want to speak to you."

Anger, rage, fear, all were struggling in the bosom of Tom Brereton, but he knew well the determined spirit he had to deal with, and he took the arm of Claude, while his face turned as white as milk, and he trembled so he could scarcely walk.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE EXTORTED DOCUMENT.—THE PROPOSED ROBBERY IN QUEEN STREET.

"You seem surprised," said Claude.

"I—I am a little."

"And terrified."

"Yes, yes, a little—only a little. I—I confess to being a little put out. It's a fine day, ain't it?"

"Why, I think it's very gloomy."

"Yes, yes, I—I mean gloomy."

"And yet the air is balmy, and on the whole the day is decidedly cheerful."

"Oh yes, decidedly cheerful."

Claude smiled to himself as he saw how thoroughly determined Tom Brereton was to agree with him. But it did not suit him to spend his time in trifling, so he at once proceeded to what he meant.

"You perfectly understand your position, Mr. Tom Brereton," he said. "It is one of some danger, if you do not use your opportunities with discretion; but if you wish to preserve yourself, you are too insignificant to make anything like a serious effort to destroy."

"Oh," said Tom.

"Yes. And now I want of you a written confession of the little piece of villany, regarding the forging of my name to a letter, addressed to Markham Brereton."

Tom was so completely astounded at the suddenness of this statement, that but for the supporting arm of Claude, he must have fallen to the ground. The whole street appeared to swim round with him, and the idea he was found out in what he considered one of the most cunning and secret things he ever did in his life, was enough ta drive him out of his senses.

"Answer me," said Claude. "I insist upon an immediate answer."

"What—what can I say?"

"That you will come to the nearest tavern, and write the confession I want of you."

"I—I must, I suppose."

"You may be assursd that you must."

Tom Brereton uttered a deep groan, but he saw that there was no help for him, and being quite sure that Claude Duval was one who kept his word, he did not scruple to think discretion by far the better part of valour.

"Only say what you want of me," he cried, "and I'll do it."

"I only want what I say. Come this way. Here is a house that may afford the necessary accommodation to us. Attempt to move an inch otherwise than I direct you, and you die."

"Lord have mercy upon me!"

"He may, but I will have none, unless you speedily perform what I require of you."

The door of a tavern near at hand was invitingly open, and into it Claude led his prisoner, for such Tom was, to all intents and purposes, and calling for a private room and writing materials, he made Tom sit down.

"You—you won't kill me," said Tom; "oh dear me, you don't mean to murder me, I hope; do have some mercy upon me."

"Why," said Claude, quite composedly, "when you were dead you would only be so much carrion, but while you are alive I think I may do some good with you, notwithstanding your wish to be mischievous."

"Then you will spare my life?"

"Yes."

"That's a comfort. I breathe again; only spare my life, and tell me what to do and I'll do it, you may depend."

"I think that you will; now write down, as clearly and distinctly as you can, the particulars of the forged letter that the governor of Newgate has, and which it was and is intended to produce at the trial of Mr. Markham Brereton, for the purpose of quite confounding me, should I come forward as a witness in his favour."

"Perhaps you won't mind telling me how you came to know——"

"Write!" cried Claude, sternly; "it is my place to ask questions, yours to answer them; I am in no humour for trifling, and will not endure it."

Thus admonished, Tom Brereton thought his best plan would be to commence his enforced confession at once, and he did so, although with a reluctance that was quite ridiculous to see.

When it was complete, he handed it to Claude, who then, finding that it was quite as full as could be wished, made him sign it, and then, folding it carefully, he said in a calm, determined voice—

"You are now at liberty; but knowing as I do, that on the day of trial you will seek to disown this document, and to say that it was extorted from you by force, and has not truth in it, I warn you that in such a case a terrible retribution shall be exacted of you."

Tom looked dreadfully pale.

"The same power," continued Claude, "which enabled me to discover that you were pursuing such infamous courses, will arm me with the means of defeating you when you make further attempts to avoid the consequences of your crimes and your follies."

So saying, Claude Duval left him at once.

Hurrying through several streets, so as to place considerable distance between him and the house where Tom Brereton was left, Claude at length slackened his pace, and appeared to be involved in deep thought.

"I am sorry," he said to himself, "that after all I have behaved so hastily to Sixteen-string Jack; to be sure he committed a serious offence against me, but after all he did all he could do for the best, that is to say he confessed the truth to me, and put me upon my guard; I ought to have considered, too, that the offence itself would not have been committed, had not his mind been thoroughly weakened and his intellect frightfully subdued, by the strange and terrible adventures he had gone through."

These thoughts thronged through the mind of Claude, and induced him to wish much to discover Jack's retreat.

Under ordinary circumstances he would have found no difficulty in doing that; but since the execution, Sixteen-string Jack had been so frightfully beset by fears of re-execution, that he had not frequented any of his old haunts, so that Claude was completely at fault concerning where to find him.

Suddenly, while he was thus ruminating, he fancied some one gently touched him on the arm, and turning suddenly he saw the object of his thoughts standing with a woe-begone face within a few paces of him.

"Claude," said Jack, "don't look so sternly on me. Oh, Claude, if you knew what I have suffered!"

Claude Duval held out his hand to Sixteen-string Jack, saying as he did so, in a voice of emotion—

"All is forgotten."

"Oh, no—no—no."

"Yes, I say yes. All is forgotten and forgiven, Jack; we are all to each other as ever we were. I only grieve that your sufferings have so far got the better of you as to make you fell and think in a manner repugnant to your nature."

"Can this be possible?"

"It is true, Jack."

Sixteen-string Jack took Claude's arm, and they walked on for some short distance together in silence. At length the former spoke.

"This is the happiest moment," he said, "that I have known for a long time."

"May it be the worst," said Claude; "and all the moments that are to come, as far transcend it in happiness as it transcends those that are past!"

Jack shook his head.

"Come, come, you must not despair."

"No, no, Claude, I will not now despair, since I have become reconciled to you, but happy I can never be. I have now but one ambition, and that is that you will employ me in undoing some of the bad work that I have done."

"Well, Jack, where does the Jew live?"

"The Jew doctor who restored me, and whose real name is Myers, lives here in Queen Street."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, he has a large house there, full of the most costly articles that the whole of Europe can furnish him with. There is no limit to his luxury and extravagance."

"Well, I propose paying him a vist."

"A visit?"

"Yes; you must know, Jack, that I am not in funds just now, and it is quite necessary that I should be. I rather think that that Brereton has not money to fee counsel and to go to the necessary expenses for his defence against the false charge that is brought against him. Cicely likewise must be differently provided for from what she was, so that I really, one way and another, am in immediate want of one hundred pounds, and I have no time to go on the road for it."

"But you do not expect to get it of Myers?"

"I do."

"Impossible!"

"Not so impossible, perhaps, as at the first glance it appears. You used to be, before you took to the road, as good a hand at a lock as was to be found in the length and breadth of all England. Has your cunning deserted you?"

"I think not."

"Then I have just but one question to ask of you."

"And that—"

"Is, will you accompany me to-night in an attempt to get some cash from the Jew?"

"I will go with you, Claude, through fire and water—to the end of the world or a step beyond it, if you wish me to do so."

"The devil!" exclaimed Claude, suddenly.

"What is the matter?" said Jack.

"It's an awkward thing. Do you see who is coming?"

"Ah, yes, yes, Lucy."

"To be sure. Well, the fact is, I don't want to have anything to say to the girl, and would gladly avoid her."

"You cannot. She sees you, and is coming fast. Talk quietly to her, and don't have a scene, if you can help it."

"I wish not for that."

Lucy, whose dependence upon the promises of Claude had up to the last few days been very strong, now made her appearance, and rushing up to him, she seized him by the arm, and bursting into tears, exclaimed—

"You do not care for me now, Claude; you have forgotten me."

"Not forgotten you, Lucy, but—but the fact is, I lead too bad a life for you to care about me. I have not forgotten you, nor—but I want you to forget me."

"Forget you?"

"Yes, Lucy; you will find some one who can love you better than I."

"Oh, Claude, Claude, this is a cruel jest."

"It is no jest, Lucy, my destiny calls me another way. Listen to me, my girl. You must name some place where I can always send to you. You may be assured you shall never want."

"Want?"

"No. That shall never be the case, Lucy, while I have anything for you, you may depend; and you may have sufficient faith in my resources to feel assured that I shall be always able to provide in some way for those whom I love."

"Love?"

"Yes, Lucy, love."

"Then Claude, you do—love me still?"

"Assuredly, you have been a good girl to me. Now and then, perhaps, when a little jealousy got the better of you, you did not know very well what you were about; but as a general thing, I say you have been true to me."

"And yet you would cast me from you?"

"There is a necessity that we should part."

"You love another?"

Claude was silent. In the course of a few moments the girl abruptly held out her hand to him, saying—

"Good-by, Claude."

"Good-by," he replied. "Tell me where to send to you to-morrow."

She passed her hand across her eyes, as she said in a low mournful voice—

"Alas, how can I?"

"Surely—surely you know where you are going."

"I cannot help it.—How can I tell where the tide will take me?"

These last few words were said in so low a tone as she hurried away, that Claude did not catch them, and turning to Sixteen-string Jack, he asked him if he heard what she said. Jack had heard, but he shrank from telling Claude, and replied in the negative, adding after a moment—

"Women say a world of things that they don't mean."

"'Tis true. Let us forget her. She will manage, no doubt, to let me know where to find her, and I will keep my word regarding her, but live again with her I cannot now. Higher motives own me."

Claude did not feel exactly disposed to tell Jack in precise words that he was married to Cicely, but left him to infer what he pleased from the ambiguous way in which he spoke of the affair. No doubt Jack had his own surmises on the subject, but he did not choose, after all that had taken place, to ask any questions of Claude concerning Cicely.

"Show me the Jew's house," said Claude.

This Jack did; and after noting well the general aspect of it, and feeling assured that he not only should know it again at any hour, either of the night or the day, but that he had a tolerable notion of the plan of its internal arrangements, he said—

"Well, Jack, where shall we meet to-night?"

"Here, under this archway."

"Agreed. You must provide yourself with all the tools necessary for making good an entrance to the house."

"Certainly, I understand that part of the profession better than you do."

"Yes, I will have everything ready."

Claude could not help seeing that Sixteen-string Jack was afraid of the adven



CLAUDE AND JACK WATCHING THE MOVEMENTS OF THE JEW.

ture, and indeed he could easily suppose that under the peculiar circumstances, the Jew had acquired a control over Jack's mind that bordered quite upon a superstitious fear. He hoped, however, to be able to rescue his old friend from such a state of mental depression; and if the night's enterprise had no other results than filling Claude's empty purse, and letting Sixteen-string Jack see that the Jew was not so all-powerful as he thought him, it would certainly not have been undertaken in vain.

They agreed between them to meet under the archway, at one o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE ROBBERY.—THE ADVENTURE AT THE JEW-PHYSICIAN'S.

THE midnight in London on that eventful date was one of the most wild and stormy that for years had shown itself in the great city.

By about ten o'clock large masses of clouds had gathered together in the far west, like some invading host, and had then taken the next two hours to complete their march to the city, over which they hung like a huge black pall, threatening death and destruction to all beneath it.

The people of London, that is to say, the decent, orderly, and estimable portion of the population, knew nothing of what was threatening, for they had all retired to rest; but those persons who for rapine, robbery, and illicit pleasures, were in the street, shrank within themselves at the prospect of the coming storm.

It was quite twelve, however, before the tempest showed any unequivocal signs of its presence, and fairly awakened the sleepers in London.

At about that hour there came a vivid flash of lightning that for a brief moment translated the whole city from intense darkness to a strange, lurid sort of light, making all things look like the remnant of some vast conflagration, which in its red dying embers was awful to look at.

The thunder that almost immediately followed, for the storm was fairly over the city, was perfectly terrific, and in an instant the whole population of London was awake. Who could sleep with such a summons in their ears to be up and watching?

Not the dread trumpet-blast which at the day of judgment is to summon the nations to the throne of Heaven, could have created greater consternation in the minds of many, than did that peal of thunder that startled them from sleep.

It was just at the moment it took place, that Claude Duval stood under the archway in Queen-street, waiting the arrival of Sixteen-string Jack.

Claude Duval was astonished at the storm, but he was not terrified, as many men. An enthusiastic lover of the beauties of nature as he was, he ever found too much to admire in any of her operations, to find anything to dread; and now in the stern sublimity of the storm, he felt that elevation of spirit which is ever the accompaniment of a superior intellect.

Alas! that that superior intellect which was given to Claude should have been desecrated, as it was, to base purposes.

He shrank back into the archway and watched the storm.

After the first clap of thunder, which had awakened everybody, there was a pause for many minutes, and then there came another, not so loud, and yet quite loud enough to be very startling, and to keep fully up to the mark the fears of those who had been alarmed at the first. The storm might then be fairly considered to be raging, for the lightning and thunder went on with scarcely one moment's intermission. Indeed the echo of one report blended into the actual reverberations of the next.

Claude was anxious for the appearance of Jack.

"Where can he be?" he said to himself. "Surely the tempest will not, even in the weak and excited state of his nerves, have the effect of frightening him from the adventure."

Scarcely had Claude uttered these words, when some one in a low, crouching attitude, entered the archway.

"Is it you?" cried Claude, fancying that, if it were Jack, he would know the sound of his, Claude's, voice.

"Heaven have mercy upon us!" replied Jack, for it was really he.

"Ah, I am glad you are come," said Claude.

"Spare me! Spare me!"

"What do you mean? What has happened?"

As he spoke, Claude placed his hand upon Jack's arm, and the latter thereupon gave a cry of terror,

"Gracious Heaven!" said Claude, "do you not know me?"

"Oh! spare me."

"Why, what is the meaning of this, Jack? Have you at length fairly taken leave of your senses?"

By this time Sixteen-string Jack seemed to be aware who it was that was speaking to him, and he said, faintly—

"I think it is you, Claude. Oh, yes, I am sure now that it is you."

"Assuredly."

"Thank God you are here, Claude. Did you hear it?"

"Certainly—I were deaf else. You mean the thunder?"

"No--no—no."

"What then?"

"The voice that came upon the storm with it. Did you not hear a voice say to you, audibly, that the hour of vengeance was at hand, and that the end of the world had come, even while we were plotting and planning a robbery? Oh, Claude—Claude, you must have heard it—you must have heard it. Would it not have been dreadful for us to have been caught by the Almighty in iniquity?"

"You are mad, Jack."

"Oh, no—no. They are mad who heed not the visible warnings of the hurricane. You and they, and all the world, are mad."

"Well," said Claude, with a despairing sort of shrug of his shoulder; "I am sorry, Jack, to find you are in such a frame of mind. Your judgment was once strong and able, but now I grieve to see that it is shattered. If you intend to help me in easing your friend the Jew of some of his cash, say so; if not, just be equally explicit, and I will essay the adventure myself."

"No, Claude, no."

"You will not?"

"Come away, let us pray and repent."

"I beg your pardon, Jack. Every one to his taste. I had rather not just now, but don't say I stopped you. You can go and pray till all is blue, if you like. As for me, I think this storm is a capital opportunity for attacking the house of the Jew, so I shall set to work upon it."

"No—no."

"Yes—yes, I say. Yes—yes. Why, how you shiver! Your teeth chatter, too, as though you were as cold as ice."

"I am cold."

Claude took from his pocket a small flask of brandy, and handed it to Jack, saying as he did so—

"Then drink of that, it will perhaps bring you to a better frame of mind. The storm, too, is well-nigh over. Do you not see and hear how the rain is coming down? We shall be washed out of the entry if we do not leave it voluntarily in a few moments more. Have you drunk some?"

"Yes."

"And how do you feel now?"

"Better, I think, and—and if you really have made up you mind to break into the Jew's house, it would be a dastardly thing of me to desert you."

"Give me your hand," said Claude. "Now, old friend, I know you again. Why, you were but playing a part before, and in your disguise no one would have recognised you as the bold, generous, daring Sixteen-string Jack."

"I am weak at times. Is there any more of that brandy?"

"Certainly. Take another drop, and don't let us have any more snivelling and crying about praying and repenting, and all that sort of thing; you know we are men, and have got our work to do. Come on. Have you your tools with you?"

"Yes. There is not a lock in London can stop me, if I choose to say open."

"Good."

They both left the archway, although the rain was coming down at a rate that was sufficient to wash any one quite away. They ran until they reached the deep portico in front of the Jew's house, where they had immediate shelter, as well as concealment; but it was rather an awkward thing for them to find that there was a watchman's box close at hand.

"What shall we do?" whispered Jack. "There is a watch-box."

"And a watchman in it," said Claude, "you may be sure."

"Think you so?"

"Of course; and no doubt fast enough asleep, where he will continue. The only thing to dread is his suddenly awakening and fancying he hears an alarm, in which case he will be springing his confounded rattle, to show his efficiency, as the sleepiest watchmen are in the habit of doing, the moment they do chance to awaken; and then when they have made a tumult, they say they have scared away some thieves."

"Exactly. But what can we do?"

"Take away his rattle."

"Can you manage it?"

"Oh, yes, anything in reason."

Claude crept close to the watch-box, and looked in; he saw by the faint light of the night, that the guardian of the property was fast asleep.

"Hilloa!" said Claude close to his ears.

"Eh! Eh! God bless me, what? Eh!" cried the affrighted watchman.

"Here—your—your lantern," said Claude, "and your rattle."

"Yes, yes. What's the matter?"

"Spring your rattle well, you might get a guinea, and something else, if you do."

"Certainly, your honour."

The watchman had quite a job to get his rattle, which was in the profound depths of the pocket of his great white coat, but he did at length get it, and was about to spring it, when Claude dexterously snatched it from his hand, saying—

"You shall have the guinea another time, but the something else I promised you, you shall have now."

A knock on the head with the rattle sent the guardian of the night in a heap to the bottom of the watch-box, and then putting the rattle in his own pocket, Claude came back to Jack.

"Is all right?" said Jack.

"Oh, yes, yes."

"What have you done with him?"

"Oh, nothing particular. I have only advised him to be quiet for a time, and he is prudent enough to accept the good counsel. Come, now, Jack. Begin upon the doors with your keys. A more favourable night could not be for cracking a crib than this, I suppose, although it is a sort of work that is new to me, and rather out of my line altogether. Be quick."

"I don't think we shall be interrupted," said Jack; "and as for cracking cribs, I can assure you, there has been some very respectable people in this line, and I don't myself see why it should be thought worse of than saying, 'stand and deliver!' on the king's highway."

"It's all a matter of taste, Jack."

"So it is, so it is."

Jack made clever use of a skeleton key that he had, and the click of the lock, as he shot it back, sufficiently testified that he had succeeded.

"Humph!" he said, "it's all very well. But there is an iron bar in the inside."

"What is to be done?" said Claude.

"Oh, it's only a matter of time, after all. The iron bars to doors are of the worst and softest iron, usually. People think if they are heavy that's enough; but I have a saw here which will soon settle the matter, and in this rain it will hardly be heard by any one."

A fine saw blade soon made way through the bar of the door, but when that obstacle was removed, it was found that there were too bolts to get rid of, so that, with one thing and another, half an hour was consumed before the door of the Jew's house yielded, and then both Claude and Jack thought that all the labour would be in vain, for a bell that was communicated with it, rung violently the moment they moved it.

"Confound the suspicious rascal!" said Claude.

"Hush, hush," said Jack.

The bell ceased ringing and all was still. They could not tell, of course, whether any alarm was given or not, but they closed the street door, and fastened it on the inside as well as they could, and then they stood in the dark passage and listened,

For full five minutes they remained motionless, and then hearing no noise they concluded that, amid the clatter of the descending rain, the noise made by the bell had not been sufficient to awaken the Jew.

"It's all right," said Claude.

"It's hard to say," whispered Jack, "but we must chance it. Come slowly up stairs, and when we get past all observation from the fanlight over the door, I will get a light."

"You have matches?'

"Oh, yes, I never come upon an expedition of this kind without all my tools and implements with me, you may be sure."

"You're right."

They carefully ascended the staircase, which, being well carpeted, returned no sound of their footsteps, and when they reached the first landing, in another moment a faint blue light which he had procured through the instrumentality of a chemical match, enabled Claude to see about him.

When a lantern which Jack took from his pocket was lit, every object upon which he turned the magnifiers was fully irradiated with light, and then they found that the landing upon which they were, was fitted up in a very costly manner indeed, and prevailed with so many luxuries, that Claude could not help saying—

"If the staircase be thus elaborately furnished, what must the room, to which it is only the thoroughfare, be?"

"He is rich with plunder," said Jack.

"No doubt—no doubt, and you have of late contributed not a little to his ill-gotten wealth, Jack?"

"I have. The command he has had over me has been immense; I hope some day to be able to shake it off."

"You have but to determine to do so, surely, and it may be considered to be done, I should say."

"Oh, you do not know him."

"He is a man."

"Yes, with power seemingly more than human."

"Hush!"

Claude laid his hand upon the arm of Jack, who in a moment shut up the lantern, so that all was darkness around them.

"What did you hear?" whispered Jack.

"A footstep—look, there is a faint light, too. We must hide ourselves somewhere—ah—good luck! this door is open—come, Jack, come in. The light increases. Some one is evidently coming down the stairs. Who can it be?"

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE FATE OF THE JEW.—JACK'S DELIVERANCE.

It was into a back room upon the first floor that Claude and Jack went for refuge from the person who was coming slowly down the stairs, but they did not close the door sufficiently to shut out all means of observation, for they were naturally anxious to know who it was that at such an hour was going about the house.

"Look," said Claude in a whisper to Jack, "and tell me if you know who it is. There—there he is."

"It is the Jew," said Jack, with a shudder.

"Then the bell has alarmed him."

"No doubt—no doubt, and we are lost."

"Lost! What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know him not as I know him. He has powers of mischief that transcend all that you can imagine."

"I fear him not. Hush, only watch him narrowly."

Meyers, the Jew doctor, was a tall gaunt-looking man, of about fifty years of age, and as he came slowly down the stairs which led to the upper portion of his house, he looked more tall and gaunt than he really was, for he was attired in a dressing-gown, the skirts of which swept the floor, and upon his head he wore a strange conical cap.

In his hand he had a large knife.

It was impossible to draw any precise conclusion from his manner, as to whether he had risen in consequence of the alarm given by the ringing of the bell, or not, although Claude, as far as he could be said to have an opinion, was inclined to think that it was not so.

There was an air of deliberation about Meyers which seemed to be very far from the sort of feeling with which a man would get up in the night who thought his house was attacked. Nor did he look at all about him, as one might naturally have supposed he would under such circumstances. On the contrary, he proceeded as though he had some perfectly definite object, which could not have been the case in the event of a mere night alarm.

Both Claude and Jack were puzzled to know what to think about this odd conduct of the Jew.

"Patience and let us watch him," whispered Claude. "There is no other resource; we shall perhaps find out something very curious and interesting by a close attention to his movements."

The more they watched Meyers, the more they were convinced that it was not the alarm of the bell ringing that had got him up at such an hour, and the more curious did they become, to know what on earth he could be about, stalking through his house at such a time, with a large and formidable-looking knife in his hand.

In the course of a few minutes he reached the landing where they were, and then he paused, as though to listen.

"Hist—hist!" he said, in an odd, half articulate voice. "Hist! all is still. He won't like it much; and what if he do?—ah, what if he do?"

As Claude looked carefully at him, an idea came across him, and he whispered to Jack, saying—

"He is asleep. Conscience has been exercising her power over that man, and he has arisen in his sleep."

"Do you really think so,"

"Look at him, and you will not doubt it."

Jack looked earnestly in the face of Meyers, and then he said—

"It is so; as you say, Claude, he has arisen in his sleep. No doubt the

noise of the storm and the bell mingled with some visions of his slumbers, and he has risen to repeat, perchance, some event of his former waking life."

"Some crime?"

"Doubtless a crime. Such a man's life is made up of crimes. Hush, he speaks again—let us hear him."

"Yes," said Meyers, "blood is real—but what of that? Many things are real as well as blood, and no one fears them. It is but a pang, and then all is over. He must die some time, and when he does I may not have the diamonds, but if he die now I do have them. Hush—hush—softly—hush!"

"A murder!" whispered Jack.

"No doubt of it."

"To be sure," added Meyers, "he is one of my own people, but my own people must die some time—I will do it."

"A pretty rascal!" said Claude.

"Follow him—follow him."

Meyers opened the door that was next to that through which Claude and Jack had just passed, to get out of his way, and in a moment he had left the landing. There was no difficulty, however, in following him, for he left the door wide open, so both Claude and Jack slipped into the room.

It was a large and handsome bed-chamber. In the centre was a great old-fashioned bed with costly hangings, and a great plume of feathers at each of its corners. All the appointments of the room, too, were of the first description, as they could very well see by the light which the Jew carried.

He continued muttering something to himself now which they could not very well make out, and then he placed his light upon a table and approached the bed, but he paused before he reached it, and said—

"Is all right below?"

After waiting apparently in a state of indecision for a few moments, he went to a part of the room where there was a door, and opening it he disclosed a large cupboard. He stooped to the floor of it, and appeared to be making a great effort to lift something.

It was a wonder that the exertion did not awaken him, but at length he got up the lid of a hole in the cupboard, and then he rose muttering to himself—

"Yes, yes, down there he will be safe. Let the dead consort with the dead. It has received others, and it shall receive him. He came to sleep here for security with his diamonds, and lo! he dies the death, and the bright gems become mine—yes, all mine!"

He then went to the table, and got the light, with which he advanced again to the trap-door, and holding it so as to give as much light as possible into the depth below, he stooped and looked down.

"What a grave!" he said. "But he is not the first—no—no—no, How should I be so rich if he were the first? I shall be rich enough some day to go to the East, and be a prince among my people. Yes, I shall be great in Jesusalem, if I am rich, and all will bow down to me. Oh, yes, I must have the diamonds. How deep down will he go?"

"About that depth," said Claude, as he put up his foot and sent the Jew headlong down the trap entrance.

"Good God!" said Jack,

One shriek came up from the depths of the abyss, and then all was still.

"Now, Jack," said Claude, "I have not taken this Jew's life for any sort of quarrel that I had with him, or for any romantic feeling that I was doing an act of justice towards society by ridding it of a bad member; but it is for your sake I have done it."

"For my sake?"

"Yes. Has not this man been as it were an incubus upon you? Has he not completely made you his slave? Has he not confounded all your faculties,

and so overpowered your judgment nd your imagination that you know not yourself?"

"Yes—oh, yes."

"Then you are firm?"

Jack drew a long breath before he spoke, and then he only said,

"I hope so."

'You only hope so. Are you not sure?"

'No, Claude."

"Where are your doubts?"

"I have been so accustomed to think this man something more than human, that although I have seen him disappear down that hole, I should not feel at all surprised at his reappearance."

Claude laughed.

Jack shook his head, as he added,—

"Wait a bit—wait a bit."

"Well, well, Jack, at all events I suppose the house is our own, and we had better take advantage of the opportunity and fill our purses, if we can. Come. It is most probable that we shall find what we want in some strong box, which your ingenuity will be taxed to open."

"My experience," said Jack, "of these matters has taught me to believe that it is in the bedrooms of such as Meyers that their principal moveable valuables are kept, and to such a perfection has the science of robbery got, that there are cracksmen in London who will tell you in which drawers in a chest of drawers money is most likely to be kept."

'Indeed!"

"Yes, and they are mostly correct. Come on, if we are to do anything."

"Ah, Jack, you are yourself again, now that you have got rid of the terror of that man."

"I feel better."

Jack smiled now in something of his old way, and he and Claude at once proceeded up stairs to the bedroom of the Jew, which they easily found. Claude was rather surprised to find no one else in the house, but Jack told him that Meyers was in the habit of only employing an old woman in the daytime to attend upon him, and that she did not sleep upon the premises.

"Then we are absolute masters here?" said Claude.

"I presume so."

In the Jew's bedroom they were nearly being foiled, for nothing of any value of a portable character could they for a time find. At length close to the head of the bed Claude saw a small keyhole in the wall, and he at once pointed it out to Jack, saying,—

"There, there; can you do anything with that?"

"Ah, you have found it."

"You think so?"

"I am certain of it; and it will be a lock indeed that will resist the means I have here of opening it. Hold the light, Claude, and if this be the Jew's strong box, I think we shall soon obtain a sight of its contents."

Jack produced his skeleton keys, and commenced operations, but the lock was certainly an ingenious one, for it resisted his efforts a considerable time. At length, with a sudden click it was thrown back, and in another moment a small iron door in the wall creaked upon its hinges, and showed a tolerably capacious chest, let into the solid brick work of which the wall was composed.

Claude eagerly looked into the receptacle of some of the Jew's wealth, and the strange miscellaneous collection of articles rather puzzled him, inasmuch as there was everything but cash.

Watches, rings, necklaces, bracelets, and every ornamental article of jewellery was to be found, and no doubt all of value, but the difficulty of disposing of such things was well known both to Claude and Jack.

"What are we to do?" said the former.



(Lucy, Claude's deserted mistress, about to commit suicide.)

"We must take what we can get," said Jack. "I should advise that we do not take too much at once, but come back again from time to time. Of course, by making a great sacrifice, we can manage to dispose of such property as we see here."

"Oh, yes."

Acting upon this advice, Claude and Jack each took some of the jewellery, and carefully putting it in their pockets, after which they began to think of closing the secret box, and quitting the house.

The lantern tha Jack had he placed upon a chair that was near the bed-side, and before he closed the Jew's strong box he sat down to trim the light a little.

The moment, however, that he was fairly seated in the chair, down it went through the floor like a flash of lightning, conveying Jack and the light with it, and leaving Claude in total darkness.

This was so sudden and so totally unexpected that Claude was quite staggered at it, and nearly fell forward through the opening which he supposed was now in the floor. He had not time to recover from his first surprise before another awaited him.

He felt the whole floor of the room vibrate for a moment, and then he was confident that it was slowly ascending. He could hear the creaking of pulleys by which this mechanical feat was executed, and as the speed with which the ascending floor went increased, a horrible fear came across Claude at the fate which awaited him.

"I am to be crushed," he cried, "between the floor and the roof. Oh! what a horrible fate. Help! help! help!"

The sound of his own voice roused him to that native dignity of courage which he possessed, and folding his arms, he, with a heroism worthy of a far more exalted sphere of action, prepared himself to meet one of the most horrible deaths in silence.

In that total darkness he suffered more than death with the horrible expectation of its approach in such a form as it now presented itself to him. But the floor ascended much less rapidly than he had imagined, or his imagination made him think the distance less. But at all events a very few moments more must settle the dreadful business.

During that brief interval nearly the whole of the most striking events in his career rushed across the fancy of Claude, from the moment when he had knelt by the gallows tree upon which hung the remains of his father, to that in which Cicely had told him she would be his.

It was the thought of her that inflicted the severest pang upon him, and made him indeed groan in spirit.

"Farewell, my Cicely," he said, "farewell for ever. If ever life had a charm for me, it is now in your love; but I must leave thee to the great world and all its sorrows alone. Oh, death, thou hast indeed a pang now, and such a pang as I have in my pride thought thou would'st never have to me, for I had looked upon thee in many shapes, and feared thee not until now. Cicely, dear Cicely, dearest, a last farewell."

His head sunk upon his breast, and but that his more manly nature revolted against such an act, he could have wept.

For a few moments then he was quiet, for each instant he expected that the death stroke would come. He lifted up his hands to try if he could touch the ceiling, but he felt nothing, and then he thought that the movement of the floor was not so rapid.

Hope—that radiant angel—came up in his heart again, and he began to fancy that after all he might be saved.—O what a soft delicious feeling was that!

"I may live yet—may live yet," he exclaimed, "but let my life be lengthened to as long a span as it may, never shall I forget the feelings of this dreadful hour."

He now became convinced that the passage of the floor of the apartment through the air had ceased, and he heard a voice which sounded startlingly near to him, say,

"Who art thou?"

"Whoever has had the strange power that is evidently possessed by some one here, ought to know," responded Claude.

"Who art thou?" said the voice again.

"Claude Duval."

"The robber?"

"Well, you might have chosen a more delicate mode of putting it; but have it your own way. I am Claude Duval the robber."

"And afraid to die?"

"No."

"Yes.—What will you give for your life ?"

"In truth, I have said stand and deliver to many men, but never yet had it said to me. Since, however, you put it in that light, I will give what I am worth, and the more readily because I cannot see my foe, and know not his power. Who art thou ?"

"One with power enough to crush thee. Thou hast walked into the trap, and must pay the penalty."

"What trap ? what penalty ?"

"Walk on."

Claude had two pistols about aim, and holding one in each hand, he stood profoundly still, saying—

"No, I wait my time."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DEATH OF THE DESERTED.

An event took place on that same night during which Claude Duval was exposed to such great peril, which deserves narration at our hands. It was this :

Those who are in the habit of considering human beings in a wholesome kind of a way, when there has occurred any lapse of what may be called the moralities of life, may take a lesson from the sad fate of the young girl who had for a time held the unenviable post of Claude's mistress.

We speak of her whom he had familiarly called Poll, and who with so much love and so much jealousy, had followed him from place to place, and sought to win him back to her.

At her last interview with Claude her manner had been strange, and she had exhibited symptoms almost approaching to a derangement of intellect. Such catastrophe might fairly be expected to occur, if no better or calmer feelings should soon find a place in her heart during the next few hours.

For a time she stood gazing after him, the way that he had gone, and then, with a gasping sob, she ran a few yards after him, and then she paused again, as some sudden alteration of feeling came over her.

"No, no," she said. "He has cast me off, and I will beseech him no more. He has cast me off for ever, and I will cast myself off—it is time for me to die now."

After the utterance of these mournful words she walked on in the way that she had been going, but it was with an uncertain and staggering gait, so much so, indeed, that any one would have supposed her intoxicated, but such was far from being the case.

Her soul was full of bitterness and woe, and as she went all she could continue saying, was—

"He has cast me off for ever, and I will now cast myself off."

These words to her mind had a fearful meaning. They spoke a sentence of death, which she was resolved to carry out against herself.

But still, before she bade adieu to this world, and "all the vanity and vexation of spirit," which had been hers while a dweller within its cities, she felt that she had something to do, yet a something which to leave undone, would be to cloud the death to her with double bitterness.

The rain came down in torrents soon after she had left Claude, but she walked on at the same pace, as though she were completely unconscious of the state of the weather, and no doubt she was.

She walked on until she came to a narrow street in Somers-town, and seeking a house in that street, which was of the most squalid character, she knocked at the door.

Before it was opened, she put her hand into the breast of her apparel, and took out some money, wrapped in paper.

The door was not opened, but a window above it was thrown up, and a woman called out—

"Who is that?"

"Ah, is that you?" said the wretched girl. "Don't you know me, Mrs Green?"

"Gracious goodness!"

"Why do you say gracious goodness? Alas! I have much need of grace and goodness too."

The window was closed, and in a few moments the street door was opened, when Mrs. Green, gasping in an odd manner as she spoke, said—

"Why, why—did you—never leave—your address?"

"My address?"

"Yes, it is a month since you have been here to see after your child you gave me to nurse."

"Yes, a month. I always, you know, come once a month to pay you. Here is the money."

"Yes, but—but——"

"But what?"

"You know you have always refused to let us know where to find you."

"Believe me, I had my reasons."

"You have been away a month."

"Gracious God! why do you continue repeating that!"

"Because, because——"

"Because what? You will drive me distracted. Speak to me, woman. Because what, I say?"

"During that time, your child——"

"My child? my child? Did you say my child?"

"Yes, yes."

"Go on, go on, or I will kill you."

"During that time your child has been dead——"

"Oh, no, no, no!"

"And buried."

"'Tis over. Thank—thank God. 'Tis over."

The wretched mother dropped the small sum of money that she carefully laid by to pay for the child's keep. It fell upon the pavement with a dull heavy sound, and the poor bereaved mother staggered from the place. Again in a rushing torrent came down the pitiless rain, dashing into her face, while the insulting wind dragged from her head the frail soddened bonnet that she wore, and scattered it to fragments.

She heeded nothing—she cared for nothing, but no doubt quite unconscious of what had occurred, she still staggered on, and it was strange that she seemed to know, even in the midst of all her mental agony, whither she was going.

She hurried up and down streets evidently with a design. It would almost seem as if some unseen hand were leading her to destruction or to peace.

"All is lost!" she said. "All is lost!" and those were the only words she uttered, as through the storm of wind and rain she took her way—to the river.

Yes. That was her destination.—Winding her way up the long straggling thoroughfare of Gray's Inn Lane, she reached Holborn, which she crossed, and diving into the intricate neighbourhood of Fetter Lane, she soon found herself in Bridge Street, Blackfriars, close to the old bridge.

The storm of wind and rain had cleared the streets of all who had houses to go to, and it seemed to that unhappy creature, so few persons did she meet, as if every one kept out of her way, as they would out of the way of something dangerous or loathsome to sight or touch.

That was her impression. Alas, poor creature! She had deserted herself and

now she found that all human kind deserted her. She was about to leave the world, which henceforward contained for her no charm, and so she, with a pardonable error, thought that it was leaving her.

She was certainly seen and remarked upon by two or three persons as she went, but then, in London, to look woe-begone and spirit-broken, is to bespeak that shrinking and shunning with which the more cheerful and prosperous are but too apt to treat their less fortunate brothers.

It is a melancholy fact that there is nothing from which human nature revolts so much as from the sight of the misery of its fellows.

Of course there are many noble and brilliant exceptions to this state of things.

An old watchman, who happened to awake, looked out of his box just in time to see the pale, wan, heart-stricken being pass him. Her face happened to be just upon a level with his as she flitted by.

He thought it was a ghost, and dropped to the bottom of his box in an agony of apprehension at having such a personage upon his beat.

"Lord forgive us!" he muttered. "It's a ghost of some one who has met death by some unfair means, and there has been no crowner's quest in the parish."

She passed on, and now the surging noise of the rain upon the river could be distinctly heard. She looked up the steep ascent of the bridge, but not a soul was to be seen. Black, heavy masses of cloud obscured the fair face of Heaven, and the starry host, which else would have made such a glorious canopy above her head, and all between that and earth was the pelting of the storm, that seemed to know no abatement.

The water came down in a stormy shower, and the mist of it came up in a seething cloud.

All was miserable, cold desolation.

The miserable creature, who walked upon the margin of eternity, did not weep —If God had granted tears to her, she yet might have found a something for the love of which to cling to life, some faint hope to which she might have held, as the wrecked mariner grasps at a floating reed, to sustain him amid the roar and the dash of a raging sea.

But she had no tears and she had no hope. Her heart was a desert, over which the simoom of wild passion had passed, and left not a green spot behind it, to mark that there had ever been verdure or beauty.

No, all was despair.

And now she has climed up the steep ascent of the bridge, and she stands near to the parapet of the centre arch. Her arms are resting upon the cold wet stone. Those arms which will soon want no rest, knowing no fatigue.

The wind scattered about her shoulders the dishevelled masses of her hair, and her poor tattered garments are tossed in confusion by the stormy breeze.

She paused a moment, and a sort of shuddering horror of the deed she contemplated doing, crossed her mind.

"Oh, heaven forgive me," she said. "It is known above that if I were not so truly desolate as I am, I would not thus seek to die."

She paused as though she almost expected some distinct and not tangible answer to her appeal, and then in a few moments she spoke again as if she were really holding some discourse or argument concerning her condition with an invisible and all powerful being.

"My child is no more," she said, "oh, then, what have I to live for? He whom I have loved has cast me from him. Another supplies the place in his heart that once was mine. Why then am I urged to live?"

She leant her face upon her hands, and shook as with a convulsion of grief, but she shed no tears, and then she spoke again in a most melancholy and wailing tone of voice, that must have gone to the heart of any human being, if such had heard the mournful tones.

"Yes, I was once virtuous; I once had friends who looked upon me with eyes

of love, and almost veneration. They said that I was beautiful too, but what am I now? I ask what am I now, that I should see to live?"

She gazed wildly around he, as though from the spirits of the storm that hustled and wailed around her, she expected some answer in confutation or acquiescence with the words she had last uttered to vacancy.

The rain beat in her face, and the blustering wind scattered about her hair, now blinding her as it was dashed across her eyes, and then streaming wildly like some strange banner far from her.

"Claude—Claude," she gasped, "where are you now? Oh! where are you now, Claude?"

Suddenly she shrunk into one of the recesses of the bridge. A party of drunken men were coming from the City side of the river, and chanting on their way some rude Bacchanalian lay, which they thought it necessary to give utterance to at the top of their lungs.

The rain and the wind did not affect them. They were in the seventh heaven of a drunkard's felicity. The headache and the repentance of the morrow never for a moment crossed their minds, as they came swaggering on, occupying nearly the whole of the carriage way.

They passed on without seeing the young girl, who shrunk from their observation as fearfully as if anything, in her then frame of mind, could harm her.

When they were gone—when their tipsy chant had decreased, in the distance, to a faint murmur, she rose shivering from the corner where she had hidden herself.

It was strange at that moment what a sudden lull came over the tempest that had been raging around her. The rain dropped, and the wind only came in small scattering misty gusts. She looked up, and through a crevice in the clouds she saw a small portion of a young moon.

Oh! never had it in her eyes looked so beautiful, and so full of calm and serenity.

The exquisite beauty of that cloudy canopy, the fair planet that shone through it, filled her whole soul.

She wrung her hands as she cried, frantically—

"Oh, if I dared to live—oh, if I dared to live."

The clouds, envious of so much calm majesty and beauty, swept again over the face of the young moon. Again, with a sullen roar, the wind arose, and the rain came down like an avalanche upon the devoted head of the poor wanderer.

The partial light that had shone for a moment upon her soul was gone again, and like the elements around her, her mind became once more all wild commotion.

She passed her hands several times across her face and brow, as to free her vision from the tangled masses of her hair, which ever and anon flaunted in the breeze, and half-blinded her. Then she spoke—

"Farewell," she said, mournfully. "Farewell to all whom I loved—farewell to all who love me. My little child is in heaven, and wants no prayer, but my last words to the great Master of all things shall be for thee, Claude Duval. May you be yet blessed—yes, yet blessed."

She looked hastily around her; no one was nigh. For all the sight or sound of human habitants that met her hasty observation, she might have been in a city of the dead.

"Claude, Claude," she cried. She waved her arms frantically in the murky air. "Farewell, Claude."

There was a rushing sound, a shriek, a plunge in the water of the Thames, and all was over. The tide rolled over the life and the sorrows of that erring one, who yet will not be despised of heaven.

CHAPTER XLV.

FINISHES CLAUDE'S ADVENTURE IN QUEEN STREET.

We left Claude Duval in one of the most extraordinary and perilous situations it was his fortune to be in during the whole of his eventful career.

The command which had been given to him to advance, he by no means felt inclined to obey. He was as yet, so far as he knew, standing upon solid ground, but he could not tell how much danger a single footstep forward might place him at once into.

Hence was it that with his pistol in his hand, upon which he knew he could rely, he declared his intention of not obeying the command which was given him.

If we were to say that under such totally unprecedented and extraordinary circumstances in which Claude was now placed he pid not feel any amount of terror or uneasiness, we should be saying that he was not human, but certainly he felt no fear, properly so called.

After he had breathed the sort of defiance that his last words implied, there was a pause of some moments' duration, and the same voice said—

"Claude Duval, think again."

"About what?" said Claude.

"Advancing."

"No; I shall remain where I am."

"You are a doomed man."

"I will believe that when it happens," said Claude, "but I decline putting faith in it before."

"Cast down your arms and yield."

"When I am better convinced of the power of my enemy I will take that course into consideration."

"Fool, are you sick of life?"

"No, idiot, are you?"

Claude thought he heard the stealty footstep of some one close to him.

This was an idea that in the intense darkness with which he was surrounded was none of the pleasantest, and he bent all his attention to listen for any confirmation of the supposition.

In the course of half a minute he felt quite sure that his senses had not deceived him. He could hear, he thought, the suppressed breathing of some one.

"Do it," said a voice.

A stealthy footstep approached nearer still, and then all was quiet. Claude doubled his fist and launched out his right arm with violence.

He was not mistaken in the result, for some substance gave way before the blow, and there was a great scuffling upon the floor of the place.

A suppressed voice uttered at the moment some of the most diabolical oaths that he, Claude, had ever in all his life heard.

"Stand off," he cried. "Stand off, I say, or advance another step at your own peril. I am armed, and never yet scrupled to defend myself."

All was still.

Claude stooped as low as he could, and then he hear a low voice say,—

"Where is he?"

"Hush!" said another. "Question him where he is. Claude Duval, attend to what shall be said to you. You are adjured to do so by the bones of him who suffered at Hampstead for the crime that was another's."

"What more?" cried Claude. "What more can you say or know upon that subject? You may enchain my attention as surely as that of a three year old child with a nursery tale, if you can tell me more than I myself know upon such a subject."

"We can tell all," said the voice.

"All? All?"

"Ay, all, from the first to the last."

"Speak, then, I charge you."

"Advance."

Claude in his anxiety to hear what he could on the subject of his father's condemnation and execution for a crime of which he was certainly innocent, was upon the point of stepping forward, but a moment's reflection made him pause, for it convinced him that nothing more had been as yet said but what might be known to many.

"I will hear what you have to say from my present position," he added, coldly.

"You are incredulous," said the voice.

"As well I may be, until I have more proof."

"Well, listen. Your father was accused of the murder of Sir Lionel Faversham's steward at Hampstead. The principal witness against him was Sir Lionel himself. Your father was innocent of the crime."

"Well?"

"He suffered, and was hung in chains upon Hampstead Heath, but you, while yet a boy, and in company with your only sister, May Duval, revenged his death. On a stormy, blustrous night, you shot Sir Lionel Faversham close to the gibbet of your dead father, and he rolled down a steep declivity a dead man, and lay a mangled corpse at its base."

"And that is all?" said Claude.

"Is it not enough?"

"Yes, for your knowledge, but not for your purposes. You have sought to make an impression upon me, by detailing some particulars of my poor father, but well I know where you have gleaned them."

"That is impossible. The secrets of occult science are not to be discovered so hastily.'

"There needs no occult science in this case. You have got a poor dupe, whose enfeebled intellect, I regret to say, has made him too readily fall into your hands. You have gleaned from Sixteen-string Jack all that you have just told me."

"Wretched man, your death be upon your own head unless you agree to our terms."

"Ay, what are they?"

"A league of mutual benefit. You will be protected upon all serious occasions, and even restored to life again if you should suffer at Tyburn, provided——"

"Ay, provided," said Claude. "What is the condition? I think I can guess it."

"The consideration is, that you bring here a portion of your gains regularly."

"In fact, be your journeyman instead of my own master. That is the affair as I take it."

"Do not reject too lightly."

"Nor accept too lightly."

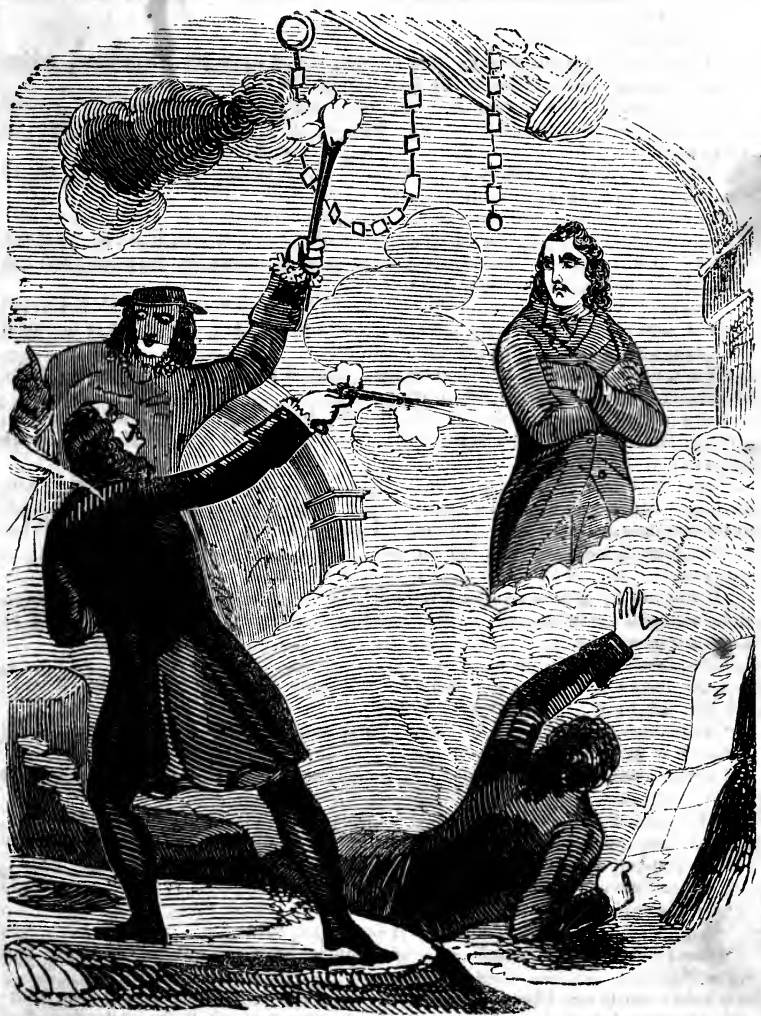
"Hark you, Claude Duval; you are upon the point of giving what you will call a haughty defiance, and a hasty passionate answer to this proposition Remember, however, that it is only made to a few, and if any one to whom it is made refuses it, we never allow him to leave this place alive."

"Indeed!" said Claude. "Then it is time we began operations."

During the course of this little dialogue, Claude had bent all his energies towards coming to an accurate judgment as to where the person was standing with whom he was conversing, and he considered that he felt fully certain upon the subject.

Immediately after he had uttered the last words, he levelled his pistol in the direction he thought would be certain to give him a fair chance in the dark of hitting his unknown enemy.

"Hark you," he added. "I have a pistol here, double-barrelled, and with a good spring bayonet attached."



(Claude Duval in the Cellars of the Jew's house.)

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed some one. "Two barrels, say you? Ha! ha!"

"Yes, and there's the contents of one of them."

As he spoke, he pulled the trigger, and a stunning report subdued all other sounds for the moment.

"Murder!—murder!—murder! Oh! oh! oh!" cried some one. "I'm done for at last!"

"Glad to hear it," said Claude, as he dashed furiously in the direction of the speaker. "Only let me get hold of you, and I'll soon put you out of your misery,

you infernal scoundrel. You thought, I suppose, you had such a man as poor enfeebled Sixteen-string Jack to deal with, but I suppose you have now found out the difference."

"Oh, murder!—murder!"

"There were only three slugs in the pistol, if you have got them all," added Claude making another dart in the direction of the voice.

Suddenly he lost his footing, and the only thing that for half a moment stayed his fall down some deep pit, was a rope that he fell across. He had just time to seize it, and then down he went at a very rapid rate, hanging by it.

"Ha! ha!" said the voice, quite in composed accents. "I shouldn't at all wonder, my fine fellow, but you will break your neck. Ha! ha!"

The rope must have met with some sort of impediment in its progress, or else it would have been of but small service to Claude. As it was, however, it saved his life, for although he came swiftly to the ground, it was feet foremost, and not with force sufficient to give him a very tolerable shake.

It was not to be supposed but that he would feel a little confused at his rapid descent, and for a few moments, if policy had not dictated silence, it is doubtful if he could have found breath to utter a word.

At length he recovered a little, and gave himself a shake, to ascertain that he had really sustained no serious injury.

All was impenetrable darkness, and Claude stumbled on for some few paces, until he heard or fancied he heard a deep groan, and then before he could speak himself, a voice said—

"Oh! is this to be the end of all? Better had I died upon the scaffold! Oh, far better had I died upon the gallows, than thus be preserved to linger out a life of torture here. Spare me! spare me! I pray you, by killing me at once. What have I done to merit this at your hands?"

"Surely," thought Claude, "that is Jack's voice."

He did not by any means wish too hurriedly to commit himself in speaking, so he listened for some time, in the hope that the voice would renew its real or mock supplications.

In a few moments it did so.

"Oh, have mercy upon me; indeed I will bring all plunder faithfully," it said; "I only ask to live; I will reserve nothing."

"It is Jack's voice," said Claude, "but I really wonder how far I may trust him. Has he played me false or not?"

Claude hesitated for a few moments longer, and then the voice of Jack came again to his ears,

"What have I done that I should be thus condemned? I know your power! I know that you have wonderful, and in all respects miraculous resources, but why should you try to crush me?"

"If you betrayed another," said Claude, in an assumed voice, "you would betray me."

"Another? Betrayed another? What do you mean?

"Your old friend and comrade Claude Duval; have you not offered to sell him to us?"

"I—I offer to sell Claude Duval?—now I understand you. I am to be murdered because I would not do so, and your making it my fault, by pretending that I yielded, is but one of those bitter pieces of irony, in which you are so great and profound. But if I am to die, or to suffer torments worse even, for not betraying Claude into your hands, it must be so; I am weak in many things, but upon that I am as firm as a rock."

"Jack," said Claude, in his natural voice. "How do you find yourself, my old pall?"

"Oh, joy, joy! is it you, Claude?"

"Yes to be sure, and alive and kicking. Never fear, old fellow; we shall do well yet."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE FIGHT IN THE CELLARS OF THE JEW'S HOUSE.

For a few moments after Claude uttered these last words, Sixteen-string Jack was silent, but it was the silence of excess of joy at finding Claude was safe and uninjured. He could not forbear shedding tears of gratification.

Alas! poor Jack, he was a very different being indeed, now, to what he was before his execution. No one had been more firm, bold, and full of spirits than he; but that awful event, although it had not resulted in depriving him of life, had completely crushed and broken down his spirits.

He was, indeed, according to the phraseology of religious fanatics, a new man, and he had gained nothing by the novelty, as Claude and all who knew him could well perceive.

"Come, Jack," said Claude, "don't be whimpering and snivelling there like a girl, but stir yourself up, and let us see or feel, for this place is horridly dark, what we have to do."

"Yes, Claude, I am here."

"Well, I know you are there; all I ask of you, is to be a man."

"I will do whatever you tell me, Claude. You have but to command me, and I will obey. We are not safe here though."

"How do you know that?"

"Some one spoke to me, a few minutes since!"

"Oh, never mind that," said Claude, who knew that it was to the short colloquy he himself had had with Jack in an assumed voice he now referred. "Never mind that, Jack; can you give a guess as to where we are?"

"We can be nowhere else than in the vaults of the Jew's house, as I think."

"And can we get out?"

"No!" said a loud stern voice, that was not Jack's.

"Oh, good gracious," said Jack, "we are lost."

"Silence," shouted Claude, "silence, I say; who was that who just now said, 'No?'"

"One who can say more, and as much to the purpose if he will," added the voice; "take that."

Bang want a pistol, and Claude felt the ball just touch his cheek as it passed him.

"Blaze away!" he cried in a voice of the greatest unconcern, as he immediately fired in the direction where he had seen the flash of the weapon. "Blaze away."

Crack went another pistol shot at Claude, but it missed him as before. His usual luck did not now desert him upon the occasion.

"All right," he cried; having taken the precaution during his previous brief conversation with Jack to reload the discharged barrel of his pistol, he was able instantly to return this second fire, somewhat to the amazement of his foes.

A deep groan came upon the air of the place after the echo of the firing had ceased.

"Oh, said Claude, "I had one of you, had I?"

He sat down upon the ground to reload his pistol, and he had while in that position satisfactory proof that it was the safest he could assume, for another shot was fired which just passed over his head.

By the flash of this last shot he saw Sixteen-string Jack, not far from him, with something glittering in his hand.

"What is it you have, Jack?" said Claude.

"A sword that I have just picked up," replied Jack. "I hope I shall be

able by its use to convince you, Claude, how very willing I am to fight for you."

"All's right, I am ready again. Blaze away."

His foes did not seem so ready as before to fire at one who really seemed to have a charmed life, and he rose from the ground to a standing posture with the double barrelled pistol ready for immediate action, without having another shot tried upon him.

Suddenly a faint light illuminated the most distant part of the strange cavernous place in which he and Sixteen-string Jack were, and from which their escape seemed to be difficult, if not very doubtful under the present aspect of affairs,

Claude fixed his eyes upon the light, which looked more like that reflected from some centre of illumination, which was sought to be hidden, than light especially intended to be directed to that part of the cavernous place.

At all events, let it come how it might into the place, Claude by its assistance saw the crouching figure of a man.

After the numerous shots that had been fired at him, it was not to be supposed that he would feel much delicacy with regard to returning them. To fire at the figure was the work of a moment.

"A miss. Try again," cried a voice. "Ha, ha!"

Claude, contrary to his usual calm practice, suffered himself at the moment to be irritated into firing his other barrel, so that he held in his hand a discharged pistol.

It would appear, that this was just the state of things he required, for in a moment a voice shouted—

"On to him. Cut him down—cut him down. Do something so that he do not leave this place alive."

Four men immediately rushed from out the darkness upon Claude, while a fifth emerged from behind a door, and held up a lighted flambeau, which cast a radiant glow over the whole scene.

At any other time, no doubt Claude would have felt some curiosity to look about him, and see what sort of place he was in, but now to defend his life was the sole thought that came across him.

The only weapon of defence or offence he had was that spring bayonet attached to the pistol, which he had spoken of; a touch made that ready for use, but it was a poor defence against four resolute armed men.

What force, however, will not do, finesse will sometimes accomplish, and in Claude's situation of danger, any course of action was allowable.

Suddenly he flung himself upon the floor, and in a strange squatting attitude, and rushing forward, he caught two of his enemies by the legs, and flung them upon their backs before they were aware of what was going to happen to them.

Springing to his feet, then, with a celerity that was truly astonishing, he made another of them by far too intimately acquainted with the power of the little bayonet to be at all pleasant, and as that one staggered back, Claude wrenched from his hand a sword with which he was armed, and stood upon his defence.

The ruffian who had hitherto escaped the result of the encounter, stood for a moment or so, like a man petrified, but it would appear as if he possessed courage, for he advanced upon Claude with some show of determination.

"Be it so," said Claude as their swords rung together, "you and I, if you please, without any tricks, will fight it out."

It was well for Claude Duval that among his minor accomplishments he included that of a good knowledge of the use of the broadsword, or he would now have found more than his match in the man to whom he was opposed.

As it was, the fight appeared to be about as fair a one as regarded equally matched opponents as could very well be imagined.

Neither party gave way an inch, and the swords clashed together with a vehe-

mence which proved them to be right good steel to stand it. No wound had as yet been given or received.

But Claude was not for many minutes to be left to such a fair stand-up fight. The two vagabonds who had been upset by Claude, at the commencement of the fracas, were not very likely to amuse themselves by sitting upon the floor for a longer period than they could possibly help; and now they both rose and advanced to the attack with a serious celerity, that really threatened mischief towards Claude.

The man who stood aloft with the torch, began to think that he might as well have a hand in the affair; accordingly, rushing forward, he dealt Claude a blow upon the back of the head with the flambeau that brought from it, the torch, such a shower of sparks as confused everybody, while it nearly stunned Claude.

The regular opponent who was fighting with Duval did not take any advantage of this circumstance, but one of the others who had been so ignominiously upset did so, and approaching Claude, he was upon the point of making a blow at him, when very mysteriously at the moment down he fell with a fractured skull.

This mystery, however, did not last above a moment, for when the fellow fell, Claude saw Sixteen-stringJack standing close at hand brandishing a sword, and looking absolutely furious.

"Come on," he cried, in a voice that was as different from that in which he usually spoke, as thunder is to a penny whistle. "Come on, you vagabonds, come on, and I'll soon make-mince meat of you. Come on, you thieves and murderers, face me if you dare."

"Bravo, Jack!" cried Claude.

The man with the torch made a blow at Jack with that most bewildering weapon, but Jack thrust at him with his sword, and the point of it going into his mouth, made such confusion among his teeth that he howled again, and danced about in the most ludicrous manner imaginable. But Claude had too much real work upon his hands to find time to laugh at what Jack was doing.

"Come on," cried the man who had been fighting him, "keep it up for a few minutes."

"What do you mean?" said Claude.

"Fight me till three in the morning, if you please."

"You are an odd fellow, what do you mean?" said Claude.

At this moment the only other person of the attacking four who was in a condition to do so, made a blow at Sixteen-string Jack, which brought him to his knees.

"Claude—Claude!" he cried, "Claude!"

"Coming, Jack," said Claude, and making two steps towards him, he clave the man's skull open with one blow of the broad sword he had in his hand, and Jack struggled with a confused look to his feet.

"Hush! hush!" suddenly cried the man who had been fighting with Claude Duval, "there's the chimes of some church clock going; it's three. Hip, hip, hip, hurrah! I'm out of his service at last."

The fellow threw down his sword, and cut such extraordinary capers, that Claude was lost in astonishment, and did not see for a moment that the man with the torch, notwithstanding his wound, and that he had cast the flambeau to the ground, where it lay spirting and burning, was attempting to make his escape from the scene of action.

"Stop him," cried Sixteen-string Jack, pointing to the man who had held the flambeau, "stop him, Claude."

"Right willingly," said Claude; "if I mistake not, my friend, you came behind me with your torch, and very nearly put me beyond further troubles."

"Oh, no—no—no," cried the fellow, as he darted on. "No, it was not I—it was not I."

"Indeed, but it was though. Defend yourself."

"Take that, then," said the fellow, as suddenly turning, with a large horse pistol in his hand, he fired, or rather pulled the trigger of it in Claude's face. The weapon only flashed in the pan.

"Thank you," said Claude, "I believe that was very well meant, but it strikes me that your powder could not have been dry. You see how dangerous such negligence is."

One blow with the sword stretched the fellow at Claude's feet, and then turning he saw the man with whom he had been so recently engaged, and who in such a mysterious manner had suddenly left off fighting at three o'clock, clapping his hands, and apparently quite enjoying the scene that was taking place.

"You are a strange fellow," said Claude to him. "Pray what is the meaning of all this?"

"All what?"

"Why, your fighting against me with such hearty good-will at one moment, and then throwing down your sword the next."

"Oh, it was three o'clock."

"But what has that to do with it?"

"Everything in the world."

"Indeed. Pray explain."

"Why, I made a bargain with the Jew to serve him well and faithfully for three months, you see, and to fight his battles for him and so on, without asking any questions, and that bargain was made exactly three months ago at three o'clock in the morning, when I was hard up."

"Well?"

"Well, don't you see I was bound to cut away at you or anybody else that he was at war with, until my time was up, surely."

"You are a strange fellow."

"I don't see anything strange in that; a bargain is a bargain, surely, and I was bound to do it."

"Well, you handle your sword well, and it was a good thing for one of us that three o'clock did come. But now that you are a free man, I presume you have no objection to tell me where I am?"

"None in the least. You are in the extensive cellars of the Jew's house. They extend under-ground a long way, and come out at a little marine-store dealer's in Wild-street."

"A fence you mean?"

"It's the same thing."

"And who are you?"

"A prig. Who are you?"

"Claude Duval."

"What! the famous highwayman they call Gentleman Jack?"

"Yes," said Claude with a smile, "but you very nearly settled my affairs with that sword of yours, my friend."

"Lor! only to think now that I was doing my best to put a stopper upon you of whom I have heard so much, and so much wished to see and make acquaintance with. Well, it's all for the best, I dare say."

"That's a comfortable enough doctrine," said Claude, "but in my opinion it will be better still if you can conduct me out of this place at once."

"Oh, yes, I can do that."

"Come, Jack," cried Claude. "I hope you are not hurt."

"Not at all," said Sixteen-string Jack. "My head is pretty hard, but I advise that we beat a retreat as soon as we can, for there is no knowing what may be the amount of mischief the Jew may yet do to us. He is fertile enough in expedients."

"Why, you don't suppose he will trouble any of us any more?" said Claude's new acquaintance, as he dashed away the charred end of the flambeau, and made it give a better light.

"Why not?" said Jack.

"Why not? just look at him."

He pointed to the dead body of the man who had carried the torch, and when Jack advanced and looked closely at him, he exclaimed—

"By heavens! it is indeed the Jew. Claude, I am free, and you will find in me again what I was."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE BALL AT ST. JAMES'S PALACE.

"Is he indeed no more?" said Claude.

"Well," said the man, "I think so. You have let daylight into his brains and that ought to do for him."

"By-the-bye, what's your name?" said Claude.

"Why, sometimes one thing and sometimes another, but among those who, know me I always answer to the name of the marquis."

"The marquis of what?"

"Oh, nothing at all. Only the marquis."

"Well, then, marquis, as soon as you can find it convenient with your civility to guide us out of this place, I shall be much obliged; come on at once."

"Certainly. I have an appointment of some importance at four o'clock, and am in no humour to delay it. This way, if you please, gentlemen. Follow your noses and you can't go wrong, so long as they point towards the flambeau."

Neither Claude nor Jack were at all willing to stay one moment longer upon the premises of the Jew than was absolutely necessary, so with all the good will in the world they followed the marquis, who led them through a labyrinth and wilderness of dark cellars that they never could have found their way among without a guide, unless they had been favoured by all the accidents that could possibly happen to lead folks right instead of wrong.

At lenght they reached a small flight of rough wooden steps, and the marquis turning to Claude, said—

"These steps lead into the shop I spoke of in Wild-street."

"The marine-store dealer's?"

"Yes; the man and his wife who kept it are sworn friends of the Jew, but there is a pass-word which I know, and which will prevent the necessity of knocking them on the head."

"Just so," said Claude.

The marquis led the way, and raised a trap door above the flight of steps, when a loud voice suddenly cried—

"Hilloa! what's that?"

"Ask again," said the marquis.

"The old story?"

"Yes to be sure. Here, there, and everywhere."

"Oh, all's right here; is anyting wrong in Queen-street?"

"No. There was, but there ain't now. Is your door open, or are you going to get up?"

"Now do you fancy I have my door open, after taking in all sorts of swag all day? Might not some dishonest person take advantage of my being asleep and take something?"

"Ah! there's a good deal of thievery in the world."

"I believe you. Hilloa!"

"What's the row?"

"You have got somebody with you."

"Yes."

"Who are they?"

"Pals—open the door and don't be a fool, you know me, and that's enough for you. God bless me, you are as particular as if you were to be hung for it. Upon my life you won't do for this place long."

"There's no occasion, markis, to put yourself in a passion," said the man, as he unlocked the shop door. "I only asked, and you know him as pays the piper is rather particular, and I shall have to tell him who has passed this way."

"You will have to bawl pretty loud, then."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh just that and nothing else. Good night."

The marquis and his two friends passed through the shop door into the street, and the man, as he fastened his place up again, muttered to himself—

"I shall have to bawl pretty loud, shall I—what the deuce does he mean by that now, I wonder? Anything amiss with the governor? Lor! if I only thought he'd croaked, wouldn't I cut with all as was here pretty quick, and no mistake, that's all. But there ain't no luck for honest people, let 'em strive ever so much; he's all right enough I'll be bound."

"That danger is passed," said the marquis.

"Was it a danger?" asked Sixteen-string Jack.

"Yes, that fellow is one of the most unscrupulous in the world, and, though no doubt in a scuffle, of course, we should heve got the better of him, he would have settled the affair of one of us. But now, gentlemen, what are you going to do? I will not conceal from you that I am busy."

"Is it a fair question," said Claude, "to ask you what you are going to be about, that occupies you so much?"

"Certainly; I am going to St. James's Palace, where a ball has been going on since twelve o'clock at night, to celebrate some nonsense or another about the old noodle of a king."

"And you are going?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, I have no reason why not, I would rather ask you why?"

"Well, that's the reason I'm called the marquis, because I go to the royal establishments and the nobility's parties."

"You surprise me."

"I do a great many people. Whenever there is anything very out of the way, in the shape of an entertainment at the palace, where so many are invited that it is impossible but there should be a number of strangers, I call myself the marquis of something, and go——"

"On the grabbing lay, of course?"

"Oh, of course, and brought away on the last occasion nine gold watches, a whole handful of brooches, and three diamond bracelets, besides a snuff-box set in brilliants, and a necklace worth one hundred pounds."

"The deuce you did."

"Yes, just wait for me a moment."

The marquis popped into a doorway, and was absent about two minutes, when he returned so entirely transformed, that well might Claude and Jack stare at him in utter amazement.

He had thrown off a coarse kind of wrapper that he wore, and got rid of some leggings, likewise, and beneath he exhibited a court dress of the most fashinable and elegant description.

"Excuse me keeping on my boots over my morocco shoes," he said. "The street is rather damp."

"This is indeed a transformation," said Claude.

"Why, yes, when one goes into the presence of royalty, however, in its individual instance, it may be contemptible, one is forced to conform to the fashion."

"Now of all things in the world," said Claude, "I should like to go with you."

"At a word," cried the marquis, "do you mean it?"

"With all my heart."

"It's settled, then. You shall go."



CLAUDE DUVAL OBTAINS THE BRACELET FROM THE ROYAL PRINCESS.

"And I," said Jack.

"You likewise, if you like. But mind it's a part to play."

"I know it. Only let me go with Claude Duval, I shall be able to get on very well indeed."

Claude laughed as he looked at himself and Jack.

"We talk of going to a court ball, Jack," he said, "but we forget that we are not, like our friend here, provided with the necessary trappings for the occasion; we cannot, as he has done, cast our skins, and from poor crawling worms rise up gorgeous butterflies."

"Yes you can," said the marquis.

"As how?"

"I know where to find you the clothing. Having made up your mind to go, all you have to do is to follow me, and all the minor difficulties will soon vanish from before you."

"I'll follow you with pleasure; but how do you gain admission to the palace without a card?"

"I walk in with a smile and a bow."

"And does no one stop you?"

"Sometimes."

"And then?"

"Oh then I elevate my eyebrows and say, 'Why, my good sir, it was you whom I begged to recollect me, for that I should be back again when I had given orders concerning the marchioness's carriage,' and then the fellow stammers out some excuse, and on I go."

"And you have never failed?"

"Never once. But mind I never venture into small assemblies; there must be a crowd when I go."

"I can understand that; I can clearly enough see likewise that the vulgarity of your manners and language, while we were in the Jew's cellars, were only assumed; you have been——"

"A gentleman."

"I guessed as much."

"Say no more upon that head, but suffer me, as it may at the moment suit my wayward humours, to seem to know much or little. You will, no doubt, be much gratified by your visit to-night to St. James's. The place is well worth the seeing of, the people are quite the reverse. If you have never been present at such a scene it will be sure to make a lasting and pleasing impression upon you."

"Well," said Claude, "this adventure pleases me; but don't let me at all influence you, Jack. How do you feel?"

"As if I should like to follow you."

"But there is peril, and there is much caution required; I speak as a friend, Jack. Do you think you are equal to it?"

"I do, Claude."

"Then come on. Is this the costumier's?"

"You may call it by that fine word if you like," said the marquis, "but I call it a clothes crib. Come along, you shall soon have a court suit that will pass you anywhere."

"If like yours, it will do."

"All's right."

The marquis took up a handful of very small gritty dust from the road, and cast it at one of the windows of a dingy looking house, before which they stopped. In the course of a few moments a head was projected from the window.

"All's right," said the marquis; "it is only me, No. 42, old chap; you know that, I suppose?"

"The marquis?

"Yes. The marquis. Come down, we want something in your way, and quickly too, or it won't do."

"Coming," said the voice, and the head popped in again, the window being closed with a bang. In less than a minute the street-door was opened, and the marquis and his two friends entered the house. The door was shut again and secured, after which a flickering blue flame appeared in the passage, and a lamp was lit, which showed Claude a man of mean appearance, who was half dressed, and who, with an odd side-long sort of bow to the whole party, said—

"Your humble servant, gentlemen; what am I to do?"

"Look at me," said the marquis.

"With great pleasure," said the man.

"Well, these two gentlemen want court dresses, for we are all going together to an acquaintance, who is giving a little dance to-night."

"Humph! the palace?"

"Well if it be at the palace, what then? We know very well that that is not the most respectable place to go to, but in this world one must not be too particular."

"Certainly not. Certainly not. Bob, Bob, Bob! I say."

"Here you is," said a sleepy voice.

"Go and get a coach and bring it to the door. It will be wanted in about a quarter of an hour."

"Ah! that's well thought of," said the marquis.

The man led his visitors into a tolerably well furnished room, and after walking round and round Claude and Jack several times, he said—

"I'll be with you in a few moments, gentlemen."

He was as good as his word, and in less than ten minutes they were both attired in elegant court suits; and if Sixteen-string Jack did not quite come up to one's ideas of a nobleman, certainly Claude looked a most distinguished personage, and would have, without the shadow of a doubt, passed as somebody in any court in Europe.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CLAUDE AND THE ROYAL PRINCESS.

"Now I suppose," said Claude to the marquis, "after all, one has really the most difficult part of the business to go through."

"Difficult?"

"Yes. We have to gain admission to the palace."

"Pho! I look upon that as settled. Come along, I hear the coach at the door."

"Gentlemen," said the costumier, "I will wait up for you, if you so please."

"Do so," said the marquis; "come along."

Claude and Sixteen-string Jack followed him to the door, and they all three got into a roomy coach, and were in another moment proceeding at the usual hackney-coach rate, of two miles and a half an hour, to St. James's.

"Being three of us, the trouble of getting in," said Sixteen-string Jack with a sort of groan, "will be great."

"Not at all," said the marquis. "I tell you how we will do it. All that is required in the whole affair, consists of what they are well used to about courts and palaces."

"What is that?"

"Impudence."

"Certainly," said Claude. "I don't suppose there is any lack of that commodity in the quarter to which we are now proceeding."

"There is not indeed. Let the proceedings be conducted as I shall point out, and I will answer for success.

"You shall decide."

"Very well. Now we will get out of this carriage at the outer gate. I know the right path to take, and will guide you. Any delay on the route would betray us at once. All you have to do, is to follow me at about a dozen paces off, and bow and smile, and accede to anything I may require of you. It is you, Claude Duval, who I fully expect to have presence of mind sufficient to aid me in the affair."

"You will find," said Claude, "that I shall not fail in that particular."

"Good; here we are, and I shall be much obliged to your friend to say nothing."

'I will not spoil anything, you may depend," said Jack; "if I cannot feel quite sure that anything I may say will be to the purpose, you may rely upon my silence."

"That is right. Here we are!"

"Right through the gates, gemmen?" said the coachman, in an inquiring tone, as he drew up close to the old Palace of St. James's, at which there was much bustle.

"No, we alight here, and you wait for us, at the corner yonder, where that house is being repaired. There is a guinea for you, and mind you take no other fare but us, or you won't get the other."

"The other, sir!" said the coachman, opening his eyes to an uncommon width. "Sir—sir, you is a gemman, and no sort o' mistake. There ain't no fear o' me taking another fare, you may take your davey!"

"Very well!"

The marquis walked on in the most easy and unconcerned manner in the world, while Claude, with Sixteen-string Jack upon his arm, followed at a few paces distant.

The sentinels offered no sort of opposition to their progress, as it was not their duty to do so. It was in the first vestibule of the Palace that the ordeal had to be gone through.

The air of the marquis as he went on, was most admirably calculated to deceive any one. He wore an appearance of the most perfect self-possession and ease, and indeed, might well be mistaken for some man of quality who was rather careless than otherwise regarding what his inferiors thought of him.

The only thing that eclipsed the marquis in point of personal appearance, was Claude Duval, and no one could possibly look a more perfect gentleman than he as, with Jack upon his arm, he followed the marquis into a small octagonal hall, where a number of the yeomen of the guard were stationed in full dress.

These offered no opposition, but at the further end of this room was a common baize door, at which stood some of the gentlemen ushers, and several officers of the Lord Chamberlain's office.

To pass these was the only difficulty, as their duty was to be specially strict as towho was admitted, and who was not, to the saloons.

The marquis now perpetrated one of the most brazen pieces of assurance that could be conceived; just as he was a few steps from the baize door, it was flung open by one of the attendants, and Lord Clarendon came out rather hastily.

He almost ran against the marquis, who with the most admirable presence of mind caught him by the hand, exclaiming—

"Ah! Clarendon, how are you? I have been looking for you all the evening."

Lord Clarenden was confounded by the familiarity of the address, and thought it surely must be some member of the House of Peers, whom he did not at the moment recognise.

He actually said—

"Very well, my lord. I—I—really—don't exactly——"

"No!" laughed the marquis "Ha! ha! ha! Are you in haste, Clarendon?"

"Rather."

"Then I won't detain you a moment. Don't upset the duke as you go out. Ha! ha! ha!"

Clarendon was so confused at not recognising who it was that talked to him so familiarly, that he did nearly fall into the arms of Claude, and having heard him called the duke, he said—

"I beg your Grace's pardon."

"'Tis I am in fault," said Claude, with a most courtly bow, which was returned by the minister, who then passed on, more astounded than ever that he did not know one of the dukes.

All this passed very rapidly; but none of it was lost upon the officers of the Lord Chamberlain's office, and the few gentlemen ushers who were upon the spot.

The baize door was opened most obsequiously for the presumed intimate friend of Lord Clarendon, and the Duke of Something, who no doubt had some other nobleman upon his arm.

"Confound me!" whispered one of the Chamberlain's officers to another, when Claude and his companion had passed on. "Confound me, if I know one of them; and yet Clarendon called one of them, your grace."

"Oh, yes, yes."

"Do you know them?"

Now this other Chamberlain's officer wanted to appear knowing, so he put on a cunning look, as though he could see an amazing distance further into a millstone than any of his neighbours, and said—

"Know them? To be sure I do."

"Ah!—who are they?"

"Mum's the word."

"Well, but——"

"I'll tell you another time. Here's somebody coming."

Claude could hardly now believe even in the reality of the fact, that he had actually passed all barriers, and was within the ancient palace of St. James's an admitted guest.

After going through the baize door, they came upon a short passage, brilliantly illuminated with wax candles, and covered with a rich piece of tapestry carpet. At the end of this passage or corridor, was another door, at which were stationed two of the yeomen of the guard, and one gentleman usher.

These persons were not, however, expected to exercise the smallest amount of surveillance with regard to who went either in or out. All that was supposed to be done in the outer vestibule; so the door was opened, and Claude, Jack, and the marquis, were passed through, as a thing of course.

They were now in a handsome room, at the farther end of which was a large space from floor to ceiling covered by a crimson velvet curtain. They could plainly hear the sounds of music and of voices.

Claude now took the lead, at the request of the marquis, and flung aside the curtain wide enough to allow a person to pass; he walked through the aperture and found himself in the old throne-room of the palace.

The scene which now burst upon Claude's view was most magnificent. The immense apartment was brilliantly lighted and adorned, and crowded with all the rank and beauty in London, that is to say, all the beauty which happened to have the good fortune to be united to rank.

George the Third sat upon an arm chair at the end of the room farthest from the entrance, looking as stupid as usual, while Her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Charlotte, was busy in conversation with some German baron, who, like herself, had a gold snuff-box in his hand.

"What do you think of this?" whispered the marquis.

"Very different from the Jew's cellar," replied Claude.

"Rather."

"How do you feel, Jack?"

"Dumb-foundered," replied Sixteen-string Jack.

The marquis laughed.

"Do not let anything tempt you, Claude," he said, "to stay above an hour. Let us all three meet in the entrance room at exactly one hour from now."

"Agreed."

"During that time, mind that you make good use of your fingers, or we shall have taken all our trouble for nothing; and let us keep out of each other's way. Look at this."

"A handsome gold watch!" said Claude, as the marquis showed him one.

"Yes; Lord Clarendon had it in his pocket before he met us in the vestibule."

"Is it possible?"

"Ay, to be sure. Ten to one if he misses it until he gets fairly home, and he will never know how he lost it."

"Nay, I am certain."

"Perhaps."

"Well, I wish you more luck."

"Thank you. We must work for ourselves. Don't be idle. They are getting up a couple or three sets of quadrilles. I shall look out for some old woman to dance with.

"Old woman?"

"Ay, to be sure, covered with diamonds, my boy. There is sport for one. You don't seem to be half awake."

Claude laughed as the marquis walked away.

The next moment the music sounded the notes of a quadrille, and although there was not much hilarity in the way the dance was executed, there was a vast amount of affectation, and what no doubt was thought dignity.

"Well," thought Claude to himself, when the quadrille was fairly over. "As yet I have done nothing, but as the marquis truly says, we must not be idlers."

While he was now considering in what manner he had best commence operations, another dance was called, and observing a rather silly-looking female sitting upon a low seat, Claude went up to her, and in the most insinuating manner, said—

"May I hope for the pleasure of your hand in the ensuing dance?"

"Oh—I—certainly, sir, certainly."

The lady rose, and Claude was wonderfully attracted by a bracelet she wore, and which his practised eyes assured him was of real diamonds. It must have been worth a few thousand pounds, and Claude thought that if by fair means or by foul he could get possession of it, it would answer exceedingly well for his share of the evening's plunder.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE REFRESHMENT ROOM.—THE BRACELET.

Claude had not the least idea of the rank of the lady he had asked to dance. How should he? It was not until he actually stood up with her in the dance that he saw a diamond star on her breast.

Then, indeed, he began to have some vague surmises as to who she was, but he felt how highly impolitic, under these circumstances, it would be for him to show any hesitation or doubt regarding who it was that had done him the honour of accepting his invitation to the dance.

The music struck up, and Claude and his partner were soon engaged with the figure.

"The heat is rather oppressive here," said Claude, as they rested while others were engaged.

"It always has been the fault of this room," replied his partner; "although we have done all we can from time to time to remedy it."

"We!" thought Claude. "Who the devil can this be?"

At this juncture an officer in a splendid uniform approached them, and said—

"The queen would speak to your highness."

"Say I am occupied with the dance."

"If your highness would excuse me."

"Well, sir?"

"The queen is very imperative."

"It is in the family, sir."

"Your highness?"

"I say, sir, a little obstinacy and imperativeness is in the family; and so again I am engaged. You have your answer, sir."

The messenger bowed and walked away.

"Humph!" thought Claude. "One of the royal princesses, it seems, has so far honoured me."

Before he could frame a sentence which he thought it would be advisable to utter, it became the turn again of himself and partner to lead the dance; and certainly the figure and steps were performed by the princess with a vigour that showed that she was not in the sweetest of tempers.

"I must say the right thing just in the right place," thought Claude, "or else, I see, there is a devil's own temper here that will soon leave me in the lurch, and destroy all my hopes of the diamond bracelet."

The slight flush of passion that was upon the face of the princess gradually subsided, and Claude spoke to her.

"What a happy hour is this!"

"Sir?"

"Forgive me, your highness—I thought aloud."

"There was nothing offensive in—in your saying this was a happy hour."

"It gilds even the golden lustre of the hour to hear you say so much. Your highness is, by birth, a princess; but were you the daughter of the humblest of your father's subjects, you would still be one of the princesses of nature."

Gratified vanity beamed from the eyes of Claude's partner, and he thought to himself, "Princesses are only women, after all."

"Sir, this is strange language."

"Is it strange, madam?"

"Yes, in courts."

"Ah, the atmosphere of courts, then, is not favourable to truth telling, madam."

"Possibly not."

"I know not by what miracle I am inspired by so much boldness as to speak as I have done. Will it please you to walk, for the dance is over?"

Another personage connected with the court came up to the princess, and after a low bow, he said—

"Her majesty the queen desires your highness to retire from the ball-room."

"Retire, sir?"

"Those were her majesty's words, not mine, madam."

"You could scarcely suppose that, for one moment, I imagined them yours. Tell the queen that I will not be guilty of rudeness to one of her guests."

"But your highness will be pleased to observe——"

"No, sir, I am not."

"That her majesty the queen does not know the gentleman whom your highness has honoured to dance with."

"Nor ever will, in all probability, sir."

"But—but——"

"Is your message ended, sir?"

"Yes, madam."

"Then oblige me by getting out of the way."

"Oh!"

The courtier retired, evidently chagrined, while the angry colour came again to the brow of the princess.

"How much I regret," said Claude, "that my hoppiness—for a real happiness it is to me to be a short time only in your society—is only to be purchased at the expense of some annoyance to you in other quarters."

"Oh, it's no annoyance, sir. They ought to know by this time that it is of no use speaking to me."

"You show, indeed, a most becoming spirit."

"I hope so. Are you long at Saint James's?"

'Not very."

"I don't suppose you will be honoured with another invite to the palace. You can call upon me on a reception day."

"How can I express my thanks? Where does this door lead to?"

"To a refreshment room; and if there be any cheese-cakes there, I shall be glad to see them. They keep me out of cheese-cakes as much as they can, and I know it is only done just to spite me, because they know how fond I am of them."

"Is it possible?"

"It is, indeed; and they do many more things, too, just to spite me. You are the young Duke of Reteley, who has been for so long on the Spanish Embassy, I think?"

Claude bowed.

"Well, if you want favour at court you had better at once forsake me, and go to the queen's circle."

"I want nothing but the joy of being near you, and of hearing you speak."

"Do you really mean what you say? Oh, here are some cheese cakes, and such fine ones too. Oh, here is a treat indeed. Do you like cheese cakes?"

"I will have one for the pleasure of taking something with you."

"Will you really though? He! he! he!"

There was a silliness about the laugh that jarred upon the ears of Claude most disagreeably, and he thought to himself, "Ah! how infinitely superior is my Cicely to this piece of vulgarity and vanity, born a princess."

But Claude had more important business in hand than making comparisons between the favourites of fortune and the favourites of nature.

The possession of the diamond bracelet was what he looked to as the reward for the violence he did his feelings in saying complimentary things to his royal companion.

Yet how to get from her wrist the costly bauble he knew not, but summoning all the assurance he was master of to his aid, he said—

"What a happiness it will be to me to wait upon you, as you so kindly suggest."

"Well I shall be glad to see you, for to tell the truth I do like cheese cakes and fine men."

"Charming simplicity," thought Claude. "How the deuce shall I get the bracelet and then be rid of the brute, I wonder."

"You will be sure to come," added the princess, as she spoke quiteindistinc ly with her mouth full of cheese cakes.

"Oh, can you doubt me?"

"Well, I don't know. Perhaps somebody will call upon you, and tell you you must not come, as I ought not to receive visitors out of my own family; but never you mind that."

"So," thought Claude, "it has happened before."

"You may depend upon no one frightening me," he added, "I am not made of such pliant materials."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. But how shall I be sure it is you?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why—why—once before when somebody was to come to see me, the name was announced, and I ordered him to be introduced, when who should come but the Bishop of London.'

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Do you know it had been found out, and they sent the bishop to give me a lecture."

"Is it possib

"Oh, yes."



CLAUDE WATCHING THE MURDER COMMITTED BY THE MARQUIS.

"And what did you do?"

"What do you think, now?"

"Well, really I can't say."

"I gave him a foot ottoman at his head, and if you had but seen the powder come out of his wig, you would have stared indeed."

"I have no doubt I should."

"Oh, that you would, I'm sure. But I see all the cheese cakes are gone."

The princess heaved a sigh, that, like Hamlet's when he took leave of Ophelia, seemed to—

"Shatter all her bulk,"

and then she was anxious to get away to some other room, where more of her favourite delicacy could be had.

"Listen to me," said Claude.

"Well, what is it?"

"It is not very likely, but just possible, that some spy may find out that I am coming to see you, and so you may again be imposed upon. Now, could not something be done to prevent it?"

"What?"

"Well, I am thinking what. Suppose when I come I send in something, that you may be able when I am announced to be sure it is no trick?"

"Yes, that would do. But what will you send?"

"It ought to be something that you know well the moment you see it."

"Oh, yes."

"Otherwise you would run the risk of being again deceived, you know."

"Certainly—certainly."

"Well, then, I will take this bracelet for the purpose. You will be quite certain to know that again, for I dare say you are sufficiently familiar with it."

As Claude spoke, he did not allow the princess a moment for consideration, but unclasping the bracelet from her wrist, he transferred it to his pocket. She certainly looked a little astonished, and after a moment's pause, she said, in a hesitating manner—

"Would not something else do?"

"Yes; but it is not worth while changing the articles."

"But—but——"

"Ah, charming princess."

"Yes, but——"

"Hush, somebody is coming. Let us get back to the ball-room. Who knows but our absence has already been ascertained? Let us come into the ball-room again at once. It is the only way to avoid suspicion."

"Well, but——"

"Yes, exactly. This way—this way."

Claude would not give Her Royal Highness any time for further reflection, or opportunity for speaking about the bracelet; but hurrying her into the ball-room, he kept interrupting her whenever she began to speak.

"Hush—hush! Not a word—not a word. We had better now separate, and then we shall not seem to have any understanding together. Remember the bracelet. In a quarter of an hour I will manage to get round to where you are, and then we will talk it over again."

So saying, Claude glided away from the astonished and rather suspicious princess, who, however she admired cheese cakes and fine men, had a large share of the family avarice about her, and dreaded the loss of her diamond bracelet.

"Now," thought Claude, "after this it would be sheer insanity to attempt any petty speculation which might possibly have a disastrous result, and so include in its consequences the loss of the diamond bracelet."

With this idea, Claude began to think it would be as well to leave the ball-room as speedily as possible; so he slowly, without putting on the appearance of any hurry, made his way to the curtains which shut out the ante-room, and in which he was to meet his friend, the marquis, and Sixteen-string Jack, according to arrangement.

Before, however, he could reach that point, some one touched him lightly upon the arm, and upon turning to see who it was, Claude observed a gentleman in a full court suit, standing close to him, who said—

"Sir, you will pardon me if I request a few moments' conversation with you."

"You will pardon me if I delay doing myself that pleasure," said Claude, "until I have given some orders to my servants; I shall be about five minutes."

"But, sir, the business is rather urgent."

"So I should suppose, as we are perfect strangers to each other, sir."

"I regret the disagreeable necessity."

"Don't name it, sir," said Claude, as he walked on.

The person in the court suit bit his lips, and looked for a moment or two irresolute. Then he suddenly turned round, and with more speed than decorum, made his way through the throng of guests in an opposite direction to that which Claude was pursuing.

"There is not a moment more to be lost," thought Claude to himself. "What is the matter or what amount of suspicion has been excited, I know not, but I feel pretty certain that this is no place for me now, and that if I linger I shall find myself under arrest in a few moments."

This was anything but an agreeable reflection, so that Claude now became as unceremonious in pushing his way through the throng of guests towards the ante-room as had been his late interrogator in proceeding in the other direction, no doubt to give an order concerning him, which would turn out to be anything but pleasant.

Some of the royal guests looked a little annoyed at the rather uncourteous manner in which they were pushed right and left by Claude; but he was past before anything could be said or done.

He reached the curtain, and drawing it aside, he at once, with a sensation of thankfulness, passed out of the ball-room at St. James's.

But he was yet far from being clear of the precincts of the palace. He was in hopes that the hour which he had agreed with his companions, should be the limit of their stay in the palace was past, and he looked eagerly about him for Jack and the marquis.

Neither of them were to be seen. He would gladly enough have waited for them, but his own danger was much too imminent to enable him to do so. Accordingly he walked on, and passing the yeomen of the guard and the gentlemen ushers, he was soon in the court.

There he paused a moment to breathe the cool air, and seeing close at hand a deep, dark, arched doorway, he plunged into it, resolved to wait there until he should see Jack and the marquis come out of the palace, unless he should see reason to doubt the safety of his so doing.

CHAPTER L.

A COMPARISON OF PLUNDER.—THE FATE OF THE MARQUIS.

CLAUDE kept his eyes fixed upon the doorway through which he had made his exit, so opportunely as it would seem, from the palace.

His hope and expectation was speedily to see his companions, but although for a short time he was disappointed in that, too, yet he saw enough to convince him that his own hasty retreat was a wise enough measure.

In the course of about three minutes the same person who had spoken to him in the ball-room made his appearance, accompanied by four others with drawn swords. Two of the four were stationed at the door, while he with the other two ran to the great gate with all the speed they could muster.

There was immediately a commotion among the guards there stationed, and Claude heard the sound of high voices.

"Perhaps, after all," thought Claude, "I am in their toils."

He looked anxiously towards the door at which the two persons with drawn swords stood as guards, for he waited to see what sort of scrutiny those who now came out were subjected to. It might be one that Jack and the marquis could not satisfactorily stand the brunt of.

Several persons came out, and Claude had the satisfaction of seeing that they

were only looked at, so that he had no longer any doubt but that it was his arrest that was sought, and that a description of him had been given.

Presently the individual who, either of his own authority and suspicions, or as the agent of another, had made all the racket, came slowly from the outer gate, accompanied by an officer of the foot guards then on duty.

They passed close to where Claude was hidden, so that he heard the officer say quite plainly—

"You must not rely, my lord, upon the sentinels."

"Well, but," replied the other, "they can answer a plain question, sir, can they not?"

"Certainly they can, my lord. But I repeat that you must not, in such a matter, altogether rely upon a soldier's report of who he has seen and who he has not seen."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, indeed, my lord."

It was evident that the officer was somewhat piqued at something the other had said.

"Accept my apologies, sir," said he who was called my lord, "if, in the hurry and excitement of this business, I have in any way offended you. I can only avow that I had no such intention for a moment."

"That is more than sufficient, my lord," said the officer frankly.

"I am glad to hear you say so."

"You see," added the officer, "the sentinels have a general order to take as much notice as possible of any one, at all times, who may pass their posts; but on such an occasion as this, when so many are going to and fro, it is really asking of them more than their not over-bright brains are equal to, that they should recollect any one in particular."

"True, true."

"Nevertheless for what it is worth, you have their word that no one answering the description of the person you mention, has passed out.

"Which is very improbable."

"Very indeed, since, as you say he had ample time to do so before you reached the gate."

"Oh, ample. I could, o course have secured him in the ball-room, but I did not like to draw genera attention to the affair. Besides, the king is rather strange to-night."

"Is he really?"

"Oh yes, anything that gives him a sudden fright, or indeed any sort of intense excitement, Dr. Lees assures us, would upset the small amount of mind that remains to him."

"That is a bad state of things."

"Oh, very—very."

"Well, my lord, all I can do now is to regret very much that you have not secured the fellow."

"And I regret it extremely, and like you, can do no more. I wish you good night, sir. Of course your men will detain such a one should they see him?"

"Of that, my lord, be assured."

They bowed and parted, but Claude, who had heard every word of the conversation, was anything but pleased at the prospect before him. He was not one, however, who was likely to sit down and despair while he had his faculties about him, and he set about thinking how he could better his condition, instead of deploring it.

"The only description they could give of me," he thought, "is one of dress, and surely I am ingenious enough to make some alteration in that, if needs be."

The moment this idea was started, Claude set to work to carry it out. The coat he had on was of chocolate-coloured velvet, richly trimmed with silver lace, and it was lined throughout with pale gray silk.

"Ministers and courtiers," said Claude, with a smile, "are much in the habit of

turning their coats upon occasion ; I don't at all see, therefore, why I should not turn mine."

As he spoke he took off his coat, and turned it cleanly inside-out, and put on that way.

To be sure it did not look quite so well as when it was the right side outwards, but common soldiers were not likely to be very great connoisseurs in the matter, and the first glance at a light gray silk coat would most probably lead them to look no further at him, when a dark velvet one had been described to them as worn by the man they must stop.

His height he thought might betray him, so he determined to assume an appearance of age, and stoop a little.

He had just completed the necessary arrangements to carry out this plan of escape, when he saw Sixteen-string Jack and the marquis come out into the court-yard.

It was evident from their manner that they were in some sort of anxiety about him (Claude). They stood together and conversed eagerly, after which they walked towards the gate, and went out into St. James's-street.

"I shall soon be with you," said Claude to himself, "or if I am not, these sentinels are very clever fellows."

The last proposition was not a very likely one to come true, and Claude issued from his hiding place with every assurance upon his own mind of escape.

Bending himself down, he slowly approached the gate. A sergeant of the guard was there, whose duty it undoubtedly was to look closely at whoever should pass ; but one glance at Claude seemed to satisfy him.

He bowed, and Claude passed on.

It was not till he got clear out of the gate that he chose to increase his speed, for no one was more alivd than Claude to the proverb of not hilloaing until one is fairly out of the wood.

Accordingly, if anything, he rather decreased than increased his pace, but still he kept Jack and the marquis in view.

When, however, they had turned a corner, and he had done so likewise, there was no occasion for caution, so he quickened his pace and made up to them, and when he got sufficiently near, he cried—

"I arrest you both in the king's name."

It was quite ludicrous to see the jump they both gave, and Claude was very near paying for his joke by the loss, for that evening, of his comrades, for they both set off at good speed down Pall Mall.

"When Claude chose to run, however, there were few indeed who could cope with him, and he soon caught the marquis, upon which Sixteen-string Jack turned, and presenting a pistol at him, cried—

"Let go your hold, or you are a dead man,"

"I hope, Jack," said Claude, in his natural voice, "that I am worth a great many dead men yet."

"Good God! is it you ?" cried the marquis.

"Yes, to be sure."

"Well, I never was so deceived," said Jack.

"Nor so frightened," laughed Claude.

"Oh, yes, I have been."

"But I have not," said the marquis, giving himself a shake. "I thought my time had come at last, sure enough. What, in the name of all that's abominable, made you serve us such a trick ?"

"Only a thought of the moment."

"Confound your thoughts of the moment. But when did you leave the palace ?"

"Before you both."

"Before us ?" said Jack. "We looked in vain for you."

"Yes: and I am happy to say some other people looked in vain for me."

"Ah! you were in danger ?"

"I was, indeed."

"Tell us all about it, Claude. Tell us all about it, do. I said something was amiss when we did not meet you in the ante-room according to agreement."

"You might have sworn that, Jack," said Claude.

He then related to them all that had happened; and when he had concluded, the marquis said—

"You beat us, Claude."

"As how?"

"In your booty. We have spoils of conquest in the shape of a few watches and snuff-boxes, but a diamond bracelet from the wrist of a princess must indeed be something worth having."

"I hope so."

"You have beat us. You are lucky."

"Yes; I think we are lucky to-night."

"*We*, did you say?"

"I did."

"Humph!"

"Why do you say humph?"

"Well, I say humph, because you say *we* are lucky, whereas, you are the only one much in luck, with your diamond bracelet."

"Do you take me for a pig?" said Claude.

"A what?"

"A pig."

"No; I—I won't say you look much like a pig. Why do you ask so extraordinary a question?"

"Because I think none but a pig would go on such an expedition as this in company, and not share the result."

"Do you mean to say you will share with us?"

"I thought that was quite understood," said Claude, coldly, as he walked on.

"I should be content," said Jack, "with what I have; Claude, you want money, I know."

"Which is no reason for my taking yours, Jack, or yours, marquis; so, without any further words or bother about it, remember we all three share and share alike in this matter; so now come on, and let us forget that the discussion ever arose."

was quite clear to Jack that Claude was much hurt at what the marquis had said, and the conversation now was rather constrained until they got near to the house of the old costumier.

Then the marquis paused, and suddenly confronting Claude, he held out his hand, saying—

"Claude Duval, I have offended you. Will you forgive me and forget it?"

"Willingly," said Claude, as he took the proffered hand. "You are a clever fellow, marquis, and I owe you much, for without you, we evidently might have had no small amount of difficulty in escaping from the Jew's cellars; but the only unfortunate thing was, that you did not know me well enough to feel no doubt of my honour."

"Well—well; let it pass."

"Right willingly."

"You must know," added the marquis, dropping the previous subject of discourse. "You must know that the old costumier we are now going to, is an excellent judge of jewels."

"Is he so? Then he shall see the diamond bracelet, if you think he may be trusted."

"You may depend upon him. Honour among——"

"Thieves," said Claude, with a laugh.

"Well, there's truth in the proverb, Claude. In his youth he has often told me he was an apprentice to a lapidary, so that he got a good knowledge of precious stones. You may be assured he will put a right value upon the bracelet."

"Can he purchase?"

"I think not."

It turned out to be precisely as the marquis had predicted. The old wardrobe keeper was sitting upon his stairs, much wondering at the non-arrival his customers. He admitted them with alacrity, and holding up a candle, he cried—

"What luck? What luck?"

"Tolerable," said the marquis. "I am famished."

"Which way? With hunger or thirst?"

"Why, I don't mind admitting to you that I could drink something."

"Come in, all of you," cried the old man; "I have not been unmindful that you might want something. This way—this way. Poor fare, but a hearty welcome, I am quite prepared to offer to you. This way—this way."

He led them to a small room at the back of his house, where a table was neatly enough spread.

"Hilloa!" cried Claude. "Do you call this poor fare, my friend?—may we never have worse."

"What is there?" said Jack.

"Look—a ham—a couple of fowels—some claret, and about half a dozen bottles of champagne, as I take it."

"The deuce," said the marquis.

"Well, gentleman, the least I could do," said the old costumier, "was to provide you with a little bit of supper."

"We are much obliged to you," said Claude, "and I for one don't think that you will exactly lose by it."

"You may be quite assured of that," remarked Jack to the old man, "if he (pointing to Claude) says so."

"Well, gentlemen, you are welcome; fall to."

"But there are only three chairs here," said Claude; "come, you must sit down with us at all events, my friend."

"Oh, I have had mine."

"Not off this table, for the ham and the fowels are uncut, and not a cork has been drawn; come, come—sit down."

Thus urged, the old man fetched himself a chair from the shop, and they all four sat down together, as merry as kings, ay, and much merrier than any king. The ham and fowls were cut up, and the wine proved excellent.

"Now," said the marquis, "where's your bracelet, Claude."

"Here—here. They tell me, my old friend, that you are a judge of jewels?"

"I was a lapidary," said the old man, "and ought to know something of them; I hope you have something worth an opinion."

"He has," said the marquis.

"I think myself something of a judge," said Claude, "but of course I defer to those who know better than I do; what now is your candid opinion of that little toy?"

He tossed the bracelet across the table to the old man as he spoke.

The old costumier took it in his hand, held it up to the light, and his countenance changed, as he said,—

"Sir, here is a rarity."

"Good, are they?"

"The correct value of these diamonds I should estimate at not less than three thousand pounds sterling."

CHAPTER LI.

THE ATTEMPTED MURDER.

After this candid declaration of the old costumier, regarding the immense value of the diamond bracelet, there was a pause of some minutes' duration.

Claude Duval was rather astonished, Sixteen-string Jack looked, as he really was, very much pleased, while the marquis, from feelings best known to himself, but in reality not at all suspected by his companions, looked as pale as death itself.

"Three thousand pounds?" at length he exclaimed.

"Yes, at at the lowest, without saying one word of the gold, and the general workmanship of the article."

"How pleased I am, Claude, for your sake," said Sixteen-string Jack; "you will be able to do several things now, that I know you much wish to do."

"There is a difficulty," said Claude.

"There is indeed," said the old man; "I can guess very well what difficulty you mean. You allude to the trouble there will be in disposing of such an artiole."

"I do."

"But yet that surely may be done," said the marquis, eagerly, and fixing his eyes upon the bracelet.

"There is but one man in London," added the old costumier, "who will have anything to do with it."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, but one, and even he may find it is rather a serious affair, you see."

"It is—it is."

"You must not calculate upon such a price for it as I have named."

"Nor anything like it, I suppose?" said the marquis.

"Well, I think, under all the circumstances, you may fairly enough expect one-third of its value."

"One-third?"

"Yes; you see whoever buys it, no doubt, will lay it by for a very long time. Perhaps it may not see the light again for years, if the individual diamonds should be suspected to be known. If not, it can be taken to pieces and worked up into some other costly trinket.'

"That would be the best way," added the marquis. "You may depend that nothing would pay so well as pulling out the diamonds and parting with them separately, to any one who would give a fair price."

"It might be tried," said the old man.

"Well," said Claude, rising, "I will meet you here to-morrow in the latter part of the day, marquis. At present, I must own, I am in some need of repose.'

"You will not think of leaving my house, gentlemen," said the old man. "I have plenty of sleeping accommodation at your disposal here, and I can truly say that you will be safe, and although I say it, you will be decidedly comfortable."

"No doubt of that," said the marquis. "I accept your offer with all the pleasure in life, for I am as tired as I can very well be."

"And I," said Jack.

"Well," said Claude, "if it is not putting you to any inconvenience, I must confess that I would rather have a few hours' rest here. It is quite morning now; so if you will have the goodness to awaken me in about four hours, I dare say I should be all right again.

"As you please, sir."

They all rose, and Claude said with a laugh—



(Astonishment and Terror of the Marquis at Claude's Sudden Appearance.)

"You must give me some room that I can thoroughly darken, for unless I can persuade myself that it is night, I shall not be able to get a wink of sleep."

"Very well, you shall have a room at the back of the house, where there are Venetian blinds, so you can make it as dark as you wish."

"That will do exactly," said Claude. "But how knocked up you look."

"Who? I?"

"Yes, you seem half asleep."

"How can that be?" cried the marquis, and as he spoke Claude saw, or fancied he saw, the marquis cast a very significant look at the old man.

"I don't know how it is," said the latter, "but—I—I am certainly just a little——"

"A little what?" roared the marquis angrily.

"A man may surely," said Claude, "be a little anything he likes, in his own house."

"I think so too," said Jack.

"Oh yes. Yes—yes—of course, only I could not think what was the matter with him."

"Nothing, nothing," said the old man, speaking thickly, "I shall go to bed now—yes, I—I shall go to bed—tumble to bed."

"It's well you said tumble," remarked the marquis.

The marquis was right enough, for in truth the old costumier did rather tumble than walk to bed, for he appeared hardly able to keep his feet as he went, and had only just power to show Claude which was his room, and Jack which was his.

Chagrin was evident upon the countenance of the marquis, but why he should be so amazed at a little drop of wine overcoming the old costumier, was best known to himself.

As for Claude and Jack, they could not make out what it could matter to him.

He made an effort, however, to recover something like good humour, or the semblance of it, before they all parted for the night, and he laughed as he said—

"Good night, Claude Duval. Good night. I hope you will sleep soundly after your royal adventure."

"I generally do sleep pretty well," said Claude, "if all is quiet about me. The worst of me is though, the merest trifle will awaken me."

"Will it?"

"Yes indeed, a something which would have no effect upon the slumbers of any one else."

"Well take care of the bracelet."

"I mean to do so."

"That's right. Good night—good night, Jack You ought to sleep the sounder to-night for having completely got rid of the torments in which the Jew held you."

"I hope I shall."

Claude walked into the room assigned him and closed the door. There was a night bolt on the inside of it, which he at once fastened, and then placing his candle upon the table, and sitting down upon the side of the bed, he said—

"I don't know how it is, but I certainly feel anything but comfortable to-night —Some feeling that all is not right in this house, seems to come over me, I don't know why."

The more he thought over his condition the less he seemed to be able to come to any satisfactory conclusion with regard to the suspicions that beset him, and at last he gave it up.

He carefully closed the Venetian blinds so that when he did blow out his candle the room was quite dark, but that he did not do until he had taken off his coat and thrown it upon a chair. The rest of his apparel he kept on, and the diamond bracelet, which was worth whatever care he could bestow upon it, he placed securely between the bed and the mattress.

"Well," he said, "I will not keep myself awake because of some vague suspicion of I don't know what. I must have rest somehow or other, so here goes to sleep, although I don't much like your manner, master marquis, and although I do think you are up to a something you would be very sorry for me to suspect."

* * * * * * *

Claude had fallen into a slight sleep, which no doubt would have been the precursor of a much sounder one, if nothing had happened to disturb it.

It had not, however, lasted above ten minutes when he was awakened by a something, he knew not what, but certainly to his perception it was a sound in his chamber.

Although he opened his eyes he made no sort of movement, but lying perfectly still he listened attentively. In a few moments he was rewarded for his caution by hearing a stealthy footstep, and it seemed to him as if it approached the bed.

He had no arms within his reach, so he thought the best thing he could do was not to call out, for fear of provoking an immediate attack, or to remain quiet and receive one, but to give some indication of being awake, and leaving whoever was creeping about the room to make the most of it.

Accordingly he executed an exceedingly natural sneeze, and then said, in a low voice—

"Confound it. I have got a cold, I think."

The effect of this was immediately apparent, for with a shuffling noise some one left the room very precipitately, no doubt not a little alarmed at finding Claude so unexpectedly wakeful.

"Now, whatever can be the meaning of this," thought Claude. "To say the least of it, it's devilish suspicious. It must be seen to. Farewell sleep, I think, in this house."

He rose instantly, and feeling about in the very dim light of the room for his coat, he got his pistols out of the pocket where he had left them. Then, without touching the blinds, he made his way towards the door.

Contrary to the state in which he had left it, it was only just closed, and not at all fastened. How any one from without had contrived to remove the night bolt he had no leisure to inquire, but opening the door just wide enough to allow him to do so, he stepped out into the passage and looked about him.

A dim ray of light came from the crevice of a slightly opened door opposite, and treading lightly across the landing, Claude put his eye to the slender opening and looked in.

To his surprise he saw, by the aid of a rushlight that was upon a table, the old costumier in bed, and apparently in a sound sleep, while the marquis, fully dressed, was shaking him by the shoulder, and speaking in a hurried low voice.

"Confound your blunders," he said. "How was it that you took the drugged wine yourself, instead of giving it, as you intended, to Claude Duval? Awake, awake."

An inarticulate murmur was the only response.

"It's of no use," muttered the marquis. "How very provoking to be sure; well arranged, too, as it was. The idea of the old fool drugging the wine for another, so that he and I might cut his throat comfortably and get the bracelet, and then by some unaccountable and strange accident taking it himself."

"A pretty escape," thought Claude.

"And now the confounded fellow is awake," continued the marquis, "and heaven only knows how long I may have to wait before I can do the job."

"I think," said Claude to himself, "you will have to wait a long while before you catch me asleep again here."

"And," added the marquis, "it was all owing to the botheration in getting off the night bolt. He must have been suspicious, or he would not have fastened it."

"Time, too," thought Claude.

After a few moments' consideration, Claude's active brain thought of a plan of operation which might bring a kind of retribution upon the old rascal of a costumier, as well as defeating the marquis. By the light that straggled through the door he saw a pair of boots on the landing, and as it was a well staircase beneath, he dropped them into the passage below.

CHAPTER LII.

A SERIOUS MISTAKE.

In that quite hour of the morning, when all the house was so still, and every one in it was rather anxious to contribute towards its noiselessness, the clatter that the boots made as they descended into the passage below, was really something prodigious.

No wonder that they startled the marquis, for, although he knew so well what produced the uproar, Claude felt a little startled himself.

The marquis in a moment came out of the room occupied by the old costumier.

Claude would have been detected had he not taken the precaution of retreating just within his own doorway in time. He managed just to see the marquis, however, through a slight opening.

Alarm was in the would-be murderer's face, and after listening for about half a minute in silence, he cried in a voice of terror—

"What, in the name of all that's troublesome, was that, I wonder?"

Making inquiries of himself, however, was not by any means a likely mode of discovering the truth, so after a few moments spent in not the most pleasant reflection, he muttered—

"I must go down and see what that was before I proceed with what I have to do above stairs here. What on earth could it be."

In his hurry—and indeed we may say his fright—he had snatched up the rush-light that had been burning in the old man's room, and now with it in his trembling grasp, he proceeded down the stairs, looking very cautiously before him at each step he took, and evidently impressed with an idea that he was upon the point of seeing something that would be not at all of an agreeable character.

It was something truly ludicrous to be situated as Claude was, and see a man going down stairs with so much circumspection and caution, after a pair of old boots that lay in the passage below.

But Claude had no time to spend in making useless reflections. Already in his mind had he matured the plans he intended to carry out, and when the marquis had got sufficiently down the stairs, that it was not likely he could hear anything that took place above, Claude immediately commenced operations.

He glided into the old man's room, and when there he found that the daylight had quite sufficiently advanced for him to see clearly and distinctly any object within it.

His first movement was directed to ascertaining if the old villanous costumier, who with the marquis had plotted his murder, was really in a sound sleep.

Claude shook him violently, but that had no effect upon him. Then he whispered in his ear—

"Awake—awake. What is to be done with Claude Duval? What is to be done with Claude Duval?"

The old man at first only replied by an inarticulate sort of grunt.

"What is to be done with Claude Duval?" again was vehemently whispered in his ear.

This time he replied—

"Cut—cut—cut——"

"What?"

"Cut his throat in the dark."

"That will do," said Claude. "I am truly much obliged. And now, my friend, we will see if something of a similar fate cannot be shifted on to your shoulders."

As he spoke, he stooped over the bed, and lifting the old man in his arms, he

carried him out of the room, and across the landing to the room he had himself so recently occupied, and so providentially escaped from.

To lay him in the bed, and cover him with the clothes, was the work of a moment.

"Now," said Claude, "I dislike the taking of a life, or anything in the shape of bloodshed, as much as most men, but if these two scoundrels like to practise any such proceedings, it will be quite as well that they should do so upon each other instead of upon me."

These operations and changes were just completed, when Claude heard the marquis creeping up the stairs again; and as he came, muttering the most diabolical oaths that the mind of the most profligate could conceive.

Claude went into the room lately occupied by the old costumier, and got into the bed, covering himself nearly all over with the bed-clothes.

He hoped that if the marquis did come in he should be able, in that dim light, to sustain the character of the old man for a little time.

The rushlight gave but a miserable illumination to the room as the marquis entered it. Indeed, the struggle that it inefficiently maintained with the rapidly advancing daylight made the obscurity greater than as if the light had been extinguished.

And now a most singular circumstance took place—a circumstance which made a deep impression upon Claude at the time and often afterwards.

The marquis approached the bed, and in a whisper said to the supposed old man—

"Are you awake?"

Claude returned no answer, and then, in the very words that Claude himself had used, he said—

"What is to be done with Claude Duval?"

"Cut—cut—his throat," said Claude, "in the dark."

"I will."

The fellow glided from the room, leaving Claude with the rushlight.

"Is not this more than belongs to a common circumstance?" said Claude. "Surely Heaven has taken its own way of punishing these wretches!"

He rose, and creeping softly to the door, and then to the landing, he listened attentively. All was still as the grave, and he went as far as the door of the room that had been his, and fairly entered the apartment after the marquis.

The Venetian blinds all remained closed, and the place was profoundly dark. He heard the marquis run against a chair, and then utter a curse.

No doubt the projected murderer thought that that slight noise would awaken Claude, whom he imagined to be slumbering there, for he paused and listened for a time, after which he muttered to himself—

"He sleeps sound enough now, at all events, for my purpose. The bracelet well be mine, and then hurrah for America, as England will assuredly be too hot to hold me after to-night's work."

"It will, indeed," thought Claude.

The fellow crept now slowly along the floor towards the bed. His eyes were getting more accustomed to the semi-darkness of the place, and he got on with more precision towards the bed than at first.

Claude did once ask himself the question of, "Shall I or shall I not interfere to stop this act?".

He had not much time for consideration. Perhaps it was a pity that he decided as he did decide; but so it was. He determined upon a system of non-interference, and upon letting things take their course.

And now, as he stood near to the door of the room, the only sense he could well bring to bear upon the proceedings of the marquis efficiently was that of hearing.

To be sure, he could just see the dim outline of his figure as he stooped over the bed; but that was all.

There was then a rustling sound, a short struggle, and then a deep and dreadful groan.

"It is done!" cried the marquis, turning from the bed-side, and speaking in a tone of fright. "It is done! Where is my reward?"

Claude was silent. A feeling of horror crept over him. He heard a strange gurgling sound, and he felt quite confident that the old man was yet dying, and that those sounds were what he was constrained to make as he gasped for breath.

He heard, too, a splashing sound—drip, drip upon the floor, and he knew, as though he had seen it, that it was the blood of the murdered, weltering forth from some gaping wound, and dripping from the bed.

It was truly horrible!

Claude, perhaps, would not have recovered himself quite so soon, but he heard the marquis speak again, and that roused him.

"The bracelet—the bracelet!" he said; "I must have the bracelet! What is the use of the murder without its gains? Light—light! I must have a light to look for the bracelet!"

Claude felt that it was now necessary, if he would know what further steps the murderer intended to take, to get out of the way.

The diamond bracelet which had been the instigation of the dreadful crime, he had securely in his pocket, so that the marquis might search in vain for it, as the reward of the horrible deed he had just committed in the chamber.

Whether at once to confront him and charge him with the deed, or yet to wait and watch him, was a matter of doubt in Claude's mind.

He decided upon the latter course, and as the only mode of getting out of his way effectually, he retreated before him across the dark passage and into the chamber of the old man.

The rushlight had burnt low by this time, and lent but a flickering light to the room. Some clouds seemed to have interposed themselves between the earth and the sunrise, for certainly there was not so much appearance of that event as there had been a quarter of an hour previously, when Claude had watched the dimly coming light.

Concealment was easy, for, as the marquis entered the room, Claude allowed the opening door to make him a hiding-place behind it.

But any one might now have got successfully out of the way of that agitated man. He was trembling fearfully, and all he could say was—

"A light! a light! I must have a light! How can I see the diamonds if I have no light?"

"Alas!" thought Claude, "what a cup of wretchedness you have filled to the brim for yourself!"

Approaching the mantel-shelf in a strange, staggering sort of manner, he grasped at the light, which had been by Claude previously removed there from the table, and then abruptly he left the room with it.

And now, indeed, commenced a part of that retribution which was surely to overtake the murderer; for, although he fully believed that the object for which he had taken the life of a sleeping man was now to be had for the going for, he stood trembling in the passage, and could not gather even courage sufficient to walk into the room.

Well he knew the sight that would there present itself to him, and no wonder he shrunk back aghast from encountering that horrible and gory spectacle.

Claude watched him as he stood shaking upon the stair-head, and muttering to himself the awful suggestions of a disturbed and guilty fancy.

"'Tis done, 'tis done!" he said. "Oh yes! I have done the dreadful deed! It is the first deliberate, cold-blooded murder I have done! 'Tis true I have taken human life before now; but it has been in the heat of conflict and in self-defence. This is a murder—yes, this is a murder! Dare I go into that room?"

He shuddered perceptibly: then, after a pause, he added—

"And yet shall I leave the reward of my crime to be laid hands upon by others?

Shall I sow in blood that they may reap in sunshine? No, no, no. I must have the bracelet. The diamonds must be mine, and mine only. As mine was the whole criminality, so mine must and shall be the whole reward."

He advanced timidly another step or two.

"Hush—hush!" he cried. "What was that?"

Some imaginary noise had disturbed him, and he stood and shook like an aspen leaf.

"Truly, truly," he added, "I heard something; yet all is still again. The opium draught keeps one quiet who sleeps upon the floor, and the knife has put the other to eternal sleep—what have I to fear?"

After a moment or two he spoke again, saying—

"The old man recommended the death of the other; he said it would not be safe to let one go. I must now take the life of Sixteen-string Jack. He sleeps above—I had better settle him first, and then perhaps I shall be better able to look for the necklace."

Claude had just time to dart back into the room from which he had emerged, when the marquis, full of his new idea, turned to ascend a narrow staircase that led to the chamber of Sixteen-string Jack.

It was not likely that Claude would now ab stn from an active interferance, when the life of his old friend was thus menaced. He allowed him, however, to ascend the stairs in peace, if the wretched trembling state he was in deserved such a name.

Claude hurried after him, and indeed so little caution did Claude use in ascending the attic stairs, that it was quite wonderful the marquis did not hear him. Nothing, however, could show more forcibly the state of mind he was in that this fact that he started in dismay at imaginary noises, and was completely oblivious to real ones.

Claude was in a fright lest Sixteen-string Jack should suffer some harm before he could get up to the stairs, but the moment he got on the landing, he pushed past the marquis, and stood between him and a door immediately opposite, and which no doubt conducted to Jack's chamber.

"Hold!" cried Claude. "Have you not already to-night imbrued your hands in blood enough?"

The flickering unsteady light from the miserable candle carried by the marquis fell full upon the face of Claude Duval, so that at a glance he must have been recognised.

It did not strike Claude at the moment, so anxious was he for Jack's preservation, that the appearance of him to the marquis must be most horrible, as that individual had all the reason in the world to believe that he, Claude, lay weltering in his gore below.

The first exclamation of the marquis, however, made him aware of this.

A shriek burst from his lips, and he cried—

"Mercy! mercy! The dead—the dead!"

He fell backwards down the staircase, candle and all, leaving Claude in the dark on the attic landing.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" cried Sixteen-string Jack, from his room. "Who is there?"

"'Tis I, Jack," said Claude. "Get up as quickly as you can. This is no place for us."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE TRIAL OF MARKHAM BRERETON.

CLAUDE spoke in a loud voice, so that Sixteen-string Jack should have no difficulty in recognising who it was. The answer of Jack showed that he had heard Claude and knew him at once.

"Yes—yes," he said. "What do you want, Claude?"

"I want you."

"I am here then. Is anything amiss?"

"A trifle," replied Claude.

"Why, you speak strangely," said Jack, as he appeared putting on his coat as well as he could see to do so. "You are, I think, for once in your life, surely alarmed."

"I am, indeed, Jack."

"Is it possible? I did but jest."

"And many a true word is so spoken, Jack. Come down stairs as quick as you can, and let us admit all the light we can into this house."

There was a window upon the staircase, which Sixteen-string Jack had noticed as he came along. It was only secured by a small hook, that is to say the shutters of it, and Jack at once opened it.

A stream of daylight made its way into the house, and never did Claude feel so grateful for anything as for that soft, mild, morning light that fell upon his face, after the night of horrors he had passed through.

Jack," he said, as he laid his hand upon the arm of his old friend, "you would have been a dead man in another minute."

"If what?"

"If I had not interfered."

"Claude, I owe then my life, as well as everything else, to you?"

"Don't think of that. There has been murder here."

"The marquis?"

"Yes."

"By Heaven, I did not like his looks last night at supper, and I had a half suspicion, do you know, that there was some sort of understanding between him and the old wardrobe man, that we knew nothing of."

"If you had a whole suspicion that way tending, Jack, you would not have been far out."

"Is it possible?"

"Ay, possible and true."

"But what—what was the motive?"

"This," said Claude, holding up the diamond bracelet.

"But it was settled the marquis was to share in the produce of that costly piece of plunder."

"Yes, Jack; but the marquis has a stomach that would digest it all, you see."

"The villain."

"The worse than villain, Jack."

"How mean you?"

"Come on, and I shall be able, I think, to show you a sight that will truly astonish you, if it does not, as I think it will, absolutely shock you."

As Claude spoke he hurried down the staircase as quickly as he could, and the first object that met his gaze at the bottom of the first flight was the insensible form of the marquis, who had struck his head heavily in the most awkward and dangerous backward fall.

"Good God! who is this?" cried Jack.

"Look."

Jack did so, and recognised the features of the marquis.

"Is he dead?"

"I think not," said Claude.

"But you have not looked at him."

"No, Jack. I formed my opinion upon the simple belief that if ever a fellow was born to be hung it was this one. Am I right now?"

The marquis uttered a groan.

"We will soon recover him," said Jack. "I will get some water and dash in his face. I dare say that will put him to rights quickly enough. He don't seem much hurt."



GENTLEMAN JACK DISGUISED AS A CLERGYMAN IN THE COFFEE ROOM.

Jack ran up stairs, and in a moment or two brought down a jug of cold water, which he threw with all the force he could into the face of the marquis.

"Murder—murder! Oh! murder!" he cried.

"A word you ought to be the first to avoid and the last to pronounce," said Claude. "Look, villain, and behold how you have been defeated."

The marquis did look up with a shudder, and for some moments he looked at Claude with an expression of perfect astonishment.

"Can this be?" he said. "Oh, no, no; it is all a dream."

"I wish it was," said Claude.

"But—but. Let me touch you. Are you a living man?"

"I am."

"And—and—and who—who—?"

He pointed to the chamber in which he had perpetrated the dreadful deed of blood, and looked beseechingly at Claude for answer to his inquiry.

"You would ask," said Claude, "who it is you have in that chamber sacrificed to your rage and to your avarice?"

"Yes, yes, yes."

"You thought to take my life while I slept; you thought to kill me, even after I had told you that you should receive a full and equal share with myself of the proceeds of my exertions to-night."

"Yes, but—but—"

"Hear me. You were not satisfied with much more than your proper deserving, but, in order to stifle my claim wholly, you would have cut my throat."

"No, no."

"I say yes. It is useless now adding falsehood to your rascally Judas-like conduct, and then, when you thought you had cut my throat, it occurred to you that, for fear of the consequences, you must perform the same operation upon my friend here."

"Do not torture me."

"What? Do you talk of torturing?"

"Yes, yes. This is worse than throat-cutting. Tell me, I implore you, who is it that lies in yonder room. Speak, oh, speak."

"Who should there be? Look at us."

The wretched man looked full at Claude, and then at Sixteen-string Jack, and then he passed his hand across his brow, as though he were in too confused a state to tell exactly who had been in the house, and who had not.

"I—I think," he said, "I think it still is all a dream."

"Do you?"

"I hope so."

"Ah, that is quite another thing. I only wish it was. But he whom you find missing from the supper party, who sat down so securely an hour ago, will most probably never sup again."

The marquis rose slowly to his feet. He cast about him one bewildered look, and then he made a rush, not to escape, but into the chamber where the victim of his avarice lay.

"Let us follow him," said Jack.

"As you please," replied Claude. "Come on."

When they entered the room, they found the marquis with the most frantic eargerness drawing up the venetian blinds, which shut out the daylight from the room, and when he had done so, he turned towards the bed.

The moment he looked upon the horrible sight which was there—and a truly horrible sight it was, for the head of the old costumier was almost severed from his body, and he lay in a pool of blood—he commenced swearing in the most horrible manner.

"Gracious heaven! what does he mean by that?" cried Jack. "He cannot be so tender-hearted, or he would not have used the knife so effectually."

"Why, what extra villany," said Claude, "consists in this murder above all others?"

The marquis gasped for breath, as he spoke slowly, saying—

"He—he was my father!"

As he uttered these words, he fell forwards upon his face among the blood.

Claude recoiled with terror, and the face of Sixteen-string Jack was blanched. Little had they, either of them, suspected such a revelation as this, and for a time it quite froze up their faculties. Claude at last spoke in a tone of bitter regret—

"I could have prevented this deed. I shall never think of it without regretting

that I did not do so; but I looked upon it as a sort of retribution upon both of them, without for a moment suspecting its awful extent of severity."

"It is dreadful," said Jack. "What shall we do?"

"What can we do?"

"It is a question that I cannot answer."

"We must both answer it, Jack, by one word, and that is, nothing. This poor wretch will suffer enough, without human laws interfering with him; and if we were ever so much inclined to call down the penalties of the law upon him, we are in no position to do so."

"Then we had better come away at once, Claude."

"I think so."

"The sooner the better, then, for I am sickened by looking upon this scene."

They both turned from the room, and in a few moments had left the house to the dead and the murderer.

"Will you go out of town at once?" said Jack.

"No, Jack, I cannot. To-morrow is Friday, and I have great reason for thinking that the trial of Mr. Brereton will come on, in which case I shall not be very far from the Old Bailey."

"A dangerous vicinity, Claude."

"Yes. But absolutely necessary to hold me to-morrow. What do you purpose doing?"

"Can you ask me? Have I not already expressed a wish to join my fortunes to yours, Claude? If you do not insist upon sending me from you, my place for the future shall be your side in danger or in safety."

"Be it so, Jack; I am grateful to you. There are but three persons in the world for whom I think it worth the living."

"And those, Claude?"

"Are Cicely Brereton, my sister May, and yourself."

Jack looked the thanks which he could not speak, and they both proceeded at a very rapid rate from the house of the costumier, which they never wished to see again.

They proceeded at once to the Old Bailey, where they put up at an hotel, and Claude said to Jack, when they had duly arranged about their accommodation—

"I shall be here the first thing in the morning, Jack. But I shall be so changed in appearance, that the people here will not know me; I think, without any danger of recognition, I shall be able to attend the court."

"Be careful, Claude."

"I will, Jack, for more sakes than one; so now good night, or rather good morning. It is now six o'clock, and I shall be with you at nine, and if the trial of Mr. Brereton does come on, I shall be able perhaps to astonish the folks a little."

It is scarcely necessary to state that Claude had had an interview with Cicely, at which he again assured her that the safety of her brother should be his utmost care.

It was likewise necessary that he should procure money for the defence of Brereton, which he did by borrowing a hundred pounds, for he had no hesitation in doing that, feeling as he did, that when he had leisure to dispose of the bracelet he should find no difficulty in repaying it.

And as regarded that bracelet, and the hands it had come from, it may be truly said, that although Claude Duval never robbed any but the rich, he never appropriated any portion of another's property to his own purposes with less compunction than he did that.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE TRIAL OF BRERETON.

THE circumstances attendant upon the accusation, by Tom Brereton, of his cousin Markham, of the robbery which he, Tom, knew perfectly well had been committed by Claude Duval, were of so peculiar a character, that it becomes necessary, now that the trial of Markham is on the *tapis*, to recapitulate them.

That these circumstances had a visible connection with the original circumstances, in which that part of the Brereton family, whom we have taken the greatest interest in, is concerned, will be sufficiently obvious.

It will be remembered that Markham Brereton, Cicely, his sister, and his mother, were subsisting rather penuriously in London, when they heard tidings of the death of Tom Brereton, the only son of Mrs. Markham's late husband's brother.

This event placed them in a position of heirs-at-law to a small freehold property at Guilford, which, believing the circumstantial tale of the death of Tom Brereton, they did not hesitate to take possession of.

The anomalous condition of the branch of the Brereton family to which Markham belonged may be easily accounted for. Tom's father, who had become a well-to-do man in the world, had been angry, or chosen to affect that he was so, at his brother's—that is Cicely and Markham's—father's marriage, so that the two families had not been for years in a state of communication with each other.

Hence it arose that the Breretons, whom we may call our Breretons, did not even know Tom by sight.

It was quite, then, a surprise to them when that vulgar and most erratic personage suddenly made his appearance at Guilford, when they had made themselves just comfortable, and in his coarse way announced who he was.

Fortunately Mr. Markham Brereton was at home, and his reply was what the reply of any reasonable man would have been under similar circumstances.

"Prove your identity," he said, "and we will yield you up quiet possession of that which we innocently, in the belief of your death, have taken possession of."

To this Tom Brereton was compelled to assent, and hence we found him travelling from Guilford to London with the Breretons in the old family coach, upon the occasion when Claude Duval stopped the vehicle upon Hounslow Heath, and instantly robbed Tom of his pocket-book, containing all the documents he possessed, to prove that he was the person he had represented himself to be.

Now, as we know, it had happened, that with a thorough disgust at the companionship of Tom Brereton, Markham had ridden on before, and actually himself been stopped by Claude Duval before the attack was made upon the carriage; and it was from the circumstance of Markham having gone on in advance, that it was thought by Tom and his advisers there would be good ground for fixing the robbery upon him.

But of course Tom had a sufficient motive for all this, and that motive was this.

There had been a third brother in the Brereton family, who had gone abroad to better his condition, and it appeared that he bettered in an extraordinary degree, for he became a very rich man indeed, and when nearly on his death-bed he had sent a person to England, to make certain inquires concerning his relatives.

This person had in due course acquainted him with the alienation between his two brothers, and in a freak of fancy he chose to leave the bulk of his fortune to Cicely his niece, merely because she was named Cicely.

This was a fact that had come to the ears of Tom, through a low attorney who acted for him, and who was named Newcourt, and then arose between them the anxious question of what could be made of the knowledge before the executors of

the deceased Mr. James Brereton became energetic in taking means to carry out the conditions of his will, which he had made at Calcutta.

It was thought that if a marriage could be knocked up between Tom and Cicely, it would answer all the purposes, and the attorney got from him a contingent bond for £10,000 as his share of the plunder, in case the marriage should be brought about.

While Cicely was in complete ignorance of her fortune, it was thought that an offer from Tom of marriage, and the settlement of the Guilford property upon her, would look amazingly generous, and be snapped at by the Brerétons; but to the annoyance of both Tom and the attorney, the former's offer was refused with a considerable portion of superadded contempt.

Under these circumstances, then, it became necessary to adopt some other plan, or to give the matter up as an impracticable job. That was what neither of them felt inclined to do, and the end of the cogitation was, that the charge of robbery against Markham should be got up.

The following were the advantages expected from this plan of operations, which was certainly well projected.

The great affection subsisting between Cicely and her brother was well known, and it was thought that by playing upon her fears arising from that affection, she might be forced into a consent to the projected marriage, and so save him.

Hence, then, the attorney, Newcourt, had made every possible exertion to get up the meagre evidence in such a way, as to interlope Markham in its folds, while at any time, provided Cicely consented to what was proposed to her, he could back out of the prosecution by pretending he had satisfactorily found out that he was mistaken in the identity of the robber who had deprived Tom of his pocket-book.

The sudden and most mysterious disappearance of Cicely somewhat discomfitted the plotters, but still the criminal proceedings against Markham would be public enough; they thought that if anything could possibly make Cicely show herself, they would.

From the first, the attorney taking the scanty and limited view of human nature incidental to his profession, and in accordance with the impulses of his own mind, had not for one moment imagined that any danger was to be apprehended from the appearance of Claude at the trial, inasmuch as for him to come there would compromise his own safety.

Lawyers and such clients as Tom Brereton cannot very well comprehend the motives that actuate such men as Claude Duval.

It was, however, soon discovered as a probability that Claude would, at the instigation of the sister, attempt something for the preservation of Mr. Markham Brereton, and hence the letter which was to confound Claude in court, was written to the Governor of Newgate, who, for a consideration, had evidently lent himself and his influence to the transaction.

How Claude had frightened the governor, with reference to the forged document, we are already well aware, but that he run the very greatest possible risk in case he should think proper to make his appearance in court, was a proposition quite clear to his mind, and to the minds of all concerned.

Poor Cicely, now actually wedded to Claude, awaited in concealment most anxiously the termination of an affair which involved the safety and happiness of the two beings most dear to her in the world. No wonder that under the circumstances in which she was placed, her mind was torn and distracted by conflicting emotions.

Such then was the state of things upon that eventful morning, when Markham Brereton was to be put upon his trial for an offence of which no one could be more innocent.

The trial and the style of evidence which went towards the production of its result, will sufficiently show what has often been much insisted upon, namely, how easy it is, upon the most slender and apparently upon the most inefficient

train of circumstances to place an innocent man in a position of the most exceeding peril.

It will show how small an amount of conspiring villany is sufficient to jeopardise an existence, and with a shuddering apprehension of the truth of the idea, we cannot help thinking how often the innocent must have suffered the pangs, mental and bodily, of death on the scaffold.

Thus far having made certain conditions of circumstances clear and intelligible to the reader, we at once proceed with the incidents of our tale in due order.

Sixteen-string Jack in vain endeavoured to snatch a few minutes' repose at the inn in the Old Bailey, while Claude Duval was absent from him. The stirring scenes he had so recently gone through, combined with his great anxieties upon Claude's account, effectually succeeded in driving slumber, although not fatigue, from his system.

Finding, then, that it was quite out of the question for him to get any rest, and that he only tortured his imagination by being alone, Jack descended to the lower room of the inn, relying upon certain changes, which, by the advice and aid of Claude, he had contrived the day before to make in his personal appearance, to prevent recognition.

There can be no doubt but that he and Claude were quite as safe, if not safer, from any danger of being known, in the Old Bailey, than anywhere; for who would for a moment have expected to find either of them there?

The very existence, too, of Sixteen-string Jack was unknown, so that even a fancied strong resemblance would have failed to induce any of the officers to say anything to him. He, therefore, might be considered to be doubly safe from any consequences of showing himself in such a quarter.

Jack, when he got into the coffee-room of the inn, found that much of the conversation of the parties there was upon the expected trial of Markham Brereton, and, knowing as he did from Claude, the real truth of the affair, he was both amazed and confused at the different versions he heard from various persons of the story.

Not one of these versions came near at all to the truth, and the whole affair set Sixteen-string Jack thinking of how imperfect an idea, after all, the courts of law can have of the cases upon which they decide. He could not but sigh to think what might be the result of the approaching trial of Mr. Markham Brereton.

"Alas!" he said, "I much fear, indeed, that poor Claude will, with his romantic feeling, consider himself called upon to make some dreadful sacrifice, in pursuance of his promise to his sister and to Cicely, that, at all risks, he will save Markham."

At this moment, a gentlemanly-looking man, attired in rather ecclesiastical-looking garments, made his appearance, and, after glancing round the room, took a seat close to Sixteen-string Jack.

The hair of the new-comer was like Hamlet's father's,

"A sable silvered,"

and altogether he looked one who had seen much of the world, and profited by what he had seen. An aspect of fixed seriousness was upon his face, and the only thing that struck Sixteen-string Jack as rather odd about his face, was the thick eyebrows, of a gray colour, that he had.

"Sir," said the stranger to Sixteen-string Jack, "are you able to tell me at what hour the trials come on opposite?"

"At nine," said Jack.

Now Jack fully meant by a short, brusque manner, to stop any further conversation, but the new-comer had either too much obstinacy, or too much perseverance, to be so put off, and he looked earnestly at Jack, saying—

"I think, sir, I have heard your voice before?"

Sixteen-string Jack felt the perspiration break out upon his forehead, as he replied as firmly as he could—

"I do not think it possible, sir. I am a stranger here."

"And so am I," replied the other.

Jack merely bowed slightly.

"Humph!" said the ecclesiastical-looking personage. "The more I look at you the more convinced am I that I know you; I have the faculty of not forgetting those whom I have once seen."

"Confound your faculties," muttered Jack to himself, and with perfect desperation he said aloud to him—"Pray then, sir, for whom do you take me?"

"For Sixteen-string Jack, the notorious highwayman."

Jack sprung to his feet.

"Hush! hush!" said the ecclesiastical-looking personage, "hush, no more; surely a discovery of identity is as dangerous to Claude Duval as to Sixteen-string Jack in such a place as this."

These last words were spoken in Claude's natural tone, and Jack then for the first time knew him.

"Good God," he said, "is it possible that you have the faculty, Claude, of thus effectually disguising yourself."

"Yes, Jack, I almost think I must have such a faculty, since it seems that even you did not know me; but it gives me the satisfaction of feeling that my disguise is very perfect—I must leave you now and go over to the court at once, for Brereton's trial will assuredly come on."

CHAPTER LVI.

THE TRIAL AND ITS RESULTS.

The court of the Old Bailey was densely crowded. Scarcely could any one person, in addition to those who already filled its rather confined area, be wedged in, so closely packed together were people of all classes and conditions, anxiously brought there to hear the trial of Markham Brereton.

The case had been much commented upon by the press for some weeks previously, and the consequence was, that considerable amount of public curiosity had resulted, and many more times the number of persons then in the court would have been glad to be present at the judicial proceedings.

As the trial was expected to be a long one, it was placed first upon the day's list, so that when the Recorder of London, and the authorities whose duty it was to attend the sessions, were duly seated, the accused, but most innocent young man, was brought from his cell in Newgate and placed at the felon's bar.

Markham Brereton was very pale, but he was firm, and in his aspect there seemed a struggling indignation, that he with difficulty kept down, while the clerk of the arraigns was gabbling over the words of the indictment in the manner incidental to such official characters.

When asked if he pleaded guilty or not guilty to the indictment, he replied in a clear loud, voice—

"Not guilty, and they who institute this prosecution well know it."

"Prisoner," said the judge, "you are adopting a foolish course. That was not the proper manner of pleading to the indictment."

"Not the usual manner, you mean, sir," said Markham; "let conscious guilt or slavish fear, cringe and whisper, but conscious innocence will speak out."

"You do yourself an injury."

"Which it is for the jury to decide and not the judge," said Markham, in a tone of voice that did not exactly please the recorder, who, however, made no further remark, but allowed to proceed at once.

A notoriously unscrupulous barrister was retained for the prosecution, and rising amid the most breathless attention of the densely crowded court, he spoke as follows:—

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"I shall, as briefly as I consider to be consistent with my duty, detail to you the circumstances which will be put in evidence, before repeating the charge against the prisoner at the bar.

"It is not my province as representing the prosecution to amplify in any shape or way, or to aggravate the charges brought forward in the indictment. I shall only be too happy if my learned friend, the Attorney-General, who is for the defence, can invalidate the facts which I shall feel it to be my duty to lay before you."

It was not news to the court that the Attorney-General had a brief for the defence, for it had been whispered upon the bench, but it certainly was to the present body of spectators. The fact is, Claude had placed the whole one hundred pounds he had borrowed for Markham's defence in the hands of a respectable attorney, and a fifty pound brief had brought the Attorney-General into Court.

If this information amazed the spectators, it really much more amazed Markham Brereton, who came into court under the full impression that he was undefended by counsel upon the painful occasion—

"Pardon me," he said, "there must be some mistake."

"If I am to be interrupted," said the counsel for the prosecution, to the prisoner at the bar, "I must appeal to the court to take some measures to put a stop to such indecorous proceedings."

"The prisoner's conduct is disgusting."

"I protest against that expression," said the Attorney-General.

All eyes were immediately fixed upon the eminent lawyer who at the period filled that important post, and the recorder's face suddenly reddened as he glared upon him.

"I protest against that expression," continued the Attorney-General. "Coming from the bench, it is of moment. Had such a remark come from a private individual, whose temper and capacity no one respected, it would have been of no consequence; but if that individual, so contemptible, is by some rare chance which no one comprehends, made a judge, even his follies and his petulance become of importance."

This reproof to the recorder was listened to with the profoundest satisfaction by the bar, and by the whole body of spectators, while the learned individual, although he dared not take to himself the direct application of the Attorney-General's words, fully felt that the hypothetical case was intended for him.

From that moment he made up his mind to condemn Markham Brereton if he possibly could, and by a strong effort he recovered his composure sufficiently to say—

"It is far beneath the dignity of this bench to wrangle with an advocate who, of course, wishes to make a favourable impression upon a jury; but this court cannot view these interruptions by the prisoner with favourable eyes, nor will they in the mind of any unprejudiced person benefit him in any way."

"It is due to me, then," said Markham Brereton, "that I should be allowed to state the words of the interruption. I was naturally astonished, having not the mean of feeing even a solicitor, to find so eminent a counsel standing up in my behalf in the court, as His Majesty's Attorney-General."

"Is the attorney here?" said the recorder.

"Yes, my lord," said a gentlemanly-looking man, "it's all right and regular."

"Very good. Pray proceed with the prosecution."

"It is not for me," continued the counsel for the prosecution, "to interfere with any little episode which the prisoner or his friends and advisers may think likely to benefit him; and, therefore, without the smallest amount of acerbity consequent upon the interruption that has taken place, I proceed. The prisoner at the bar is accused of a crime only second in its capital nature to the highest crime in the calendar. The crime of robbery, attended with personal violence upon the King's highway. It appears that a Mr. Thomas Brereton became, as



heir at law of his father's possessed of certain premises in fee simple at Guilford; and having occasion to go upon the sea, either for pleasure or for profit, as his own good will, there arose a report that he was dead soon after his departure, whereupon, without taking any legal or proper steps upon the occasion, or even waiting a reasonable time, the prisoner at the bar, his sister, and his mother, rushed to Guilford, and took possession of the property. Now Mr. Tom Brereton, as it appears he is most frequently called, who had in the phraseology of the old ballad not been dead at all, came back, and with some surprise found relatives who had never spoken a kind or even commonly civil word to him in their lives, in posses-

sion of his property. He, of course, demanded a surrender, upon which they put him upon proof of his identity forthwith, and at the end of rather a stormy interview, they consented to accompany him to London to see what a solicitor would say to the documents which he, Tom Brereton, had in a pocket book, and which he showed to his kind relations, as those which would enable him to prove his identity. They all proceeded in a coach from Guilford to London; that is to say, Mr. Tom Brereton, the prisoner's mother, sister, and a young person calling herself May Russel, but of whom more hereafter, while Mr. Brereton, the prisoner at the bar, rode on horseback by the side of the carriage. Now it appears that the family party which was with Mr. Tom Brereton drew the conversation much to the subject of highwaymen, so that he was quite unable to get a word in edgeways, even upon any other, and so they went on till, at a most dangerous part of the road, the prisoner at the bar announced his intention of leaving the party and riding on alone. To this Mr. Tom Brereton made no objection, for he did no share in the fears of the others respecting highwaymen; and for some time the carriage proceeded in safety, until stopped by a mounted man, much disguised. And now, gentlemen of the jury, mark what occurred. This mounted man—this highwayman, singled out Mr. Tom Brereton for attack, and he took from his pocket-book containing the papers which went to prove his claim to the Guilford property, and without which he might be involved in endless litigation. He was quite courteous to the ladies, and some words of absolute recognition passed between him and the young person named May Russel, who made a pretence of giving up her purse to the highwayman. My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, in this highwayman, Mr. Tom Brereton from the first recognised the prisoner at the bar, his cousin, and hence has arisen this most just and necessary prosecution.

"It will be left in your hands, gentlemen of the jury, to decide whether or not the evidence I shall bring before you, will suffice to support the allegations contained in the indictment, which you have heard read, and to which the prisoner has pleaded 'Not Guilty.'"

The counsel for the prosecution sat down, and evidently not much fault could be found with his speech, for he was really himself deceived by the attorney into a belief that Markham Brereton was guilty.

The first witness was Jane Smithson.

"Were you a servant at the little estate in Guilford during the occupancy of Mr. Markham Brereton, and his mother and sister?"

"Yes."

"Do you recollect who else was in the house?"

"Oh, yes; John Adams, the gardener, Phebe Lowes, the housemaid——"

"But I mean with, and upon an equality with the family?"

"Oh, you mean Miss Russel?"

"I don't mean anybody, I merely ask you a plain question, and want a plain answer, that is all."

"Oh, yes, Miss Russel was there."

"Did you, or did you not, ever see this person at the bar pay marked attention to Miss Russel?"

"Marked?—marked?—I never saw him mark Miss Russel. He only courted her now and then, I should say."

"Oh, very well. Did you see them all start for town, after the visit of Mr. Tom Brereton to Guilford?"

"Oh, yes, to be sure. There was Mrs. Brereton, Miss Cicely, Miss Russel, and Mr. Tom in the carriage, and Mr. Markham on horseback."

"On what coloured horse?"

"A dark bay."

"Very well, you may go down."

"Nay, not quite so hasty," said the junior counsel, who with the Attorney General, was for Markham. "Not quite so hasty—I wish to have a little conversation with this young lady."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" said Jane, bridling up at the compliment.

"Well, Jane, what was Miss Russel's christian name?"

"May."

"Should you have liked to go to London in the carriage?"

"Oh, yes; but there was not room for more than four."

"But tell us how it came about that Mr. Markham so violently prevented Mr. Tom from riding on horseback?"

"Lord bless you, sir, you have got the wrong end of the story. Mr. Markham says to Tom, 'there's a good horse; ride to London, and we will follow you in the carriage, which will just hold four.' But Tom, he says, 'oh, dear no, I can' ride,' says he, 'let me go in the coach,' whereupon in he goes, and Mr. Markham rides."

"Oh, I suppose if Tom had riden on to London, and Mr. Markham had been in the coach some miles behind him, he could not very easily have robbed him on the king's highway."

"How could he?"

"Ay, how indeed? That will do."

Down went Jane, having damaged the prosecution considerably, by her revelations concerning what passed.

The attorney, Newcome, bit his lip, and whispered to the counsel for the prosecution, who turning over his brief, called—

"Thomas Matthews." And a rough-looking, half boy, half man, in the costume of a groom, or coachman and groom, made his appearance, and was duly sworn.

"Now, my friend," said the counsel for the prosecution, "did you drive the Brereton family from Guilford to London, upon the occasion named in the indictment?"

"No."

"No?—Here is some mistake surely. Is your name Matthews?"

"Ess."

"Then do you mean to tell me you did not act as coachman upon that occasion?"

"Never axed me that afore. Axed me if I druv family—never did that."

"What did you do then? You drove the coach, I suppose?"

"No. I druv the osses—osses dragged the cuch."

A roar of laughter in the court at Matthews's doggedness and singular style of speech rather discomposed the counsel, who, however, made a laugh of it, quoting from Hamlet, and saying—

——"We must speak by the card,
Or this knave will ruin us with equivocation."

Matthews looked doggedly serious, while the court was in positive convulsions of merriment upon his account, and it was some minutes before business could be proceeded with.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE TRIAL CONTINUED.

If anything in the conduction of a trial, criminal or civil, can be more than another annoying to counsel, it must certainly be to have the laugh turned against him, and the barrister who was conducting the prosecution fully felt the awkwardness of his position.

But if anything can be more fatal than another, under such circumstances, it is to make abortive attempts to recover the laugh.

This the counsel was by far too old a stager to do, and with a face of the most imperturbable gravity, he continued the examination.

"Very well, it is admitted that you drove the horses that pulled the coach that contained the persons mentioned."

"Ees."

"Did anything particular happen upon the road previous to the coach being stopped by a highwayman ?"

"Ees."

"What was it ?"

"Near oss cast a shoe."

"Anything else ?"

"Ees."

"Well, what was that ?"

"Nothin'."

Another roar of laughter disconcerted the counsel, who fancied that the mode of examination he was pursuing would never in this world elicit from the witness the information he wanted. He accordingly changed it to quite another course, and in a loud and clear voice, he said to him—

"Did you recognize the highwayman who stopped the coach ?"

"Wrong agin—didn't stop the cuch—stopped me, and I stopped osses."

"Did you know him ?"

"No."

"Was he, or was he not the prisoner at the bar, to the best of your belief ?"

"Don't know."

"Then you know nothing ?"

"Why you and me is much of a muchness."

"You are the most incomprehensible idiot I ever met with."

"Ees."

"Stop," said the counsel for the defence. "Was the highwayman on a bay horse of any peculiar tint ?"

"Culiar ? I should think not. There's lots o' bay osses. What is there 'culiar in a bay oss ?"

"Very well. How many persons would the coach hold ?"

"Four. How many did you want it to hold, stupid ?"

"Not one more, I assure you," said the counsel, with a laugh. "You may go down now."

"Well, ain't I going ?"

"Silence," said the crier of the court.

"Silence yourself. Nobody makes half the noise you does."

"Turn that man out of court, officers," said the judge. "He has given his evidence, and we certainly do not want any further annoyance or interruption from him."

Thomas Matthews was duly hustled out of court ; and so far as the trial had gone, it was certainly all in favour of the accused person, for no jury could for a moment have thought of convicting him upon such meagre evidence as had already been adduced, but the principal witness was certainly to come.

"Thomas Brereton," said the crier of the court, and Tom made his appearance in the witness box.

He had evidently made up his mind to produce what he hoped and fully expected would be a favourable impression on the court by his style of dress, which was a vulgar caricature of the fashion.

He looked pale, despite the assurance of his character, and there was about his manner an evident determination to go through any ordeal rather than flinch from that which he had made up his mind to do. Even the counsel for the prosecution looked at him with an expression of disgust, and did not seem half to like the side of the question he was on.

Tom was sworn, and when that ceremony was over his examination at once commenced.

"Who and what are you, sir?"

"My name is Brereton, and everybody knows I'm a gentleman."

"Well, well; have you some property at Guilford?"

"Oh, yes."

"Pray relate how you came to be temporarily out of possession of that property?"

"Why, you see, the little place came to me naturally when the governor went off the hooks, but I found that my previous cousins had laid hold of it, and were making themselves snug enough."

"What does he mean?" said the judge. "What governor does he allude to?"

"His father, my lord."

"Oh, oh; very well. Go on. I am sorry to hear the governor met with so dreadful a death."

"Eh?" said Tom, "what dreadful death? He died in his bed all comfortable enough, I heard say."

"In his bed?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"I thought you mentioned that he had to be got off some hooks?"

A scream of laughter followed this remark, and it was some minutes before the gravity of the court could be at all restored.

"Lord bless your reverence," said Tom, "I only meant he had died, that's all. It's my funny clever way of speaking; don't you see?"

"Oh, indeed. Go on, then."

"Well, Mr. Brereton," continued the counsel, "you found your patrimony in the hands of your relations; what did you do, therefore, sir?"

"Why, I naturally enough asked 'em how the deuce they came there, and all I could get out of 'em was, some cock and bull story about my being drowned, so I told 'em to move off at once."

"And then?"

"Oh, they said they had no particular objection if I would prove who I was, so I showed 'em all my papers in my pocket-book, letters from the governor, my own baptismal register, and so on, but they wouldn't say it was all right before anybody but a lawyer; so you see it was agreed we were all to come to London, and go to one, when the matter was to be settled."

"Now, sir, will you be so good as to answer the question I am about to put to you as precisely and clearly as you can? Was there, before starting from Guilford to London, any proposition made to you to ride on in advance, and meet the family in London?"

Tom winked his eye in a peculiar manner, and then with an air of the very greatest effrontery, he said—

"No."

"Nothing of the sort?"

"Oh, dear, no, nothing of the sort. Markham Brereton rode on, and I went in the coach with the women folk."

"Very well, sir; now favour me by detailing to the jury what happened during the journey, of a noticeable character?"

"Well, they began talking about highwaymen, until they nearly made one's hair stand on end, and particularly the old card pitched it strong, pretending to be all of a flutter every minute."

"The who?"

"The old woman."

"But you said something about an old card."

"Oh, that's my funny way."

"I wish," said the judge, "you would change your funny way for a natural way."

"Well," continued Tom, "as I was saying, they pattered away about highwaymen, and when we got at a good distance Markham rode on at a brisk canter and left us to take care of ourselves. After that, Miss Cicely and the young person

they called May Russel, were always looking out of window, and would not hardly answer me when I said anything funny. At last there was a bit of a row, and a fellow on a horse came to the window, and pretended to be mighty civil, while he coolly tells us we are to be robbed."

"The ladies, I suppose, were very much alarmed, Mr. Brereton?"

"Well, I don't know—they took it pretty easy; but I was, I can tell you."

"What happened?"

"The fellow and I had a bit of a squabble, and he took away my pocket-book with all my papers, and it seemed to me that he didn't care for much else."

"Did he rob the ladies?"

"Not a bit of it. There was some nonsense about a little purse, but it was quite clear to me that he and Miss Russel knew each other."

"Well, Mr. Brereton, oblige me by looking at the prisoner at the bar."

This was rather an ordeal for Tom to go through, but he did manage to turn round and look upon the pale, thoughtful countenance of Markham Brereton, who had listened with ineffable disgust to the examination. It was only for a moment that Tom looked at him, and then he was glad to turn away his eyes from the stern contempt of the glance that he encountered.

"Now, sir," pursued the counsel, "is the prisoner at the bar the person who robbed you of your pocket-book in the manner you have related?"

There was a death-like stillness in the court, pending the reply of Tom, who almost gasped out the word—

"Yes."

"Liar!" said a loud voice from amid the dense body of spectators who were closely packed upon the floor of the court.

So thoroughly astounded was everybody by this most audacious interference, that for some moments not a word was uttered—judge—jury—counsel, and spectators seemed to be electrified with astonishment, and even Markham Brereton's countenance wore a sudden flush, and he looked curiously in the direction from whence the bold denial had proceeded.

The recorder half rose, and with an angry gesture, cried—

"Officers, bring that man before me."

A great bustle ensued. The numerous officers connected with the court rushed here and there among the crowd, but no culprit was forthcoming.

"Is it possible," said the recorder, "that a person who has thus unsettled the court cannot be found? Do your duty, officers, and bring him before me directly."

This was much easier said than done. The officers were quite in an agony to lay hold of somebody, and they did seize several persons, but the indignant remonstrances and asseverations of those close at hand forced them to let them go again, with the full conviction that they had made a mistake.

"We can't find him, my lord," said one.

"Not find him?"

"No, my lord."

"Then I shall take care to have every officer of this court reported for inefficiency. Proceed with the examination of your witness, sir."

Tom Brereton was very pale, and holding for support to the rails of the witness box. It was quite clear that the bold denial given to his evidence had had a remarkable effect upon his nerves. He guessed pretty accurately from whom it came, and he was vainly casting about in his own mind for the best means of getting out of the rather difficult position in which he found himself.

"Now, Mr. Thomas Brereton," said the counsel, recalling him to a recollection of where he was, "I trust this most unseemly and criminal interruption of the court will not in the least intimidate you?"

"Oh, no—no—I—I—oh, no."

"Well, sir, I wish to ask you if you have the least doubt or mental reservation in the shape of a doubt, concerning the identity of the prisoner now at the bar, with the person who stopped the coach in which you were travelling from Guilford to London upon the occasion now in question?"

"How should I?"

"But have you? That is the question."

"Oh, dear no; not the least."

"And you have not recovered your pocket-book, containing documents of so great importance to your personal interests?"

"Certainly not."

"Very well, sir. I do not see that there can be any necessity for my troubling you with any further questions upon minor points, when your testimony upon the main particular is so clear and so distinct that the jury can come but to one conclusion upon the subject matter of the inquiry before them."

"Then I may go?"

"Oh, certainly, unless my learned friend for the defence thinks that anything can be done in the way of cross-examining you."

"He will try," said the attorney-general, rising.

"Oh, very good, very good."

"Ain't I to go?" said Tom.

"Not yet, sir, if you please, however unwilling I am to detain you," said the attorney-general.

"I wish you would excuse me; I ain't very well."

"Extremely sorry, but the pleasure of your company here in that box for a short time longer is quite indispensable to my happiness, so you will be so good as to remain where you are, and answer me a few plain questions."

Tom saw there was no escape, so he made an effort and mustered up all his courage and impudence to endure the cross-examination, which everybody felt certain would be in his case no joke.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE DEFENCE.

The auditory shifted its position, and there was not a person present who did not look for something very troublesome to Tom Brereton from what the attorney-general was about now to commence with.

Tom looked him as steadily in the face as he could summon courage to do, and then the attorney-general said, in quite a familiar tone—

"How do you like horse-racing, Mr. Brereton, eh?"

"Horse-racing?"

"Yes, horse-racing. Don't you think now it's a pretty and gentlemanly-like amusement?"

"Well, I—I. Really, I—don't exactly—"

"Oh, nonsense; did you not win the ladies' cup once at Hatcham-park races by riding a horse called Skyscraper?"

"Lord bless you! I ride a race?"

"Did you not?"

"Come, you are on a wrong scent now. Why, what have you got in your head? I ride a race and win a plate? Well, that is a good one."

"But you are a great horseman, as witness the celebrated steeple-chase you rode last year. Come, come, you won't deny that?"

"Yes, I will, though. What do you mean by bothering me about horse-racing and steeple-chasing? You know, I dare say, well enough, that it's all nonsense. I don't like riding at all."

"Oh, you do."

"I tell you I don't. I always avoid it."

"Nonsense."

"It's you that's talking nonsense. Don't aggravate me. I tell you I am no rider, and I don't like riding at all."

"Aggravate you? You are enough to aggravate me. Why, when Mr. Markham,

at Guilford, asked you to ride his bay horse to London while he followed in the carriage, you didn't pretend to be so frightened at riding."

"Why should I? I don't want anybody to get the laugh of me."

"Oh, stuff."

"Besides, Cicely was there, and the other girl, and somehow, if girls don't think you can do everything, they turn up their noses at you."

"Ah, very likely. I wonder how my learned friend feels now?"

As he spoke, the attorney-general cast his eyes towards the counsel for the prosecution, as he was biting his lips, for Tom had been seduced into admitting what he had in the most positive manner denied, namely, that Markham Brereton had offered him the horse to proceed to London with in advance of the carriage.

"Very well," added the attorney-general, who, now that he had gained his point, had no wish to waste further time upon the question of Tom's horsemanship.

"We will look upon that as quite settled. You stated in your examination that the conversation in the coach turned upon highwaymen?"

"Yes. Oh, yes."

"Was any particular highwayman mentioned?"

"No."

"You are quite sure of that now?"

"Oh, yes, quite sure."

"Very well, it's of no consequence. Was it before or after your accusation of her brother, that Miss Cicely Brereton contemptuously rejected an offer of your hand?"

Tom looked horribly confused, as he stammered out,—"I—really—don't recollect."

"Was it before or after?" cried the attorney-general, in a loud voice.

"Well, it was before, then."

"Oh, you admit that, do you? Come now, sir, you know you were very much hurt and enraged at this young lady's refusal of your offer in the contemptuous manner in which she did refuse. Between you and me, don't you think that that contempt arose in a great measure from your expressions of fear, while in the coach coming from Guilford, of being robbed by the notorious Claude Duval?"

"How do I know?"

"But it might have been."

"Well, have it your own way."

"I am pretty well having it my own way, I think; I don't know what may be the opinion of my learned brothers."

"The witness is a fool!" cried the counsel for the prosecution.

"Save me from my friends," said the attorney-general with a laugh.

Tom looked confusedly from one to the other, not very well aware of how far he had committed himself, and yet quite confident that he had done so in some rather alarming way to make his own counsel so bitter against him. The attorney-general, amid the amusement of the whole court, continued his cross-examination of the thoroughly exposed and discomfited Tom Brereton.

"Now, sir," he said, "you have distinctly, and without doubt or reservation, sworn to the identity of the prisoner at the bar, with the person who robbed you of your pocket-book on the highway?"

"To be sure I have."

"Well, how came you to know him so well?"

"How came I?"

"Yes, how came you? Surely, that is a simple enough question to answer, even for you."

"Why, by his looks, of course."

"What? Do you mean to tell me that a man parted with you at Guilford, and then was fool enough to rob you at Ealing Common, trusting that you would not know him again?"

"Oh, but he was disguised."

"Oh! indeed. Well, you penetrated his disguise, I suppose?"



"Of course."

"How did you do that?"

"God bless me, by taking a good look at him, to be sure. How else could I, I should like to know?"

"Well, if you took a good look at him, you know what he had on. How was he attired?"

"He had a scarlet coat on."

"What else?"

"A lace cravat, white breeches, and tall boots."

"Oh! What luggage did Mr. Markham Brereton carry with him when he left the coach and rode on before to London?"

"Luggage! How could he have luggage on a horse?"

"Why, he must have carried his scarlet cloak, the lace cravat, the white breeches, and the tall boots somehow, you know, if he were the robber."

"Well, I don't know."

"Of course you don't."

"Well, don't ask me, then. You are enough to bother a man's life out, you are."

"Oh, dear, no. You are by far too complimentary. Come, now, Mr. Tom Brereton, you have sworn that the young lady named May Russel was not alarmed at the highwayman, but, on the contrary, appeared to know him."

"Yes—oh, yes."

"Do you know who that young lady is?"

"No"

"Have you ever heard or suspected who she is?"

"No. How should I?"

"Very well. Now, of course, you felt highly indignant at the refusal of Miss Cicely, your first cousin, to marry you. It was enough to aggravate anybody, I can well believe."

"Well, you would have been aggravated yourself."

"I should, but—but, Mr. Tom Brereton, I should not have been so ungentlemanly as to taunt her with keeping about her as a bosom friend the sister of a highwayman, which you told me you had ascertained Miss Russel to be. Oh, Mr. Tom, you should not have said that."

"Well, I don't see much in that; when a man's aggravated he will say things that he wouldn't upon other occasions. You ought to know that."

"I do know it. And now, sir, first of all you swore distinctly that no offer had been made to you to ride on before the carriage upon Mr. Markham's bay horse, and then you admitted you had refused such an offer.—Perjury No. 1. Secondly, you swear that, during the conversation held in the carriage, no name of a highwayman was mentioned, and then you admit that Claude Duval, one of the most notorious of the whole fraternity, was mentioned as the subject of your dread.—Perjury No. 2. Thirdly, you swore that you knew nothing further of Miss May Russel than that she was Miss May Russel, and then you admit that you taunted Miss Cicely Brereton with the fact of her being the sister of a highwayman.—Perjury No. 3!"

Tom looked aghast. The counsel for the prosecution shut his eyes and leant back in his seat, affecting to be half asleep, and quite wearied by the tiresome proceedings of the Attorney-General, while the Recorder looked anything but pleased, for he seemed to have come into court with quite an animus against Markham Brereton. The jury looked puzzled, as juries look usually, and the spectators were delighted.

"I suppose I may go?" whined Tom.

"Not yet."

He was compelled to remain, although it was quite clear that he was in an amazing state of fidget, and had an awful dread of what would next be said to him, during that most remorseless cross-examination.

"Now, sir," said the Attorney-General, "did you or did you not upon the thirteenth of this month visit the Governor of Newgate in his private apartments situated in that prison?"

"The thirteenth, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Well, I—I really don't know about the exact date."

"But you did visit him?"

"Ye—ye—yes, I suppose if you say so, I did."

"You are highly accommodating, Mr. Tom Brereton; but I ask you, sir, upon your oath, did you or did you not visit him?"

"Very well—I did."

"What passed on that visit?"

The perspiration poured down Tom's face, and he fidgetted about. At length, when the question was repeated in a voice of thunder, he said—

"I want to ask him to give what indulgence he could to Markham Brereton, because, bad as he was, he was still my cousin."

The Governor of Newgate, who was present, drew a long breath of exquisite relief, and not a little amazed was he at the sudden display of ready wit upon the part of Tom Brereton.

"Well, what else?" said the Attorney-General.

"He said he would do all that was consistent with his duty."

"Very good: and then, when you left him, who did you meet in the street?—who did you go into a public-house with?—who did you give a certain written paper to, which I have now in my hand—a written paper which contains a confession that you were getting up the prosecution of Mr. Markham Brereton solely from malice, and that you knew the robber on Ealing Common was no other than Claude Duval?"

"Really," said the counsel for the prosecution, rising, "any man may write any paper and sign it, if his life probably is to pay the penalty of his refusal."

"Yes," said Tom; "that was it; I deny everything."

The Attorney-General shook his head at the counsel, as he said—

"How well you know that this interruption is most scandalous, and contrary to all professional practice. But you have succeeded in putting words into your witness's mouth, although I have proved that nothing he says can be relied upon for one moment. I trust I have proved that."

The Attorney-General sat down.

"May I go now?" said Tom.

"Oh, yes; you can go now," said the counsel for the prosecution.

"Stop," said the recorder.

Tom looked the picture of distress.

"Do you still distinctly swear to the prisoner at the bar as the person who robbed you upon Ealing Common of your pocket-book?"

"Yes—I do."

"Well, I apprehend, gentlemen of the jury, that that, after all, is the point."

"And," said the Attorney-General, "I protest against the gross interference on the part of the judge with these proceedings."

"I apprehened," said the recorder, "it is always competent on the part of the court to ask a question of a witness, Mr. Attorney-General!"

"Yes, but not to draw an inference."

"I regret differing with you, Mr. Attorney, but I am not aware that I have gone beyond the province of a criminal judge."

"A long way, my lord."

"We differ upon that point."

"As it appears, my lord; and we are likely to continue so to differ; but I trust that the jury will dismiss from its mind an indiscretion, although it does come from a high place, and hedged round with the authority of a judge's robes."

"This is scarcely proper, Mr. Attorney."

"There we differ again, my lord."

"Let the trial proceed."

"Most willingly, my lord; most willingly. I shall endeavour to make the truth apparent, even in spite of your lordship."

"I cannot sit here, Mr. Attorney, and allow the office I hold to be thus insulted in my person. This conduct is most indecorous indeed."

"If I have said anything indecorous to or of the office, I humbly apologise; but, my lord, it was the man holding the office I spoke of, and permit me to say that, after all, it is he alone who can desecrate and insult the office."

There was a pause of a few moments' duration, after which the counsel for the prosecution said—

"That is the case against the prisoner, my lord, and I shall call no more witnesses."

"The court adjourns for an hour," said the recorder.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE DEFENCE OF THE PRISONER.

DURING the short period that the judge and the official personages who had seats upon the bench left the court, not one of the spectators made an effort to quit his or her position. If they had done so, they had a very strong opinion that there would be no such thing as getting back again.

Markham Brereton took the opportunity of casting his eyes scrutinizingly around the court to see if he could observe any one he knew, or any friendly face which could give him assurance that, after all, he should not be made the victim of false evidence.

In a remote corner, half hidden from him by a column supporting the roof of the building, was a small knot of persons; and among them he caught a glimpse, and only a glimpse, of May Russel.

The extraordinary disclosure made by the counsel, to the effect that May Russel was the sister of a highwayman, had caused him infinite pain, and as he saw now but a small portion of that delicate and pretty cheek, he could not bring himself to believe that any species of criminality could find a home in one so nearly allied to her.

"No, no," he though to himself; "all that will be contradicted. That May is poor there can be no doubt, but that she is disreputable I will not believe."

The brief period of rest, however, was quickly over, and the recorder again entering the court, accompanied by the Lord Mayor and both the sheriffs of London, resumed his seat upon the bench.

The Attorney-General and the prisoner's counsel for the defence held together a brief consultation, after which the former rose, amid the most marked silence of this court, and commenced the defence.

"My lords and gentlemen of the jury," he said, "I must confess that I came into this court with a strong feeling upon my mind that there really was something like presumptive proof of the guilt of the prisoner at the bar to be fought against, and that the evidence would be such as to seem to carry with it a probability of his participation in the crime of which he is accused. But, gentlemen, no doubt you are equally surprised with me at the glaring want of common, every-day, presumptive evidence in this case, so cruelly and scandalously got up against an innocent man. It was to be expected, gentlemen, that the footsteps of Mr. Markham Brereton would almost have been reckoned upon the night in question. It was to be expected that if there was a difficulty in saying positively he was at the robbery, there would have been an attempt to prove that he was nowhere else; but, on the contrary, what does the evidence for the prosecution amount to? It is rather a strange thing, gentlemen of the jury, that the evidence for the prosecution divides itself in the most natural way in the world into two portions—one portion that can be believed, and one that cannot. What is true is favourable to the prisoner, and what is false is not. All that was with difficulty wrung by my learned friend and myself from the perjured witnesses for the prosecution was favourable to the prisoner, and so diabolical an attempt to torture and transfigure the truth, I never, during the whole course of my experience, met with in a court of justice. But to return to our question—what does the evidence amount to? Look at it fairly, and it comes to this, and no more. Mr.

Markham Brereton, owing to an erroneous belief in the death of the prosecutor, takes possession of certain property. Well, the prosecutor, of whom it is admitted they knew nothing personally, appears and claims his property, to which Mr. Markham makes the natural reply, 'Come to a civilian, and let us settle the business in a regular way. If you prove to the satisfaction of a respectable solicitor, that this property ought to be surrendered to you, there it is at once without further let or hinderance.' Well, this was too reasonable even for Mr. Tom Brereton to object to, and after rejecting the use of the horse, he rides in the carriage, which would hold no more than four, so that one was necessitated to ride on horseback. We have it upon his own evidence that he might have ridden to town but for his cowardice. Did that look suspicious? Well, gentlemen, there was nobody else to take the horse but Mr. Markham Brereton, and so the party proceeded. An attack is made by a highwayman upon the carriage, and the conclusion you are sought to be persuaded to come to is, that the attack was made by Markham Brereton. You are to be told that having, accidently, mind, been compelled to ride to London, he then conceives the idea of robbing his cousin; a scarlet coat, white breeches, boots, and lace cravat, fall upon him. one must suppose, from the skies, and he is equipped as a knight of the road. Can anything be a greater insult to the understanding of Englishmen than this? Well, but the identity of Mr. Markham Brereton, we are told, with the highwayman, is duly and distinctly sworn to. It is—but by whom? By a man whose whole evidence was a complication of perjuries; by a man who, as sure as I live, shall be indicted for perjury before this criminal session is over; by a man who for cowardice, cringing manners, and rascality, scarcely has his equal. It is upon the evidence of such a man alone that you are asked to commit one whose character is far above stain or reproach. It is upon the evidence of a man who swore point blank that he was never asked to ride at all, and then admitted he refused upon the ground of incapacity. It is upon the evidence of a man, who swore distinctly that he never knew anything whatever of a certain person, but her name, and then admits that he had reproached somebody else for keeping company with her on account of what he had heard. But why pursue the falsehoods and inconsistencies of such a man as Thomas Brereton? They lie transparently before the jury, and it is impossible —impossible, I say, conscientiously to convict any man of any offence upon such testimony. Gentlemen, I look upon the prosecutor's case as so complete a failure, that I am certain I might safely leave the affair in your hands at this point; but, nevertheless, I will call some witnesses, who will further satisfy you. Call Job Harley."

A most singular-looking specimen of humanity was pushed into the box and duly sworn. He wore a rough great coat, and had an enormous red face, with a profusion of whiskers.

"Well, Job, do you keep the turnpike gate at Acton Green?"

"Yes, I do."

"How long have you kept it?"

"Me and my son has kept it a matter of five years."

"Then, of course, you know such persons as frequently pass through it?"

"Rather."

"Do you remember on the night named in the indictment—the 17th—any one of a noticeable character passing through the gate?"

"To be sure, I do."

"Who was it?"

"Claude Duval, the highwayman, on his bay mare, to be sure. He went through at a sharp trot, and I said to myself—'Look out, whoever happens to be upon the road with a well-filled purse.'"

"Have you any doubt about its being him?"

"Lord bless, you, no. I know him as well as I know myself. It was Claude, and no mistake, as was on the western road that night; and, besides, he came back again, and then I saw him, too."

"Very well, that is sufficient for me, Mr. Job. I shall not trouble you any further."

"Stop a moment," said the counsel for the prosecution, as Job was about to leave the box, "stop a bit; I have a few words to say to you."

"Speak up, then."

"You say you frequently saw Claude Duval, the highwayman, pass your gate. Now, did you ever make an attempt to stop the progress of so notorious a criminal?"

"What?"

"I say, did you knowingly permit such a character to pass your gate, with a full conviction that he was bent upon robbery, without making some effort to apprehend him?"

"Apprehend him? I apprehend him? Well, that's a good 'un. What's it to me, who goes through the gate? If I was to stop all the rogues I see, I should have enough to do."

"Then do you mean to tell me that, knowing a man is going on an errand of robbery and pillage, you would let him go in peace?"

"Yes. You are a lawyer, ain't you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, I'd let you go through any time."

A laugh ran through the crowd, during which the counsel sat down, finding that nothing was to be made of the turnpike-keeper.

"Call May Russel," said the Attorney-General.

Markham started and turned pale, and there was a visible stir of curiosity in the court, when May was handed into the witness-box to be sworn. Her beauty won all hearts, and the state of agitation she was in, only imparted a greater interest to her personal appearance.

"It shall be my careful endeavour to give you as little pain as possible, in the questions it is my duty to ask you," said the Attorney-General, "and I sincerely hope my learned friend on the other side will follow my example."

May slightly bowed.

"Permit me to ask you if Russel is your real name?"

"It is not."

There was a visible sensation in court, and Markham buried his face in his hands; for he could not bear to look upon that face which he had so often pictured to himself in dreams as all that was beautiful, with now a flush of shame upon it.

"What is your name?"

"May Duval!"

Various expressions of surprise broke from the spectators, and even the counsel looked from the table curiously at the fair young girl.

"Then you are the sister of Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"I am Claude's unhappy sister."

"How came you the friend and companion of the Breretons?"

"They took me in from charity, knowing me not. I call myself Russel. They gave me a home full of kindness—God bless them! God will bless them for it."

"Those are actions which are not forgotten. Now tell us if you know anything of this robbery upon Ealing Common of Mr. Tom Brereton?"

"The coach was stopped."

"By whom?"

"By my brother."

"You are certain?"

"Do I not know him? There is not a feature, not a slight trick of voice or gesture, that is unknown to me. As I stand before God, it was Claude who stopped the carriage, and only Claude."

"Have you anything further to add, bearing upon the case?"

"Yes. Claude owned to me the robbery. He handed to me the pocket-book, with the contents uninjured."

"Where is that pocket-book?"

"Here."

May took from her bosom the pocket-book, and handed it to the Attorney General.

"It's mine—it's mine," cried Tom, "give us hold of it. It's mine, I say. I'll swear to it any day. Give it to me."

"The pocket-book for the present must remain in the hands of the court," said the recorder.

The Attorney-General intimated that he had more to say to May, and the connsel for the prosecution rose to cross-examine her.

"So," he said, "you are the sister of Claude Duval?"

"I have said so!"

"And you have a sneaking kindness for the prisoner at the bar?"

May's countenance flushed for a moment, but she made no reply.

"I insist upon an answer."

"Which," said the Attorney-General, "I fell bound to say, in defence of my witness, you cannot do, nor will the court aid you."

"Oh, very well, very well, I will take it for granted. I suppose, Miss Duval, you are aware that your worthy brother has committed numerous robberies, and probably you think that to clap one which he did not commit upon his shoulders, will do him no harm, and your lover much good. Now answer me upon your oath, was not the pocket-book you have handed to the court, given to you by the prisoner at the bar?"

"Sir?"

"Oh, you are highly offended at the supposition; you are very sensitive, I suppose."

"I do not perhaps, sir," said May, "live in the atmosphere of falsehood and duplicity familiar to you, who may hear your oath ridiculed without construing it as an insult."

"Dear me!—I suppose you read that in some romance; but now we deal in realities. If you did not receive the pocket-book from the prisoner at the bar, you probably received it from some one to whom he handed it, and, at all events, for your consolation in this affair, I can inform you that you are liable to a criminal indictment."

"I know it."

"Oh, you know it? Now upon your oath, were you not, all of you, that is to say, you and your brother, and his sweetheart Cicely Brereton, and your love, the prisoner at the bar, and the old lady, mixed up together in a nice little plot to get Mr. Tom Brereton's property by fair means or by foul?"

"The supposition, sir, can only show the contemptible character of the imagination which could conceive it, and the shameless licence of the tongue that could utter it."

"Upon stilts again! Well, Miss Duval, I shall leave the jury to form their own estimate of your evidence, and your abilities in this transaction. I have no doubt but that you have said your lesson here in a manner that will give the greatest satisfaction to your friends and admirers. Can you tell me where Miss Cicely Brereton is?"

"No."

"Very well; you can go down, my dear."

Thoroughly vexed and embittered, far beyond anything she had ever before felt in the shape of anger, May left the witness box; but yet the cross-examination had been a complete failure, and the Attorney-General looked with a smile at the junior counsel, as much as to say, our learned friend on the opposite side is particularly unhappy to-day.

CHAPTER LX.

THE VERDICT.

Oh, what a relief it was to May to find herself once more on the floor of the court, and out of the witness box, where, to her perception, every other word that was uttered to her came in the shape of an insult. She scarcely heard that the next person called was, Cicely Brereton. The name was vociferated through the court, but there was no response, and the Attorney-General said—"I only had a hope that this witness would make her appearance, but it seems that hope was a fallacious one, and I now abandon the call, and proceed to require the attendance of the governor of Newgate in the box."

Tom and the governor both felt a little uneasy, and to tell the truth, so did Mr. Newcombe, the solicitor, but the governor stepped into the box with an air of assurance that they thought promised well for his success, in evading disagreeable disclosures in the forthcoming examination.

"I believe, sir," said the Attorney-General, "that you hold the responsible situation of governor of Newgate?"

"I do."

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Thomas Brereton?"

"No."

"Do you swear that? Has he not visited you?"

"He has, but yet I do not consider him in the light of an acquaintance."

"Very well, you may draw as nice distinctions as you please. What we want to know is, what passed at your last interview with the prisoner, an interview which took place in your private apartment in Newgate?"

"He called upon me to request indulgence for Markham Brereton, which I promised so far as my duty would allow me."

"Did you ever intercept a letter from Claude Duval to the prisoner at the bar?"

"No."

"Did you ever receive a visit from Claude Duval, in Newgate?"

"Certainly not."

"This is too absurd," said the counsel for the prosecution; "Claude Duval, the famous highwayman, visiting the governor of Newgate!"

"'There are more things in heaven and earth, sir,'" said the Attorney General, "'than are apparently dreamt of in your philosophy.' The governor here, feels the truth of my words. Now, sir, will you swear that Claude Duval and you did not walk arm and arm out of the prison together, after he had pretty well frightened you out of your senses?"

"Certainly not. Nothing of the sort happened."

"Then you know nothing of Tom Brereton—never had a visit from Claude Duval, and are in no way interested in the conviction of the prisoner at the bar?"

"Of course not."

"Now listen to this paper."

The Attorney-General then read the statement, which Claude had forced from Tom Brereton, and which ran as follows:—

"I, Thomas Brereton, declare that I am perfectly well aware that Mr. Markham Brereton was not the person who robbed me upon Ealing Common, but that it was Claude Duval who stopped the coach upon the night in question. Nevertheless, as I wish to terrify Cicely Brereton, my cousin, into accepting my hand, I made a false charge against her brother; and fearing that Claude Duval may come forward, and by owning the robbery defeat me, I have concocted with Mr. Newcombe and the Governor of Newgate, a forged letter, as from Claude to Markham Brereton, stating that for love of his sister, Cicely, he will



come forward at the trial and own to the robbery, so as to clear him, Markham.

(Signed) "THOMAS BRERETON."

This paper was listened to with curiosity by all present.

"Now," added the Attorney General, "Mr. Thomas Brereton might have denied this statement to be in his own hand-writing. He might have denied all cognizance of it, and it might in such a case have made no impression; but he has admitted it, and his only explanation of it is that it was extorted from him by fear."

"Doubtless it was," said the governor.

"Do you swear that you know nothing of it?"

"Certainly I do."

"Very well, Mr. Governor; you have in this affair pursued a bold course. Whether it be altogether a prudent one or not, time will show. I have done with you."

The governor lingered, but the counsel for the prosecution said—

"I have no questions to ask you, sir. The examination that you have endured has been by far too ludicrous for me to comment upon."

"My case for the defence is over,' said the Attorney General. "I trust I have proved my point, which was, that Claude Duval, and not Markham Brereton, committed the highway robbery, of which the latter stands charged. The testimony of Claude's sister, May, I apprehend, must put that matter completely at rest; and the prosecutor himself would do well at this stage of the proceedings to own himself mistaken. As far as the jury is concerned, I think there can be no difficulty in returning a verdict of acquittal. I am aware that by calling witnesses, I have given my learned opponent in this case a right of reply, which I now give him leave to avail himself of, should he in the due exercise of his judgment, think proper to do so."

The Attorney General sat down, and the counsel for the prosecution rose.

"I have very few remarks to make," he said. "My learned friend looks for an acquittal triumphantly, and if the case was as the case seems, probably he would not be disappointed; but I have, I must say, too great a reliance upon the common sense of Englishmen to believe for one moment that they will allow themselves to be hoodwinked by the pretty little romance of the defence in this case. Here we have two sets of lovers. The prisoner at the bar loves the sister of the highwayman, Claude Duval, and Claude Duval returns the compliment by loving the sister of the prisoner at the bar, and all of them together have no objection to Tom Brereton's property. The prisoner commits a robbery, and Claude Duval fathers it. If Claude Duval should chance to be apprehended next week, perhaps the prisoner at the bar will have the kindness to own to the case brought against him. Gentlemen of the jury, I trust you will defeat this snug little family compact, and notwithstanding the dust that has been industriously attempted to be thrown in your eyes, you will still put the saddle upon the right horse. I leave the case now in your hands, with confidence as to the result, for however Mr. Tom Brereton may not have succeeded in winning upon your sympathies, still he is not upon that account to be robbed upon the highway with impunity, nor are a few inconsistences in evidence elicited by the tact of counsel in a cross examination, to invalidate broad and startling facts. Of course the advancement of justice is the first consideration of us all, and I sincerely hope that your verdict will vindicate the law."

The counsel sat down, having said all he could say to damage the defence, although by the initiated it was well enough perceived that he had no great fancy for his own case, and no great reliance upon its strength. All that remained now of routine proceeding, was that the judge should sum up the case to the jury, and every one in the court was on the rack of anxiety to listen to what he would say, and the turn he would give to the evidence that had been adduced upon both sides of the question. He commenced in a low voice—

"The prisoner at the bar stands charged with the robbery of certain papers and documents from the person of Mr. Thomas Brereton on the king's highway, on the evening of the 17th of the last month. It appears in evidence that a coach in which the prosecutor with some ladies were travelling, was stopped upon Ealing Common, and the robbery which forms the subject of the indictment was effected by the prisoner at the bar, or some one so resembling him, as to induce the prosecutor to swear that he was the person. It cannot fail to be observed that the whole case resolves itself into questions of personal varacity, and personal identity. The defence has laboured to prove that the prosecutor is either perjured or misfaken, both rather serious allegations, and they prefer much the former, which

is of course by far the most serious of the two. It appears that Thomas Brereton possessed papers about him of importance to the prisoner at the bar, or rather I should say of importance to Thomas Brereton, and counter to the interest of the prisoner at the bar, and the presumption set up by the prosecution is, that it was to annoy and distress Thomas Brereton by the loss of these papers that the robbery was committed. Thomas Brereton swears distinctly, and without reservation, to the identity of the prisoner with the person who robbed him upon Ealing Common, and another witness swears as distinctly, that the robber was no other than Claude Duval, the notorious highwayman, and actually produced the prosecutor's pocket-book which she says was handed to her by Claude Duval. It is not necessary for me to say much more of this witness than that she has placed herself in an extremely delicate and painful position, for whether that which she has sworn to be the truth or not, she is most awkwardly situated. It will be the duty of the jury to endeavour to come to some sort of conclusion between the conflicting testimony of the prosecutor, whose character no one has attacked, and this young woman, who if she be herself immaculate, certainly is most unfortunate in her immediate connexions. It is suggested that the pocket-book might just as easily have been handed to May Duval by the prisoner at the bar, as by her brother Claude, and it is likewise suggested that by so doing she was saving a lover at a small expense to a brother, an expense or risk which the brother was willing to run for the sake of the sister of the prisoner at the bar. Whether or not there be such a family compact and understanding between all these persons, it is hard to say, but that among them all they had the prosecutor's pocket-book, which was taken from him by violence upon the night in question on Ealing Common, is a fact patent to the whole proceeding. If that pocket-book was taken by Claude Duval and handed to his sister, as she says, and suppose the prisoner at the bar was aware and sanctioned the proceeding, still he is not guilty of the present indictment. But if, on the contrary, he really did take it, and this introduction of the name of Claude Duval, is nothing more than a base fraud and impudent attempt to juggle justice, then is he most guilty, and most guilty are those who have aided and assisted him. Between the conflicting testimony it is for you, gentlemen of the jury, to decide, always bearing in mind that the prisoner at the bar is not to be found guilty upon any other assumption than that he was *de facto* the robber of the pocket-book, upon Ealing Common, and upon the special occasion, recited and specified in the bill of indictment. If you believe Mr. Thomas Brereton on his oath, your duty lies quite clearly and evenly before you, for then you can do nothing but find the prisoner guilty, according to your oaths upon taking your places in that box. The case is before you, gentlemen, and the court waits your decision upon the question submitted to you."

The charge to the jury was over, and although it was rather of a rambling and discursive character, no one could take upon himself actually to say that it was unfair, notwithstanding there was an evident leaning to the belief that the prisoner was guilty. The judge, however, in that stage of the proceedings, had as much right to his opinion as any one else. There was a buzz and a hum of conversation in the court.

"Silence!" shouted the crier.

All was still again, and the jury with puzzled and anxious looks, began to lay there heads together.

"You can retire, gentlemen, if it is your wish to do so," said the clerk of the arraigns, looking hard at the jury as she spoke.

"No," said the foreman, "we think we shall soon agree."

This announcement kept every one in the court motionless, and the recorder, who had partially risen to leave the court, under the impression, when the clerk of the arraigns spoke, that the jury was about to retire, resumed his seat again, and composed himself to a little patient waiting. Many eyes were turned upon Markham Brereton at this juncture, but their anxiety was not much gratified. He preserved the same look of calm dignity, which had been, with very few exceptions of an occasional character, the characteristic of his bearing during the whole

of the long and, to him, most harassing trial. Occasionally he glanced at the jury box, but it was not with that kind of feverish impatience which a guilty man might be supposed to feel, but with the feeling of wishfulness that the who affair was over, which was so likely to beset one in his position, who for so many hours had been made the gaze of hundreds. May was there, too, with her fair face hidden in her hands, and weeping bitterly; Markham Brereton would have been glad to have been able to have shared some of those tears, but he could only see them and suffer, and his suffering from being pent up and silent far transcended hers. At length, there was a slight stir in the jury-box, and the members faced the court. Silence was loudly called for, and amid the breathless attention of all present, the clerk of the arraigns said, "Gentlemen of the jury, are you agreed upon your verdict in the case now before you?"

"We are," replied the foreman, faintly.

"Do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

The short paused that follow was dreadful. It seemed as though the foreman of the jury could not find voice to speak—as though, like Macbeth's amen, the word stuck in his throat. At length, by what was evidently an effort to him of no common character, he said, "Guilty!"

CHAPTER LXI.

THE INTERRUPTED SENTENCE.—A STRANGE SCENE.

Surely from what had already taken place, this verdict of guilty must have been expected by every one in the court, and yet, what a wonderful sensation it really produced; proving what has often been asserted by those who know human nature, and its habitudes, viz., that, however we may fancy we are prepared for any event, we never in reality are so. A strange kind of groan burst from the body of spectators. Their sympathies had from the first evidently been in favour of Markham Brereton. The evidence against him had not been respectable. The conduct of the judge had not been impartial.—No wonder, then, that most of them who had remained during the whole of the proceedings had become strongly impressed in favour of the prisoner. The countenance of the recorder when the groans came from the people, first grew red and then nearly of a purple colour.

"I cannot believe it to be possible," he said, "that the officers of this court are unable to lay hands upon some one who is the cause of this disturbance, or some of it."

This was a direct challenge to the officers to produce somebody, and no wonder that they became energetic accordingly. But upon those who knew the prisoner well, the effect of course of the verdict was far more perceptible than upon strangers. A kind of half-stifled cry had burst from the lips of May, that attracted some special observation to her, and then she clasped her face in her hands, and was as still as the very grave; she guessed what was going to happen. The effect of the verdict upon Markham, was that a look of indignation spread itself over his face, and he stood more erect than before, in the bar confronting those who had done him such injustice. By this time, however, the officers, who found, from the words of the recorder, that their reputation was at stake if they did not produce somebody, bustledabout, and laid hold, of course, of the quietest. person they could meet with, and hauled him forward as the author of the tumult that had made the recorder so indignant.

"Who is this?" said the judge.

"The man that made the row, my lord."

"Oh, very well. He stands committed to prison till the end of the sessions. Take him away"

"But what for?" said the man.

"Disturbing the court."

"I never opened my lips; it's all a mistake."

"He's sure to deny it, my lord," said the officer.

"Oh, of course—of course. Take him away—take him away."

"But I've done nothing," said the man, "and I won't go away. Why should I be sent to prison when I have done nothing? I won't go."

"Your present conduct," said the judge, "is quite a sufficient proof of your former guilt; you are evidently a violent man—a man of ill-regulated passions, and it is my duty, sitting here as I am, to preserve the court from the possibility of being again by you disturbed."

The officers, after a short struggle, for the man's blood was up at the idea of being committed to prison for nothing, succeeded in forcing him out of the court, and locking him securely up. Litttle they cared for the gross injustice they were committing, so long as they pleased the judge, and saved themselves from further reproof. There is nothing so dangerous as an officer wanting to show his proficiency. The tumult in the court was certainly quelled by this means, for those who had made the disturbance, took the fate of him who had not, as a warning to themselves, and were quiet accordingly. Some of the crowd that filled up every available corner of the place, made their way out, to announce the verdict to those who had been quite unable, either from too late an arrival or a want of physical orce to push their way into the place, so that the court was by no means so densely crowded as before, and those who remained had a little breathing room. As the prisoner was not removed from the bar, it was evident that the judge intended to sentence him at once. At that time those merciful and enlightened alterations of the criminal code, which are now introduced, had not taken place, and it was death alike to commit murder, or to take a purse by violence or otherwise. There was, in fact, at that time every temptation to the robber likewise to become a murderer, for if he knocked his victim upon the head, he certainly got rid of a material witness against him. His punishment too was the same precisely. How any legislator could overlook for a length of time so glaring a defect in the laws, it is difficult to conceive; in fact, it can only be accounted for by that indifference to domestic policy which has ever characterised the parliaments of this country, except in cases which interested them and their friends in a pecuniary or pleasurable point of view. That the due amount of punishment should be meted out to crime was essentially a poor man's question, and therefore not of any importance to such noble and worthy persons as had the legislation of the country in their hands. It was a Friday upon which Markham Brereton was tried, and if the opinion of the court had been that some punishment short of death might suit the justice of the case, he would have been removed from the bar as soon as the verdict was recorded, and brought up probably on the next day for judgment; but as he remained, it was quite clear to which fate the learned recorder assigned him. A death-like stillness now prevailed, so that when the crier rose to call for silence, his doing so was a mere matter of form. Nevertheless, in the loud, cold, official tone, he shouted—

"Silence! silence!"

"Prisoner at the bar," said the recorder, "have you anything to urge why sentence should not be pronounced against you in due course of law?"

"Much," said Markham Brereton.

"Very well, you are at liberty to speak; but it is to be hoped that you will not take up the time of the court needlesely."

"The court is so very indulgent to me," said Markham, "and so full of justice tempered by every description of dignity and mercy, that I ought indeed to be most chary of taking up its time, or putting it to the smallest inconvenience."

There was a tone of such bitter irony in these remarks, that even the judge winced a little, as he said—

"The court will hear you."

"I am well aware," began Markham Brereton, "that it would be much more

pleasant to some parties for me to submit quietly to my fate, without a murmur, but I do not intend to do so. Before God, I declare that the statements that have been sworn to-day against me are false. I solemnly declare my innocence of the crime imputed to me, and I brand my cousin, Thomas Brereton, with perjury."

"Prisoner, you——" commenced the judge.

"Silence!" cried Markham. "If it be my turn to speak, let me speak; I did not interrupt you."

"Bravo!" cried a loud voice.

"This is intolerable," said the judge, as he rose from his seat.

"We have him, my lord," said an officer. "Here he is."

"Murder! murder!" cried Tom Brereton, whom they had, in their haste to catch somebody, right or wrong, laid hold of by the throat, and were half throttling. "Murder! It was not me."

It was quite evident, even to the recorder, that Tom Brereton would be the last person in the court who would have called out "Bravo!" to what Markham Brereton had said, and he was set at liberty.

"I know who it was," said Tom.

"Who?" said the judge; "point him out."

"It was a big fellow, who was close by me, but I don't see him now. He certainly was there this minute."

"If you see him again, call the officer and give him into custody. These interruptions are evidently quite systematic. It is truly surprising how the friends of the unhappy man at the bar, can fancy such a course will be of any possible service to him."

"I am not unhappy," said Markham. "You, rather, are the unhappy judge upon the bench, than I the unhappy man at the bar, for you are, knowingly or unknowingly, committing a great injustice, while I am only suffering one."

"Prisoner, this is irrelevant."

"It is."

"Proceed with what you have to say, then, why sentence of death according to the law should not be passed against you."

"All that I have to say is summed up in the fact, that I am innocent of the crime alleged against me."

"You have finished?"

"Not quite, my lord."

"Go on, then."

"Nay, why is this great hurry and anxiety shown to pronounce sentence of death against a fellow creature? The mere suspicion, ever so faint, that you may be wrong, ought to make you pause. What I have to say should at least be listened to with common patience."

"The court has no desire to hurry you."

"Well, I thank the gentlemen who have advocated my cause, for the exertions they have made, that the truth should be apparent. To the extent of their knowledge, they have done all that in them lay for me; and very properly, they have not stated things which, although truths, they could not for want of the necessary witnesses make into evidence. I, however, may state those things. What has been laid before the court, is all sufficiently true up to the point when the carriage containing my mother, and my sister, and Miss Russel, started from Guilford. I being on horseback, and Tom Brereton having my place in the vehicle, after, with all the nervousness of excessive fear, refusing the offer of a horse, I did then, certainly, upon nearing Ealing Common, ride on in advance of the coach, and I was urged by considerations to do so. The first was to escape from the society of such a man as Tom Brereton into the better companionship of my own thoughts; and the second was to see if the road was clear, as I had heard much of the depredations of highwaymen, and my mother was in but a poor state of health. I had not ridden far before I was stopped by a mounted man. It was not likely that I should allow myself to be insulted or

robbed with impunity, by one man, and the consequence was a contest, in which I received a hurt that I am not quite the better of now. I was overcome, and then told the highwayman that a carriage with ladies was approaching, and begged him to be considerate. I had, of course, no reliance whatever upon Tom Brereton affording any protection to the ladies he was with. After this I was conducted to a hut near at hand, where I remained some time, until I recovered sufficiently to take the road again. That the same highwayman who stopped me, likewise stopped the carriage, and robbed Tom Brereton, I can well believe, and that he was Claude Duval, you have heard already from the lips of his sister. But to some here who are not in the secrets of my family, it may indeed seem most strange that Tom Brereton should rather try to fix guilt upon me than upon Claude Duval.—The secret is this. He thinks that I know where my sister Cicely is, and if driven to extremity, she will, to save my life, consent to marry him, in which case he would came forward and represent to the Secretary of State that he had been mistaken as to the identity of the robber on Ealing Common, and be it whom it might, it was not me. In this he will be disappointed, for if injustice and wrong take their course, I shall surely die."

Markham ceased speaking.

"Have you said all that you wish to say?" said the recorder.

"All that I care to say now," replied Markham.

"Then it——?'

"A witness! a witness!" cried a loud voice from emong the dense crowd in the centre of the court.

CHAPTER LXII.

AN INTERRUPTION.—CLAUDE'S DANGER.

So completely was everybody taken by surprise at this sudden and most extraordinary interruption, that the speaker, whoever he was, had for some moments everything his own way. The judge first revived from the surprise of the sudden interruption, when it was thought all interruption was past.

"Seize that man!" he cried.

As he spoke he pointed to a tall personage in the crowd, and the officers made a rush forward, but the man by no means showed any disposition to avoid them. On the contrary, he pressed forward, and finally confronted the judge, saying as he did so—"A witness! a witness!"

It was Claude himself.

"No, no, no!" cried May Duval, for she knew her brother, despite the disguise he was in, and at that moment her fears got the better of all other feelings—she fancied that she almost saw his sacrifice.

"Silence," cried the usher.

"Oh, no, no!"

"Remove that person," said the judge.

"I am still," said May. "Oh, let me remain—I am still now. I shall not move or speak now. It is over."

Again she resumed the attitude which the voice of Claude had broken, and hiding her face in her hands, she wept silently. Could there be a more painful situation than poor May's? Loving as she did Markham Brereton, for alas! she did love him, she saw no other mode of saving him from death, than by the sacrifice of her brother, who, we all know, was, despite all his faults, so very dear to her heart. All eyes were now, naturally enough, fixed upon Claude Duval, although only three persons in all that crowded court knew him. One of that three was May. The other, Markham Brereton, and he rather guessed than at sight recognised Claude, and the third was Sixteen-string Jack. The officers all tried, a-

officers do upon occasions, to look cunning, but they were all at fault, and really knew nothing of the bold man who stood close to the witness-box.

"What do you want?" said the judge.

"I have testimony to give, in favour of the prisoner at the bar."

"Then you are too late."

"Too late?"

"Yes."

"Can it be too late to be just?"

"No; but there are certain forms and modes of transacting the business of courts of justice, which cannot be tampered with. If you have anything to state, it must be put into the form of an affidavit, and handed to me to-morrow."

"That will not do."

"It must. Stand aside—it is the only form in which evidence can now be received in favour of the prisoner; of course there is no need of any of a contrary tendency now. The probability of what you shall swear being true or not, will be a matter for consideration, always provided it be of sufficient importance to affect the sentence of the prisoner."

"It is of the first importance."

"Very well. Stand aside, or I shall commit you."

"This is making justice a form," said Claude, "and man's life a matter of rules of court. My Lord Judge, I defy you to pass sentence of death, or of any punishment whatever, upon Markham Brereton. I was present when this robbery was committed upon Ealing Common."

"I think, my lord," said the Attorney General, rising, "there is a precedent in a criminal case, for hearing a new witness after the verdict. It has been held by Lord Stowe, that when life or liberty is concerned, a jury is always sitting, and the ears of a judge always open, while a prisoner remains in his place, at the bar of the court."

"What case constitutes such a precedent?" said the recorder.

"Dean's trial for murder, my lord; reported in the sheriff's reports for the last year. An alibi was clearly proved after the verdict."

"I recollect the case, Mr. Attorney General," said the judge. "The court is not exactly sure that it would be safe to make Dean's case a precedent; but still the court must not say it is not."

"Then your lordship will hear the witness?"

"No, no," said Markham Brereton. "Let the witness depart in peace."

He saw May's agony.

"Hush!" said Claude Duval, "right is right. Hush, Markham Brereton, I pray you; let me take my own course."

"The court will detain this new witness," said the counsel for the prosecution, "I apprehend, whether he be heard or not?"

"I think," said the judge, "that the court, in its discretion, will feel bound to do so."

"You hear," said Claude. "It is done now."

As he spoke, he ascended the two steps that led to the witness-box, and then, and not until then, the whole court could see him plainly; no one, however, but those whom we have already mentioned, recognised him or had the least suspicion that they were looking upon so celebrated a character as Claude Duval, the notorious highwayman.

"Swear him," said the recorder.

"There is no need," said Claude. "The character of the testimony I come to give, will carry with it amply sufficient its own verification; not all the oaths in the world could make its truth more apparent, or for one instant shall it. I tell the court that I was present at the robbery."

"You saw it committed?" said the Attorney General; "what objection can you have to be sworn?"



"It is scarcely an objection. After I am sworn in, you will not ask for my evidence. Let me say at once that I was present at the robbery as a principal."

"A principal?"

"Yes."

"Then you did it—and are—"

"Claude Duval!"

Certainly if a bombshell had suddenly come into the court it would not have created a greater sensation, although it might have made one of a different

description, than did the sudden and unexpected declaration of a name that certainly nobody expected. Even the judge gave a slight start. Tom Brereton made an effort to leave the court.

"Close the doors," cried the judge. "Let no one depart. Officers, is there no one among you who can depose to the identity of this person with Claude Duval the highwayman, or not?"

The officers crowded forward with looks of intense chagrin. Here was the very man they had been so anxious to lay hold of, and upon whose capture three hundred pounds had depended, fairly by his own act in the clutches of the authorities, and nobody the gainer.

"They don't know me," said Claude; "but there is one here who can swear to me. May?"

"Claude!—Claude!"

"Are you satisfied, my lord, that I am the veritable Claude Duval? If not, I have another proof."

"What is it?"

Claude glanced round him, and with a slight curl of his lip, he replied in a loud defiant tone—

"Who but Claude Duval would do this act? What other knight of the road, think ye, would place his own neck in a noose for the purpose of pushing out another man's? Is it like, or is it not like what you have heard of Claude Duval, who never robbed a poor man in his life, but who has relieved the necessities of many and many a one?"

"There is no objection to swear this man?" said the attorney-general.

"No," said the recorder. "Of course he is in custody; but a prisoner awaiting trial is a competent witness upon oath. Of course his testimony must be taken with all its qualifications."

"My lord, a man may be believed when he lays down his life as the pledge of his sincerity."

A general clapping of hands now ensued in court, and it was actually renewed three times, despite the frowns of the recorder, and the bewildered manner in which the officers tried to take everybody into custody; while the usher, who never had before been witness to such an exhibition, was unable to call for silence in a higher tone than a whisper.

"If such a truly disgraceful practice as this be repeated," said the judge, "I shall retire from the court, and measures shall be taken for imprisoning every one who has taken part in such unmanly disturbances."

"You have one man already in custody," said Claude, "for my act. It was I who made the exclamation; but the officer found that it was necessary to take some one."

"Is there anything else," said the counsel for the prosecution, "that this gentleman will take upon himself? Perhaps he will direct the authorities to make a general gaol delivery, fathering himself with the criminality of the country?"

"I would rather father any amount of bold criminality," said Claude, "than the petty malice of a hired partisan, who for his fee would send an innocent man to the gallows, or throw back upon society the most blood-stained wretch ever beheld."

"Pho!—pho!"

"You may affect to sneer at me, but you cannot comprehend the deep contempt I feel for you."

The advocate tried to smile, as though he had the greatest possible contempt for what Claude had said; but the smile was only a sickly one, as it was evident to all that the truth of the reproof had made its sting deep indeed.

"My learned friend," said the junior counsel, for the defence, "has caught a very magnificent Tartar, I think."

Even the recorder could hardly keep his countenance at this remark, and everybody else laughed outright, with the exception of the "learned friend," who could

not see the joke at all, in those whose feelings were too much interested in Claude's fate, to jest even with Momus himself. An oath was now duly administered to Claude Duval, and it certainly was what, in the chapter of strange accidents, no one would have expected to find such a personage, with such a price upon his head, in the court of the Old Bailey, giving his testimony, and that testimony, too, such as would have the effect of consigning himself on the instant to a dungeon.

"To what do you depose?" said the Attorney General.

"I robbed the prosecutor, Tom Brereton, of his pocket-book on Ealing Common on the night in question."

"Was the prisoner at the bar present?"

"No."

"Was he in any shape, way, or manner, cognisant of the robbery?"

"Certainly not; he and I were utter strangers."

"Well, my lord," said the Attorney General, "I may say that it is an established custom of all courts to protect witnesses in giving evidence. I claim, therefore, safe conduct for this witness."

"Why, Mr. Attorney, you don't mean," said the recorder, "to ask the court to let this most notorious and much sought for criminal go?"

"I think he is entitled to a safe conduct."

"Monstrous! I will, if there be any such sort of custom, break in upon it; officers, take that man into custody, and hold him safely. Now-a-days, courts of justice must not be sanctuaries for great offenders. Remove the prisoner at the bar."

"I claim my liberty," said Markham.

CHAPTER LXIII.

CLAUDE'S COMMITTAL.—THE LONELY CELL.

WHILE the Attorney General had made this certainly rather impudent appeal for the liberation of Claude Duval, there was a peculiar expression upon his countenance, which induced those who knew him well to think that after all he only did it to bother the recorder. At all events, he could not have expected, whatever were his motives for making the application, that it could for a moment be successful. It had done some mischief, however. It lit up a momentary hope in the breast of May—which the words of the judge as suddenly crushed again—leaving her, if possible, more desolate than she had previously been, and Heaven knows that was needless. Alas! poor May! The appeal, however, which Markham Brereton had just made to the court was far more reasonable.

"With respect to the application of the prisoner at the bar for a release," said the judge, "an application which, I presume, he founds upon the testimony of this person calling himself Claude Duval, it is not in the power of the court to grant it."

"Upon what pretence am I now detained?"

"You have been found guilty."

"Oh, my lord," cried one of the jury, "we have altered our minds now."

"That cannot be helped now, gentlemen. You have given your verdict, and it is recorded. All these subsequent proceedings it will be my duty to place before the Secretary of State, and, at the discretion of that official personage, a pardon or not will issue for the prisoner."

"What am I to do, my lord, with Claude Duval?" said an officer.

"Have you no warran'—"

"No, my lord."

"Well, somebody, I believe, has; and if you can produce no warrant, you must take him before a magistrate."

"But, my lord, now that we have him as it were under the roof of Newgate, would it not be better to keep him?"

"Certainly. I dare say you will find no difficulty in getting a magistrate to come to Newgate and legally commit him. Indeed, I fancy I have that authority *ex-officio* myself, but the matter had better go through the regular course."

"It will be my duty," said the Attorney General, "to prefer an indictment against Thomas, commonly called Tom Brereton, for wilful and deliberate perjury."

"Oh, good God, no!" said Tom. "What do you mean? I'll swear anything you like if you will only let me go. It was all a mistake, it was. Governor—Governor, where are you? you know you persuaded me to stick to it."

"I?" said the Governor of Newgate.

"Yes, you rogue, you know you did."

"Why, you incomprehensible vagabond!"

"You wretch!"

"You thief!"

"This is really quite edifying," said the Attorney General. "Mr. Governor, your position in this affair will need some clearing up."

"Not at all," said the Governor.

"Oh, very well."

"I don't know anything about it. I'll indict anybody who says a word against me for conspiracy. I know I have enemies, and it seems they are hard at work, but let them beware. I say, let them beware!"

"Good bye—good bye," said Tom. "It's a fine evening. Good bye, gentlemen. I forgive you, sir, about the joke of—indicting me. Ha! ha! of course it was only a joke, and it's no matter now. All's right. Upon my life a good joke. Good-bye!"

"The Lord Mayor will perhaps take a deposition which shall justify him in committing Thomas Brereton," said the Attorney General.

"If you think I can, Mr. Attorney General," said the Lord Mayor, "I shall have great pleasure."

"Pleasure!" said Tom. "What do you mean by that? Come, come, Mr. Lord Mayor, don't be a fool. I went to your house on the ninth of November, and now you talk of having the pleasure of committing me; is that gratitude? The Mayor's gratitude! What do you mean? Good-night!"

The Lord Mayor pretended to blow his nose to smother a laugh. After a few minutes, Tom Brereton was fully committed for perjury. He roared for mercy, and was taken away blubbering like a schoolboy.

May started forward and clasped her hands round Claude as she said—

"You will not fall—you will not be sacrificed?"

"Farewell," said Claude. "Bless you, May!"

"I did not wish this," said Brereton.

"No, Markham," cried May, "I know you did not. I know well you did not."

"Save Claude Duval," cried a voice in the court. "There's enough of us to do that easily enough. Save him for his gallant conduct in coming forward to sacrifice himself, rather than that an innocent man should suffer."

The voice was Sixteen-string Jack's. A partial rush was made by some few persons acting upon the sudden and thrilling impulse given to them by these words, but half a dozen officers immediately precipitated themselves upon Claude Duval, who himself cried in a loud voice—

"Forbear! The attempt is madness! Forbear, my friends—forbear! it is a vain effort, my friends! quite vain!"

Claude knew well that the mere crowd in the court was not to be depended upon, and he likewise knew that his life must be lost in the affair, for it would be

the duty of the officers to resist to death. Whether they would have done so or not remained to be seen. At all events, Claude gave them credit for so much, and spared them the probable disastrous consequences of a collision; and after all Sixteen-string Jack, although on the impulse of the moment he had made such an attempt to rescue Claude, could not help feeling how very helpless it was. The judge had now left the court, which was ordered to be closed, and as the best way of doing that, the officials began to extinguish the lights rapidly. This soon had the desired effect, and in the course of the next quarter of an hour the court of the Old Bailey was left to silence and to darkness. Claude Duval was heavily ironed and led through a number of intricate and winding passages to a cell, which was presumed to be of such strength as to defy all the attempts that even he, with all his courage and with all his ingenuity, could make to escape from its confines. Claude said not one word in answer to the many remarks that were made to him, and very many they were, for there was not a petty turnkey in Newgate who did not hasten to have a look at the famous highwayman, and have his say upon the occasion of so important a capture, as it would be called. Claude had, as it were, walked into prison, so they had nothing to congratulate themselves upon in this acquisition, for it is probable he would for a considerable time longer have escaped the clutches of Newgate had he not, from the chivalrous feelings that actuated him, chosen to give himself up. It was both a foolish and ungenerous thing, therefore, for the authorities to rub their hands as though they had really achieved something. The cell which was assigned him was indeed a gloomy one, and seldom used, except to place the very worst of malefactors in when they were too refractory for any ordinary control. But from that very circumstance Claude Duval gathered hope.

"This cell," he said to himself, is out of the usual track of the turnkeys. It is not now so well watched as any other, so that I am left, at all events, to myself to carry on what operations I may please."

"Now," said the governor, as the door was closed and barred, and doubly locked and bolted upon Claude Duval, "I think we have this bird in about as secure a cage as old Newgate can very well accommodate any one with."

Truly there is nothing so dangerous as excessive vanity. The governor did not yet know the man he had to deal with.

"Wait a bit," said Claude, as he flung himself upon the miserable stump bedstead that was in the cell, "wait a bit—I may still give you something more to talk about yet, Mr. Governor."

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE ARREST OF TOM BRERETON.—THE TABLES TURNED.

How deserted poor May Duval felt! Perhaps of all persons intimately connected with the various personages and events of our story, she felt most acutely the painful sense of loneliness, which is worse than any other species of grief. If Markham had been quite at liberty at once, instead of having to wait for a tedious form of law to pardon him for the offence he had never committed, no doubt he would have taken upon himself the task of consoling her in her sufferings. But alas! both the persons in whose happiness and existence all the best feelings of affection were built up, were now within those dreary walls of the much-dreaded Newgate. Cicely, from the place of security in which Claude had placed her, knew literally nothing of what was going on, she only thought that Claude was necessarily absent on business connected with her brother's position; but although he had told her over and over again that he would save Markham Brereton, he had not told her it was to be at the price of his own life. She had not questioned him closely as to the means he had of carrying out such a promise; but with that

blind confidence which all persons ought to have in the resources of those whom they love, she had stifled her fears into a belief that what Claude really chose to do he would find some safe and easy enough mode of speedily accomplishing. His last words had been to her,—

"Wait, Cicely, and inquire nothing, believe nothing until you hear from me."

"And will that be soon, Claude?" she asked him.

"As soon," he replied, "as it is possible, consistent with the safety of both Markham and myself to do so."

This had satisfied Cicely, and she waited anxiously, it is true, but without the horror of knowing or even suspecting Claude's real situation. That it was his hope to alter that situation before the truth of its reality came upon the mind of Cicely, we can well enough imagine. It will not be from the lack of energy, or courage, or that species of perseverance which overcomes apparently insurmountable difficulties, if he succeed not.

It must not be supposed that Claude had resigned himself to a dungeon, without making some previous arrangements, the carrying out of which might be beneficial to him in his imprisonment. For example, he had arranged with Sixteen-string Jack a mode of conversation from without, which it was next to impossible the authorities of Newgate could discern, or even dream of. It was this. Certain articles were always permitted, after the most careful examination, to pass to prisoners, but no letters were permitted to be sent, which did not first undergo a careful inspection from the authorities, and Sixteen-string Jack had no wish to send, and Claude Duval had no wish to receive such love-courting epistles as are thought admissible to Newgate; they adopted the plan we speak of. It was agreed that when any inconsiderable or allowable article was sent into the prison for Claude's use, it should be carelessly wrapped in an old torn piece of newspaper. Upon such piece of newspaper there would sure to be letters enough under which Jack could put a small dot to compose the number of words which he wished to make up to Claude's understanding. By this means they hoped to keep up something like a correspondence, for Claude could return the paper with soiled linen or anything that he was allowed to send out of the prison in the same way. He was allowed pens and ink, with the hope that some fit of remorse would seize him in consequence of his lonely and mind-depressing situation, during which he would write some confession, implicating himself and others. They did not know much of Claude Duval, though, when they ventured to calculate upon such a state of things, and upon such ordinary and commonplace results in his case. Still it was necessary he should appear to make some use of the writing materials, and he did, by writing some of the most extraordinary twaddle that could be imagined, and which quite confused the governor, the chaplain, and the sheriffs, to each of whom it was duly submitted. As for Markham Brereton, although assured now of his own safety and enfranchisement from prison, yet he was, if possible, in a more distressed state of mind than before, and yet he could not tell himself why he should be so. Claude Duval had done the robbery, and Claude Duval certainly ought, if anybody suffered from it, to be the person. Moreover, to have allowed him, Markham Brereton, to be executed innocently, would surely have been the height of baseness. But yet, although Claude would have been beneath contempt to have not come forward, his doing so was a chivalric act, and it was a romantic appreciation of its chivalry which made Markham unhappy. He became extremely anxious for Claude's safety.

"How shall I save him?" he kept repeating to himself. "What means can I possibly adopt to save him?"

The oftener he asked himself the question the more impossible did it seem for him to find a satisfactory reply, and he could not help coming to the painful conclusion, that from the moment Claude Duval had answered his name in the court of the Old Bailey, his fate was fixed. Of course he, Markham Brereton, was in complete ignorance of Claude's external resources, nor could he be supposed to have a very clear notion of the personal powers of the highwayman. It seemed so

hopeless a thing to escape from Newgate, that he, Markham, had not made the smallest attempt so to do; but he little knew that it was one of Claude Duval's most familiar thoughts, that he should some day be caught, and them imprisoned, and that he would then endeavour to add his name to the short muster-roll of those who, with the most extraordinary perseverance and courage, had managed to make their way from those gloomy and spirit-depressing walls. There was now a third person well known to the reader in Newgate, with whom we certainly cannot have any amount of sympathy. That person is the despicable Tom Brereton—the trickster, the shuffler, the perjurer, the false witness, the everything that can be contemptible and beyond all measure mean. If we did not feel so much contempt for Tom Brereton, we must feel some amount of pity. Let us look at him. Tom Brereton was put into a room where there were a number of untried prisoners; but it was not the policy of the governor to keep him where he could find any company. Accordingly, calling one of the turnkeys, the governor said to him quite confidentially—"Davis, I want Thomas Brereton in solitary confinement. You understand me. He must be alone."

"All right, sir. He'll be refractory soon," said the turnkey, with a grin, for if the authorities chose that any prisoner should be refractory, why refractory to all intents and purposes he was very soon declared.

"That will do," said the governor.

In a little time after this, the turnkey entered the ward where Tom was, and going up to him, he said—"What you will, will you?"

"Will what?" said Tom. "Oh, dear me, I am doing nothing."

"Gammon."

"What, sir?"

"Oh, don't try to gammon me. I saw you making ready to give me a hit in the eye, so away you comes to a refractory cell."

With this Tom was violently seized, and dragged off, in spite of his loud remonstrances of how peaceably inclined he really was. That some dreadful fate awaited him, Tom Brereton fully believed, and he made the prison echo again with his shouts, but in such a place remonstrance, whether loud or low, produced but little effect, and Tom soon found himself the inmate of one of a range of cells, tolerably well out of ear-shot of the rest of the prisoners of Newgate.

"There," said the jailer, "you may roar as loud as you like. There's nobody but the rats and the beetles to hear you."

"Murder!—murder!"

"Oh, it's all very fine. Who the deuce do you suppose would take the trouble to murder you?"

"Help!—help!"

"Oh, very good, You won't be quiet? Bang goes the door, then."

The door of the cell was closed and bolted upon him, and Tom was left to two things he never liked, namely, darkness and solitude. What his reflections were likely to be, we may in some measure judge from what we know of his general character. He now cried in a perfect paroxysm of fear for almost an hour, and then he fancied he heard a footstep approaching down the narrow passage from which his cell, in connection with many others, opened. He listened attentively, and when he at length heard the footstep pause at the door of the miserable place in which he was, and the bolts being removed, a hope that, after all, he should be delivered from confinement sprang up in his breast, and he cried out—"I'm here—I'm here!"

The door swung open, and the governor made his appearance.

"Oh, it's you," said Tom.

"Yes," said the governor, as he carefully closed the door behind him, and set down the light he carried upon the floor—"yes, it is I."

There was something about the governor's manner that gave Tom some qualms of fear, and then there was something likewise about the look of his face that was far from pleasant or encouraging to him, Tom Brereton.

The position of the light, too, so low down as it was, cast some very strange

shadows upon the governor's countenance, and made him look rather diabolical, as with folded arms he stood now glaring at Tom Brereton as though he expected him first to begin a dialogue, which could not be expected to be very delightful to either of them. This Tom was in no hurry to do, but yet he was one of those weak-resolved personages who cannot endure silence for long, and now that he saw, or thought he saw, that the governor was determined not to say anything first, he spoke—

"So, you have come to see me, have you?" he said.

"Yes, idiot," said the governor.

"Well, that's polite, at any rate, old fellow."

A scowl stopped the familiar jocosity with which Tom would have been glad to carry on the conversation.

"I don't come here for folly and ribaldry," said the governor.

"Oh!"

"No; it is business with me. I am in danger."

"Well, so am I," said Tom.

"What is your danger to me, you worse than idiot; you rogue in heart, and absolute fool in capacity."

"Upon my life," said Tom, "you must have been reading some distionary, and found out all the abuse in it. What compliments you are full of, to be sure, to night!"

"Have peace, I say."

"Very well."

"You have kindly implicated me in your transactions, and, of course, to save yourself even from the smallest inconvenience, you will turn evidence against me and blow the whole affair. You need not deny it, as, of course, you are about to do, for I know you too well."

"Oh, dear," said Tom. "You very much deceive yourself. But what's to hinder you letting me go, and then, you know, there's no danger."

Tom thought now that he had got hold of quite a bright idea, and that if he threatened the governor with disclosures that would thoroughly implicate him if he did not connive at his escape, he (the governor) would feel himself compelled, from considerations of personal safety, to let him free.

"You know," he said, "we both rowed in the same boat, and it is not at all natural that I should like to suffer alone when you were to have had part of the profit if we had succeeded, you know; but if you let me go, of course then I could only come to harm by saying anything about you."

"That is your calculation, is it?"

"Eh?"

"I say, that is your calculation. Well, perhaps, under some circumstances, it might have succeeded; but it is too late."

"Too late? How?"

"As no one will believe for one moment that you are the sort of man to break out of Newgate, and I dare not place any facilities in your way, simply because you have already committed me and yourself too, by mentioning me. If I were to let you free now, it would be to bring a certainty upon my head instead of a mere suspicion."

Tom gave a groan.

"And, as I say," continued the governor, "it is too late."

"Oh dear—oh dear!"

"Ay, you have made a fool of yourself indeed, and you may well say—'Oh dear.' You have damned me with regard to this whole transaction. You never for one moment let me know the sort of people with whom we had to deal. You never let me know that they were of that obstinate character that all ordinary motives and impulses would fall dead upon them."

"Dear me!"

"And you never let me know that, in the event of any little miscarriage of



the affair you were going to plunge about, accusing anybody for the mere purpose of securing yourself."

"Really, you are very severe," said Tom.

"Not more so than the occasion warrants, I am quite sure, Thomas Brereton."

"You think not?"

"Bah! this is the very worst of trifling. What do you mean to do? that is the question. If you intend to turn evidence against me, and implicate me, I must look to my own safety by some means, and whether or not those means will

be pleasant to you, depends upon the turn my thoughts may chance to take in the matter."

Tom had sense enough to feel that whatever he meant to do, it would be at the present juncture highly dangerous to induce any belief in the mind of the governor that he meditated any danger towards him, so he said—

"Well, as you put it in that fair light, I will tell you really what I mean to do, now. I shall hold out like a brick."

"You will?"

"Certainly, I will. I am very sorry for the few words I said in the court, but the fact is, I was so taken by surprise, I didn't know very well what I was about; but they won't get any more out of me, for I dare say if I were to tell everything, and admit everything, they would just serve me out all the same."

"They would, indeed."

"Very well, then, you and the lawyer may make your minds easy, for I ain't going to say a word about either of you."

"Only keep to that resolution, and you will find me your friend, Tom Brereton; break it, and your danger will be great."

"Stop, stop, I say. Are you going?"

"I must."

"But—but, am I to stay here in this dark place?"

"Only for a little time. You may depend, that as you keep faith with me, I will keep faith with you, Tom Brereton; the result will soon be sufficiently apparent to you."

The governor then rather abruptly left the cell, leaving Tom in a state of anxious doubt as to whether he had been clever or not.

CHAPTER LXV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MAKES PREPARATIONS FOR CLAUDE'S BENEFIT.

Jack was not unmindful of what had been agreed upon between him and Claude Duval previous to the latter being placed in the gloomy walls of Newgate. And in addition to the efforts without, which Sixteen-string Jack was to make to supply Claude with the means of making some effort for freedom, he, Jack, had some desperate schemes of his own which he kept secret from Claude. But Sixteen-string Jack reasoned in a different way altogether. "I hold my life cheap," he said, "if I employ it in Claude's service, and nothing shall be too desperate for me to attempt for his release." Acting upon this feeling, he commenced some proceedings, in the course of which we will follow him. It has been truly said, that one half of London have no idea of how the other half lives, and one would need to make it a life-long study to arrive at the information in all its minute particulars. Nevertheless, if there be any class which more readily than any other arrive at such a knowledge of the hidden modes of existence in London, it evidently is that class which has thrown off the restraints of law, and of which Sixteen-string Jack was one. The principal difficulty he had in his movements, however, consisted in the fact of his presumed death. So impressed was what is called the London family, that is, the London thieves, with the idea that he was no more, that even his personal appearance among them, undisguised, would only have been looked upon by many as a very remarkable likeness. Indeed, we can very easily imagine that we or our readers would be somewhat chary of our belief in the appearance of a man whom we had seen recently executed at Tyburn Gate. This, then, was Jack's difficulty. If he went about among those from whom, as a "family man," he wanted assistance, and convinced them that he was the veritable Sixteen-string Jack, he ran the risk of being informed against by some

scoundrel, and of falling into the clutches of the law again, before he could complete what he was about for the service of Claude Duval. Then, again, if he intruded himself as a stranger, he could hardly expect to be treated with confidence by those who would naturally be suspicious of one concerning whom they had no knowledge. These were difficulties; but Claude's position was such that he, Jack, was not to be deterred by difficulties from serving him, or at least making the attempt to do so. One thing he wanted, which he knew was to be had in London for money, and that was an accurate plan of Newgate. Careful as the authorities had always been that the interior of that celebrated prison should remain a mystery except in its most general details, there can be no doubt but that the London thieves had as accurate a plan of every cell and every passage as the city architect himself could have taken with all his means and appliances for the task. The dimensions of the plan might be a little defective proportionally, but everything was there, and that was the main point. That this plan was to be had somewhere, Sixteen-string Jack knew well, but where he did not exactly know; and he had another difficulty, which lay in the fact of being rather short of funds, for although he had enough money for any of the ordinary contingencies of living, he certainly had not enough for such purposes as he now required it. Under these circumstances, Jack asked himself where was the most likely place to find any cash that would be sufficient for his purpose. Now, from many long conversations which Jack had had with Claude Duval, he had imbibed many of the latter's notions, one of which was, that the crime of robbing a robber was certainly by no mean so great in a social point of of view, as robbing an honest and industrious man. Among robbers, and the worst of robbers, too, Claude very properly classed most public functionaries, secretaries of charitable societies, persons connected with the administration of public monies, and canting, hypocritical scrapers together of subscriptions of all sorts, kinds, and degrees. Ministers of state, parsons and lawyers, he likewise comprehended in his list of persons who, from their frequent dishonesty and cupidity, were all fair game for the highwayman or the housebreaker. "It is among such, Jack," he used to say, "that you may commit what amount of depredation you can, and although the law will be exercised more strongly against you than if you robbed a poor man of his last shilling, yet you will find, in an absolute case of conscience, much compensation for the additional risk that you run." These lessons had not been thrown away upon Sixteen-string Jack. He was sitting in the little dark parlour of rather an obscure public-house, thinking over his position, when his eye happened to rest upon a paragraph in a newspaper that was lying upon the table before him. It ran thus—

"Yesterday, His Grace the Lord Bishop of London, presented to the Rev. and Hon. George Augustus Fitzflunkie, the living of Upton Lees, estimated as worth 1,400*l.* per annum. The Rev. George Augustus Fitzflunkie is already Rector of Andoy, Incumbent of St. Margaret's, Rector of Hegliton, Vicar of Bolton-cum-Lees, &c.&c. We understand that the rev. gentleman has just returned from Naples, where he spends the greater part of his time, no doubt in prayer for the poor curates who perform his duties at home for an average of 60*l.* per annum each, whilst his revenue amounts in the whole to the sum of 8,448*l.* per annum."

"What a rogue!" said Sixteen-string Jack.

Yes, Sixteen-string Jack, the highwayman, the housebreaker, the liver upon other men's substance, the thief who called "Stand!" upon the king's highway, blessed his stars that he was not such a rogue as the bloated church pluralist; and he was right! He was not such a rogue.

"I will rob that man," said Jack, "if it can be done, as sure as I am alive; he is one of the greatest scoundrels, even among parsons, that I have heard of for many a long day."

There were some serious difficulties in the way. First of all, Jack had to find out were the reverend gentleman was, and he had to concoct a plot by which, at the least amount of personal risk, he should be made to surrender some of his ill-gotten money, but difficulty only sharpens invention, and Jack first of all set out to find where the reverend sinner resided in London. This was not a difficult task

by any means, and indeed Jack saw the reverend gentleman actually come out of his hotel, and on foot, too, condescending to walk the streets like any common man, which certainly ought to have been thought something, and considering that he was an humble and meek follower of the disciples, who were such luxurious personages. Jack took such accurate notice of him that he felt certain now that, let him see him when and where he might, he could not be mistaken in him. Jack followed him with some curiosity, and he was not long in discovering why the reverend gentleman chose to walk instead of to make use of one of his luxurious carriages. He followed every young lady he chanced to see who had a pretty face and a neat ancle; of course, his object was to beg of them to say their prayers regularly, and attend scrupulously to their religious duties. Such a very reverend personage, who was thought worthy of so many livings, could have no other object in view. This was enough for Sixteen-string Jack, and he left the reverend gentleman to his onerous duties, while he made his arrangements accordingly. It was in the dusk of the evening that Sixteen-string Jack knocked at the door of a private house in the vicinity of Bloomsbury Square. It was a very peculiar sort of knock, and in a few minutes it was opened by a black man, who said, "One—two—three."

"No," said Sixteen-string Jack, "twenty-four."

"From the country?" said the black.

"Yes, Mungo."

"Me no Mungo. Me Lillywhite."

"That will do. Is your master within?"

"Yes, him be."

Jack followed the black into the house, which was rather elegantly furnished, and was shown into an apartment on the ground floor, which had the appearance of an office for the regular transaction of business. After waiting for some time, a pale, small, thin man made his appearance, and with an easy address, said,

"Have you a name to state?"

"Yes, Claude Duval told me to say I knew him as forty, and that if you thought him at all worth anything, I ought to be worth something."

"Very good."

"You are satisfied?"

"Quite. Sit down. I suppose you come with a proposition?"

"I do."

"Very well. Be so good as to state it as precisely as you can."

Sixteen-string Jack made a speech of some ten minutes' duration to the little pale, thin man, but as the object of it will be best seen during the course of what occurred in the next few hours, we need not detail it. Suffice it to say that at its conclusion the man of the house rose, and took several turns to and fro in the room, as if considering, and then he said—

"It might be tried. It is novel."

"I thought so."

"Oh, yes. A similar kind of thing has been done, but not in that way. Yes, half of 500*l.*, you say, will be enough for your purpose?"

"It will, and I make no secret to you of what that purpose is."

"What?"

"It is to attempt the rescue of Claude Duval."

"Indeed?"

"We are old companions and dear friends."

"Well, you can easily suppose that I wish you all the success in the world. Who you are I don't know. I see you are disguised, or, perhaps, I might know you, but I am quite satisfied that I am in safe hands."

"You are, indeed, and perhaps soon, when we are a little better acquainted, I shall let you into the secret of who I am. There is one question I want answered and which, probably, you are the very man to answer."

"What is it?"

"Where can I get a plan of Newgate?"

"Here?"

"Indeed! And the terms?"

"If this affair that I have consented to enter upon should succeed, you shall not want either a plan of Newgate, or as much efficient assistance for Claude Duval as will go far towards ensuring success in attempting his rescue."

"I am glad of that."

Shortly after this, Sixteen-string Jack, who, it will be noted, had evidently recovered much of the daring, courageous charac'er which, for a time, had been under a cloud of depression, left the mysterious house. He managed upon that evening to send in the following words to Claude Duval, marked upon a piece of newspaper—"Be tranquil. All is going on well. Do nothing rashly, Claude; and, in fact, do nothing at all until you hear again from me."

Claude returned the paper with some soiled linen, and had marked as follows in answer to Jack—"Do you do nothing rashly, Jack; I mean to give myself twenty-four hours' thought before attempting anything. I think May ought to be taken to Cicely, who you know is my wife. They will no doubt be good friends, and console each other. Cicely has money."

Claude had put Jack fully in possession of where Cicely was, and of all the circumstances connected with his marriage to her, and as this companionship of May Duval and Cicely was a thing that he, Jack, had before advised, he set about with considerable alacrity the measures necessary to bring it about as soon as possible.

CHAPTER LXVI.

CICELY AND MAY COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

It would have been quite impossible for Claude Duval to have thought of anything which could have given more exquisite and general satisfaction to both his sister and Cicely, than this proposition of companionship between them. Their old intimacy, and a certain congeniality of tastes, feelings, and dispositions, had always made them the best of friends. No wonder, therefore, that the circumstances which had for a time parted them had been renewed with the greatest gratification by both. The only thing that rather puzzled Jack in the affair was, that Claude Duval, in his few words from the prison, had not been explicit as to whether Cicely was to be made acquainted with his situation or not. Upon this head, however, he thought he would take the advice of May, or leave it as a matter altogether in her discretion. For his own part, he was decidedly of opinion that Cicely had better know all that had happened, inasmuch as thus knowing it from those who could and who would tell her the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, she would be spared the shock of hearing, by some accident, a distorted and partial statement of those circumstances in which she was so very deeply interested. Sixteen-string Jack knew where to find May. He thought the best way was to explain to her his mode of coumunicating with Claude Duval, and actually to show her the few words which he had written.

"They will," he said to himself, "silence all scruples about her accompanying me, in case she should happen to have any, which may or may not be the case."

He found May in a state of great grief, and it was a great satisfaction to him to be able to say to her what he did.

"You have a remembrance of Cicely Brereton?" he said.

"Oh! yes, yes."

"Then Claude wishes you to be with her, to console her for his absence.

May was silent far a moment or two, and then she said—"You are Claude's friend, and I know that from you he hides nothing. Tell me, now, in all truth and honesty, is Cicely Claude's wife?"

"In all truth and honesty, she is."

"I am satisfied and delighted, and yet——"

"Yet what, Miss May? You hesitate."

"I do, and I hardly know why I do so. Give me but a few brief moments to collect my thoughts, and I shall be able to accompany you freely."

Alas! poor May, her mind was going back to old scenes—to the brief period of happiness that the family of the Brereton had enjoyed, while they were unmolested at the farm-house, with all its pleasant appertenances of gardens and orchards, at Guildford. It was there that Markham Brereton had first told her that he loved her.

Ah! no wonder that that became a green spot in her remembrance, never to be by time or the confluence of other events obliterated.

Sixteen-string Jack saw that she was deeply moved, and he thought to be sure it was Claude's fate she was speaking of. He hastened to put her in better spirits by saying—

"All are not lost, Miss May, who are in danger."

"Ah!" said May, "how that phrase rings upon my ears. Do you not remember using those same words to Claude, on that night when he and I first encountered you in the waggon, upon Hampstead Heath, that sad and fearful—fatal night?"

Jack was silent for some moments, and then he said, with some evident emotion—

"Miss May, I cannot conceal from myself that you look upon me as the tempter of Claude, and upon his accidental association with me that night, as the commencement of the career that has brought him to his present condition."

"No," said May, quickly. "I can reason now more justly, and I do not, as I have, I confess, frequently done, condemn you. You certainly came in Claude's way upon that occasion; but when I come to reflect upon what had already happened previously to meeting with you, and upon Claude's disposition at that time, I think he might, and would probably, if he had not met with you, encountered a much worse companion."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said Jack.

"I mean it," rejoined May.

"Well, then, I shall feel the more comfortable from the thought that you don't look upon me as Claude's enemy; and now, come along at once, and I will take you to Cicely, from whom I think nothing now ought to be kept regarding Claude's situation and prospects. As we go along I will manage to tell you all that I think and know about it. People have broke out of Newgate before to-day, and why may not Claude do so."

"Alas! is an escape from Newgate the only hope?" said May.

"Not the only hope; but if it were, should you think it impossible?"

"I should, indeed. You must recollect, Jack, that Newgate is different now to what it was then, when the daring characters of the last century laughed at its bolts and bars."

Jack winced a little at this remark. Its truth struck him rather more forcibly than pleasantly, and he was rather induced to be silent and reflective for the rest of the time, as they proceeded to where Cicely was staying. We need not detail the interview between Cicely and May. Suffice it to say that it was on both sides all that could be wished. Cicely had always had a great partiality for May Duval, and from the first few words that she now spoke to her, May found that that partiality had suffered no diminution. The worst part of the meeting, however, had to come, and well might May shrink from reciting to Cicely all that she had to tell her. But yet it had to be done, so May set about it as courageously as could be, and fairly and distinctly told Cicely all that happened from first to last of the trial of Markham Brereton and its results. Cicely listened with the most breathless attention; and when they had concluded, it was evident that Cicely was making a very great effort to overcome her emotion, and to exhibit a calmness and fortitude she was far from feeling in reality. The effort was, however, too much for her, and clasping her hands over her face, she burst into tears.

"Ah," said May, while Cicely was sobbing hysterically, "I almost regret that I have told you at all."

"No, no; do not regret it. Do not regret it," sobbed Cicely, "and do not fancy that these tears are those of regret that Claude has placed himself in his present position. No—no. He was right to do as he has done, and if he had done otherwise he would not have been the Claude I took him to be."

"Can you speak thus?"

"I do—I do. Dear to me as he is, and dearer still since I know so much of his chivalric goodness, I myself would have counselled him to do as he has done."

"And Mark Brereton is saved?" said May.

"Nay, do not mistake me."

"Mistake you, Cicely? How do you mean that I should mistake you?"

"Do not fancy, May, that it is only because Markham would have been the victim that I would have applauded and encouraged Claude in what he has done. It would have been base to have allowed any one to suffer innocently for an act of his. Oh, May, May, how much dearer has this truly heroic conduct made him to me! I thought that I loved him fully, but now I feel that there was an admiration yet to mingle with my affections, which was to lend it a new charm."

These words were deeply affecting to May, and she could not control her tears. Nevertheless, she flung herself into the arms of Cicely, exclaiming—

"Ah, how happy we all ought to be, Cicely, with such thoughts and feelings! And yet shall we ever know even serenity again!"

"Heaven only knows, May. But what can be done? Are we condemned to be merely spectators of what is going on? Can we do nothing for Claude?"

"Alas! nothing—nothing. The attempt upon our part fails, and any interference would most probably be full of mischief. We must perforce remain as we are, and wait the issue of events which to us are of terrific importance. There is a perfect understanding between Claude and his friend, Sixteen-string Jack, and that they mean to try something I have no doubt. Let us hope for the best."

"Hope! alas, faint hope!"

Sixteen-string Jack had promised to return in an hour when he left May with Cicely, and as that period of time had expired, he made his appearance, according to his promise. The moment he showed himself, Cicely ran eagerly towards him, and taking him by the hand, she said—

"Tell me—tell me, I implore you, by all your dearest hopes—tell me, what can be done for Claude?"

"I cannot," said Jack.

"You cannot?"

"No. I really cannot tell you what will be done, but I can tell you that every thing will be attempted. Be of good cheer. Claude is hopeful, and so am I. There is no violent hurry about it just now. Nothing is to be gained by precipitation; and, besides, the first flush of caution as regards Claude in Newgate, upon the part of the authorities of the prison, will blow over when they see that he is quiet, and apparently resigned to the circumstances that surround him."

"Then something will be done?"

"If I live to do it, yes."

"And—and you have hope?"

"Indeed, I have abundance of hope. Do not ask me to detail the plan to you, for it will very likely assume many different shapes yet, before it can be matured and carried out, but all the information that from time to time I can bring here I will bring, of that be assured."

This was rather meagre as regarded actual information, but both Cicely and May felt that it would be unjust, as well as ungenerous, to force further explanations at that juncture from Jack, so they let him go, declaring themselves satisfied with his promise to come from time to time, and let them know what was doing. Having thus far carried out Claude's wishes, Jack set about procuring the money, without which he felt how useless it would be to attempt anything for Claude

The plan of operations that he had concocted with the man who had promised him a plan of Newgate, was fully successful, and if we do not at this juncture go into the details of that remarkable robbery, which at the time made a great noise in the metropolis, it is that we have more important matters, immediately connected with the personages of our story, to dilate upon. The result was to place in the hands of Sixteen-string Jack a considerable sum of money, and an accurate plan of Newgate and the surrounding houses. He had already ascertained from Claude by the mode of communication that they had agreed upon between them, what part of the prison he was confined in, so that now, with the plan before him, Jack had no difficulty in marking the very spot where Claude was languishing in the fortress-like building. This was something, but it was not everything. It was only an approach towards a first step. The first step itself had yet to be taken, and in the midst of all that he was doing, or attempting to do for Claude Duval, Jack had continually to labour under a difficulty which would not have beset any one but himself. That was the dread of being himself recognised by any of the officials of the prison, for he was perfectly well known to them all, having been for a long time in the gaol before his trial and execution. To be sure, feeling confident, as all the officers and turnkeys in Newgate of course did, that he, Sixteen-string Jack, had been duly executed at Tyburn, they, even if they had seen him, could scarcely have been able to believe their own eyes; but what he dreaded was the consequent inquiry that would in all likelihood thus ensue. Thus, then, all that he did had to be done under this serious disadvantage, that he was compelled to keep himself continually disguised. He wrote to Claude, by means of an old piece of newspaper, as follows—

"I have a plan of Newgate, and know your cell. If gold can purchase a turnkey it shall be done, as that would be an assistance, but, whether or not, hope for the best, and do nothing yourself until I send you word that I can do nothing for you. May is with Cicely."

The note reached Claude, but he was quite lost in wonder to think what scheme Jack had in his head which with any chance of success could be put in practice from the outside of the prison. He trembled for Jack's safety, while he did not himself gather any hope from the communication. We shall now leave Claude, while we turn our attention to Sixteen-string Jack's proceedings, which were most singular and complicated. He felt that by no ordinary, or every-day means, could there be any reasonable hope of snatching Claude from his prison, and certainly, if by bold daring, and the most exquisitely put together plan of proceeding, success could be achieved, Sixteen-string Jack fully deserved it, for such a plan was never before attempted of invading, in the manner Jack intended to do, the inmost recesses of Newgate.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE APPARITION IN NEWGATE.

It was on a drizzly, damp, and most uncomfortable evening that Sixteen-string Jack, in the dress of a drover from Smithfield Market, entered a public-house nearly opposite to the debtors' door of the Old Bailey, where he knew the turnkeys and under-officers of the prison were in the habit of coming to solace themselves with various creature comforts after their spells of duty. He called for some ale, which he stood sipping at the bar, while he regarded with interest the countenances of the persons who came in from Newgate. It was then the fashion for all officials connected with the gaol to wear red waistcoats, so that there was no difficulty in recognising them, for if they buttoned up ever so closely, they always managed to allow some portion of the red waistcoat to show itself. One of those men Jack



knew at once. He was the one who had always brought him his rations while he, Jack, was waiting for execution in one of the condemned cells. Before this turnkey could order anything, Jack said to him in rather a mysterious tone, at the same time pushing his ale towards him—

"Have you been in Newgate long enough to recollect Sixteen-string Jack?"

"Ah, to be sure I have. What then?"

"Well, then, I don't mind telling you what I have not mentioned to anybody else, and that is, that last night, while I was dozing against one of the pens in the

market, for I had made up my mind to keep watch, as me and my partner had lost a four-year-old, and you know that thieves always come twice, and so you see I thought it would be only prudent, you understand, to—— "

"God bless me, what a rigmarole!" said the officer.

"Well, I'm coming to the point—you don't drink. Well, as I was saying, I was half asleep, leaning against the pens, when the hospital clock struck twelve, and then St. Sepulchre's struck twelve, and I said to myself, one or the other of them must be slow, and——"

"Confound you," said the officer, as he finished Jack's ale, "if you are not the most roundabout story-teller I ever came near in all my life. Come, be quick."

"I will. Well, from Barbican way there came a man on horseback, but what made no noise on the rough stones. On he came right up to me, and stopping close to the pen, he said, 'My friend, I had not an opportunity of thanking you for handing me up my handkerchief before, but I do now.' 'Your handkerchief!' said I. 'Yes,' he added, 'on Holborn Hill, September 16. Look at me well.' I did so, and then, as the moon struggled out, I saw that it was Sixteen-string Jack, to whom, as he went to be hung, I had handed his handkerchief, which he let drop out of the cart on Holborn Hill."

"Oh, bother!" cried the officer, "you were dreaming."

"No—no."

"Drunk, then!"

"No, I tell you, no; I saw him as plainly as I saw you ever, or see you now, and you may well suppose how I shook. He had on the identical dress he went to be hung in, and his top-boots had the ribbons flying to them that he then wore."

"Oh, stuff—stuff!"

"Well, it may be, but I only tell you of it just as it happened to me. You may suppose I stared a little, and shook a little, but after a few moments he said, 'You need not be afraid, Joseph Brown—you need not be afraid, Joseph Brown. Perhaps I can tell you something that may be for your good. Listen, Joseph Brown, I have not got much time to spare.'

"I had recovered myself a little by this time, and the idea took possession of me that I was being hoaxed, and made game of for somebody's sport, so I up with my thick stick, and gave him a pelt over the head with it, saying as I did so—'take that as a stopper to your joking to-night.'

"The stick went clean through him and the horse, without meeting with any opposition, and then I dropped it, and I felt my hair begin to stand on end.

"'Joseph,' said the spectre, in rather a mournful tone of voice, 'I'm sorry you did that. It's the worst blow possible to strike at nothing. But my mission is not over. Find out Mr. Swade, at Newgate, and give this to him. It was his handkerchief, not mine, and it was accidentally buried with me. Tell him, Joseph Brown, that I will call upon him some night at Newgate.'"

"What!" cried the turnkey, "what! did he say Mr. Swade?"

"Yes, he did."

"Why—why, that's my name."

"Yours?"

"Yes, to be sure, and you know it. Come, come, this is some joke, but it won't do. Everybody, of course, saw me lend my handkerchief to Sixteen-string Jack, in the lobby of Newgate. No, no, this won't do, and I happen to know it was buried with him. At least, when his friends took away the body, it went with it."

"That's just what he said. After saying it, away he went; and when I recovered myself a little, I found on one of the posts the handkerchief."

As he spoke, Jack produced from his pocket a handkerchief, which he handed to Mr. Swade. Now, the turnkey was rather a jovial, hearty-looking sort of man, under ordinary circumstances, but when he saw the handkerchief, he turned as pale as death, and staggered back till he came to a seat, upon which he sat down with a plump that was enough to knock all the breath out of his lungs at once. Sixteen-

string Jack took the opportunity of slipping out of the house. A crowd gathered round Mr. Swade, whom everybody thought was taken suddenly ill, and there he sat, with the handkerchief in his hand, which he knew perfectly well, and gasping in a curious manner, in a vain attempt to say something about it to those around him.

"Undo his neckcloth," said one.

"Send for a doctor," said another.

"What does he stare at that handkerchief for?" remarked a third.

"I—I—am better," gasped Swade; "some—brandy."

"Oh," said the landlord of the public-house, "he is coming round now. When a man is well enough to ask for a glass of brandy, you may depend he'll do, gentlemen."

While this bustle was going on at the public-house, Sixteen-string Jack hurried off to a lodging he had taken, and got rid of the drover's clothes. He attired himself quite different, and sallied out into the street, saying as he did so—"There can be no doubt now, that all the turnkeys in Newgate will fully expect a visit from my apparition, so that if I do show myself I shall produce a tolerable sensation." The accurate plan of Newgate that he had, sufficed to show him that there was a house in Newgate-street, the back attic of which was not more than twenty-five feet from the wall of the prison, which wall was covered with spikes abutting in all directions. As fortune would have it, this attic was to let as a sleeping room. The house was kept by an old woman who sold aberdashery in a small way, and as Jack was decently dressed, and threw into his manner much courtesy to the old woman, his application regarding taking the attic was favourably received, and in consideration of his alleging he was a stranger in London, a reference was dispensed with upon his paying a month's rent in advance. Sixteen-string Jack fairly took possession of the attic, and that evening he managed, by sending a shirt to Claude, to communicate with him to the following effect—

"I shall make an effort to reach you, as soon as a man named Swade is on the lock of the outer gate. Let me know, if you can, the name of the turnkey who visits you late at night, for I know it is the custom for one to visit prisoners who are in separate confinement. Hope for the best, Claude."

To this Claude Duval managed on the following morning to send the following reply to Jack—

"The turnkey's name is Wright. Be cautious, Jack, and do not peril yourself for me. Do nothing rashly, for it would surely fail."

"Wright," muttered Jack, "I must see this Mr. Wright, and ascertain what sort of metal he is composed of. He may be flexible enough, or he might not. At all events, it can but be tried; but the trial must be made with caution."

Of course, the great difficulty in making an attempt upon the integrity of this man, Wright, consisted in doing it so that its failure, if it should fail, entailed no bad effects upon him, Sixteen-string Jack. After much thought, Jack hit upon a mode of accomplishing this. He found that Wright came over to the public-house regularly to have his drop, and that there generally dropped in about the same time a man dressed in a long drab coat, half-dressing gown, and half-dressing coat, and who had a glass of beer, which he consumed with a small biscuit he took from his pocket always. Upon inquiry, Jack found that this man was a clerk to a well-known usurer's attorney in the neighbourhood, and, indeed, it was considered that he was a sort of partner in the grasping business. At all events, Jack heard enough of his character to feel no compunctions whatever at getting him into a little difficulty. After taking the most accurate notes of this man's dress, Jack went to one of those places in London, where accurate costumes of any required description can be had in a few hours, and supplied himself with a drab coat, and so exactly like that of the usurer's clerk, that he might very well be taken for him by any one not intimate with his physiognomy. The next thing to do was to find Mr. Wright somewhere away from the public-house, and this, after some waiting, Jack accomplished at night, for he saw him come out of Newgate, and walk towards Smithfield. Jack pursued and called to him.

"Hilloa!" said the officer, pausing; "what do you want? Oh, your name is Falk, is it not? I think I have seen you often at the Rose Inn."

"Yes," said Jack, "yes. Mr. Wright, have you any objection to earn a 100*l.* note?"

"Humph! How do you mean?"

"In plain language, are you really fond of your situation in Newgate, for its own sake, or for what it brings you in? If the latter, you may as well earn 100*l.* in addition to what you usually make."

"But how?"

"First of all, Mr. Wright, let me tell you that I am a man of determination."

"I don't understand you."

"I can easily explain myself. Here is a loaded pistol. If you attempt to arrest me, I will blow your brains out. Now, listen."

"Oh, I don't want to arrest you."

"Will you, then, connive at the escape of a prisoner from Newgate for 100*l.* provided it can be so managed that you are in no way implicated?"

"An awkward and dangerous proposal from you to me, Mr. Falk. I must really have a little time to consider."

"Very well. Will you let me know when you see me taking my glass at the Rose to-morrow morning?"

"Certainly, I will."

"And in good faith, I hope, Mr. Wright. If you accept terms, well and good; and if you don't, I hope there's no harm done."

"Oh, none at all. Good evening."

On the following morning, Jack took care to be at the bar of the Rose Inn, but in quite a different costume; and presently came in the real Mr. Falk, with his drab coat, and asked for his half pint of beer, as usual. Jack stood quite close to him, and scarcely had he been there two minutes, when in came Wright, the officer. He sidled up to Falk, and whispered, "All's right."

"Eh?" said Falk.

"I consent."

"Oh, you do?" said Falk, who thought it was a joke at his expense. "I am very happy to hear it, I'm sure."

In an instant, Wright sprung upon him; and then two officers, who were there in disguise, likewise pounced upon him, and poor old Falk found himself handcuffed in the twinkling of an eye.

"Murder! murder!" he cried. "What's this for?"

"Oh, you know," said Wright.

"How can I know? Good God! what have I done? It's some mistake. What have I done?"

"One scarcely expects you to admit it," said Wright, "but you will find that trying to bribe a sworn officer is an offence. Bring him along."

"Ah," said Sixteen-string Jack to himself, "it was as well for me to be cautious. Wright will not be bribed; but I have lost nothing by trying, so now I know what I have to depend upon, and fear no ill-consequences from the experiment."

Two persons were talking at the corner of Newgate-street as he passed. One was a perfect stranger to him, but the other was Swade, the officer, and Jack heard him say, in answer to something from his acquaintance—

"I would, with pleasure, but I am on the outer wall to-night."

"To-night, then," said Jack, as he crept up the attic stairs to the room he had hired, "to-night, then, the attempt must be made to free you, Claude. It is desperate; but yet a desperate adventure will sometimes succeed where a carefully got up one would fail. I will try, and I will succeed or fall by it. You would do as much for me, Claude Duval."

Sixteen-string Jack had made all his arrangements, so that there was no necessity for him to leave the attic again that day, except to send something into the prison to Claude, by means of which he might let him know that he would that

night make an attempt to rescue him. He marked letters sufficient on a piece of newspaper to convey to Claude the following brief communication—"Expect to see me to-night, Claude. Keep yourself awake and well alive. All may, and shall be well, if I can make it so." So much depended upon circumstances as they might occur, that Jack could not say anything more explicit to Claude, and so, after sending that much to him, he waited until the shades of evening began to gather around the city, and the lights were gleaming in the streets. Sixteen-string Jack needed no light. What he had to do was a great deal better done in the dark; for although, as far as he knew, no window commanded a view of his attic, he could not swear to such a state of things, and he was not at all inclined to run unnecessary risks. From the lights in the shops, as well as from those in the street, there came a strong reflection, so that Jack was able, from his eyes having become gradually accustomed to the creeping on of that ruddy sort of twilight, to see tolerably plain everything in the attic. The clock of St. Sepulchre's church struck ten as he began his preparations for entering Newgate—that dreadful abode which he last left in a cart to go to execution. He carefully unlocked a large chest that he had in the room, and the key of which he had carefully hidden. In this chest were some very long, stout ropes, with strong iron hooks, or grapnels, and at the end of each of them, and here and there in the rope, was tied a great knot, by means of smaller pieces, so that there was a good hold at places for either feet or hands. Slowly, and with the utmost caution, Sixteen-string Jack opened his attic window, and looked out into the night air. The legion of spikes and *chevaux de frise* that ran on the top of the prison wall could be clearly seen against the bright sky, and there it was that Jack now directed all his attention.

"Kind," he said, "very kind of the architects of Newgate to place so many good holdfasts upon the top of the wall for my hooks. Here goes! it will be hard, indeed, if I do not get a grasp upon some of them."

He cast one of his ropes so that the hook fell among the *chevaux de frise* on the top of the wall, and then, pulling it tight, he ascertained that he had a good firm hold. He then secured unto the window-sill a very strong brass hook, which seemed such as chandeliers are suspended from ceilings by, and fastened the other end of his rope to it firmly and tightly.

"So, so," he said; "a very tidy bridge indeed, from my attic to old Newgate. I hope sincerely, my poor friend, Claude Duval, that you will be able to say, this was well done."

There was much more to do, though, besides fixing the rope, before Sixteen-string Jack could venture into Newgate; but he set about his well-arranged preparations with great speed and exactitude. First of all he dressed himself from top to toe, exactly as he had dressed when he left Newgate to go to execution. It was not without some strange thoughts that Sixteen-string Jack put on that clothing, which brought back to his mind, more vividly than usual, such a host of painful thoughts and feelings. He quite shuddered as he surveyed himself in the glass, and saw that he was restored to that precise condition that he had been in, when it was whispered to him that it was time for him to come to death. But this was only a temporary feeling, and not one that he would for a moment allow to interfere with the proceedings to which he had so heart and soul pledged himself. He gave the finishing touch to his costume by putting on a large cravat, and then he said—

"Now, Claude, I will rescue you, or we shall, I think, both have our homes in old Newgate to-night."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK IN NEWGATE.

NOTWITHSTANDING Jack had succeeded tolerably well so far, and that he had found a good hold upon the iron-work on the top of the prison wall for the rope, which made a frail bridge from thence to his attic, it was no easy task, at that

giddy height from the ground, and with the faint, uncertain light about him, to achieve the first step in the adventure. Clambering along horizontal ropes, although to a sailor as easy, probably, as walking up stairs, was rather foreign to Sixteen-string Jack's habits; and when he knew that a single fake grasp, or the least accession of giddiness, might be his death, he might well be excused for feeling some slight degree of nervousness upon first starting. He tried the rope repeatedly, to thoroughly satisfy himself that it was quite secure; and then, as he stood upon the window-sill of the attic, he listened for a few moments to that dull, confused roar, which always comes from London—a combination of thousands of voices, of thousands of footsteps, of the rolling of coaches, and the clanking and clanging of thousands of handicrafts, all combined into a sullen, half-muffled kind of roar, not unlike that of the sea when the sun has gone down upon the face of the deep, and the sighing night-wind is whispering to the spirit of the waters.

"Who else," said Jack, "in all this vast city, is engaged upon a similar enterprise to mine? Who else is about to risk so much for one whom he loves as I?"

Alas! Jack little knew the secrets of that vast congregation of humanity when he thus spoke. It was probably true enough that no one was precisely in his circumstances, but there is more heroism in every-day life, during one passage of the sun over London, than is to be found in the wildest romance ever dictated by the most discursive imagination. Jack looked down from the height at which he was, but nothing was to be seen below, save a congregation of little black-looking spots, which made up the yards of a number of houses jammed in between Newgate Market and Newgate-street. Here and there he could see a glimmering light, and then it would disappear, leaving the darkness more profound than before. St. Sepulchre's church clock struck eleven.

"It is time," said Jack, "it is time."

He carefully, before starting, fastened his apparel about him in such a way that there was no loose portion of it dangling about, and this he did with the greatest ease, as he took with him a quantity of rope, which he coiled round and round him, as being the most ready and easy way of conveying it. A pair of good double-barrelled pistols, carefully loaded, he placed in a breast pocket, and a knife, and a file, and a pair of strong nippers he likewise had with him. Thus he considered himself provided against all ordinary contingencies; and with a firm determination not to be deterred from the prosecution of his object let what would occur, he swung himself off the attic window-ledge on to the rope. It was a good stout piece of cord that, and drawn tightly, too, yet it swayed down a little, and gave to Sixteen-string Jack's weight, as hand over hand he slowly dragged himself along it, keeping a firm grasp with his ankles at the same time. The distance from his window had really looked nothing, but now that he came in such a way to traverse it, how wonderfully it was increased in imagination! Once, too, he thought he heard a creaking noise, as though the rope was either breaking at some portion of its continuity, or as though the iron at the end of it which was grappling the *chevaux de frise* at the top of the prison wall was coming gradually off.

This was a horrible idea, but there was now no help for it. He was more than half across, and he would not go back. He paused, however, and grasped the rope tightly; for if the end attached to the prison wall were to give way, he was confident that fastened to the window-sill would not. In the course of about half a minute, as nothing occurred, he began to think he must be mistaken, and that it was merely the straining of the rope, and the working of the hook at the end of it against the iron-work it grasped, which made the sound of such alarming import, and he went on again with renewed courage. To Jack, this part of his adventure seemed as though it would be the worst of all; which probably arose from the fact, that he saw all of this, while what was to come was shrouded in mystery still, and was invested with the radiant colours of hope. At length, the vibration and the depression of the rope ceased, and, by stretching out his hand, Jack could grasp the iron work on the top of the wall. Another moment, and he was standing, evidently rather precariously, among it; but still he had crossed the

chasm. He thought it imprudent to stand up, for fear even his shadow might be seen against the night sky by some one from the prison, and he stooped as low as he could, while, by the insufficient light in the place, he carefully examined the hold that the hook had taken. He found it perfectly fast; and as he had no sort of intention of disturbing that rope, he began, with great caution, to uncoil the one he had round his waist. Any idea of being able to consult his plan of Newgate during his expedition had never crossed his mind, so that he had carefully previously studied it, and it was as strongly present in all its details to his mind's eye as though it were actually before him. He gazed down into Newgate from the top of the wall, for he knew that a small court-yard, of a triangular shape, was immediately before him, and that the only mode of getting from it into the interior of the prison was by a vaulted passage, with a door at each end of it, tolerably well secured by bolts and bars. There would be no danger in this first little court-yard of meeting with any one, for no cells looked into it, although the narrow gratings of some obscure places of confinement caught a faint light from it in the day-time. The height was terrific. Now Jack was in a much better position to make sure that his rope was well fastened to the iron work, and he accordingly took good care that it should be so before he let the other end of it slowly down the inner side of the wall, like some long, slender snake, making its way into the abodes of wretchedness. He grasped the rope, and slid down rapidly. He was quite sure that it was more than long enough to reach the ground, and he was not deceived, for when his feet touched the cold pavement there were some yards of the rope remaining coiled upon it. "Better than an inch to short," said Jack, as he stood in the little court-yard, feeling a little giddy with his rapid descent. A very few moments' stillness, however, sufficed to free him from that feeling, and then assuring himself that he was quite recovered, he placed the superfluous end of the rope close up against the wall; for although it was against all probability that such should be the case, he yet felt that some one might come into the court-yard. The next object was to get out of this place which he had taken so much trouble to get into, and he carefulfy stepped along to the passage which led from it. This was to test the correctness of his plan of the prison: if the passage was just in the place the plan indicated, then he felt that he could have abundance of confidence in all other respects—if not, he should be sadly puzzled. One, two, three, four, five six, steps counted Jack, and then he paused and felt the wall immediately before him. Yes, there was the door, true enough, studded with thick, large, iron nails, just as it was represented in the plan which he had so carefully consulted. "All right so far," said Jack; "I am not deceived." The precision with which persons, who have made such matters their study, will ascertain the manner in which a door is fastened, is something surprising, but it was certainly true in the case of those ancient disturbers of the tranquillity of the wealthy, who are now no more. Sixteen-string Jack shook the door quietly, and then muttered to himself, "Humph! one bolt above only, and a bar." At that time Newgate depended more upon its bolts and bars than upon its locks. The art of lock-making had not reached the perfection that it has now attained, so that the skill of the cracksman of Claude Duval's time was generally more than sufficient to bid defiance to locks. Bars and bolts, however, were always more troublesome obstacles in the way of a prison escape or an entrance into a house; but even they were not unfrequently removed with great skill.

Sixteen-string Jack at once set about this work, with scarcely a doubt of its success, considering that he had with him tools and implements sufficient to fully accomplish it. With a centre bit of the most delicate and exquisite construction, he bored holes above and below the bolt, so that he could introduce the blade of a fine saw. This blade was not above two-eigths of an inch in thickness, and yet it was so excellently-tempered a piece of steel that the rough soft iron of which the bolt was composed stood no chance against it for a moment. The saw cut into it as though it had been wood. The lower bolt was not fast, but the bar still remained, and Sixteen-string Jack could easily enough have cut through that, but he knew that the passage beyond the door was paved, and he feared that

the two ends of the bar might fall and make a clattering noise that might reach the ears of some official of the prison amid the silence of the night. Some other means, then, must be resorted to to get rid of the bar. He judged that it was merely placed across the door, being lodged in a socket prepared for its reception at one end, while, no doubt, it was jointed on to the strong frame-work composing the door-post at the other end. At least, he was well aware that, unless this bar was an exception to the general rule, such was the construction of it, and he set about his operations accordingly, without a moment's loss of time or consideration. By tapping the door gently with one of the implements he had brought with him, he ascertained the exact place of the bar; and then, about six inches below it, he bored a hole right through the door. The centre-bit encountered an iron plate in its progress, but that was only a temporary obstruction after all, and it was soon right through. Jack was provided against this very contingency that he had to contend with, so, taking from his pocket a long soft nail of about six or eight inches, he bent it in the form of a hook, and passed it through the hole in the door, so that the hook part stuck upwards. He placed it firmly there in its place by the insertion of another straight nail, which he firmly wedged in, for he did not care to remove either of them when they had answered fully his purpose at the present time. Thus far, then, all was right. The next thing he had to do, was to lift the bar out of its rest, and that was a matter of more difficulty, for the only way in which it could be accomplished was to get something under it, which should act as a kind of lever against it; but where there is a will there is a way, and throughout the whole of his proceedings Sixteen-string Jack exemplified the truth of that well-known and somewhat venerable proverb. Another hole was bored in the door, precisely below the lower edge of the bar, and through this was introduced another bent nail, the head of which was held firmly in a pair of pincers, so as to have a good purchase of it. By moving this slowly round, then, Jack caught the bar upon its under edge and lifted it. The only chance of failure was that the bent nail might not lift it high enough to release it from the kind of holdfast in the door-post behind which it was slipped. Jack had his doubts, but they were soon removed, for, upon suddenly releasing the bar, it fell clear of the holdfast and fairly upon the hook that he had previously prepared for its reception.

"All's right," said Jack.

The door yielded to a touch, and, with a slight creak, swung back upon its massive hinges.

"So much for bolts and bars," said Sixteen-string Jack, as he at once entered the narrow passage.

To his surprise, the door at the other extremity was not fastened at all. Probably it was thought so utterly chimerical for any one to entertain the idea of getting into Newgate, that outer doors were only attended to strictly. At all events, it saved Jack some time and trouble. The plan of the prison was so firmly fixed in his mind that he knew at once where the last door led to. It was to a passage to the right and to the left, along which were cell-doors, but they were not the cells he sought, and taking the right hand branch of the passage, he passed noiselessly on. Jack had taken the precaution to draw on over his boots a pair of thick worsted stockings, which had the effect of completely deadening the sound of his footsteps, while it gave him the confident step which a man has in his boots, and which he can never have in his stocking soles merely. The passage was substantially built and vaulted. It was of about twelve feet in width, and about fifty feet in length, when it terminated at a door where there was a wicket of wire, through which the turnkey could take a good survey of the passage. Whether or not a watch was kept during the night at this wicket, Jack had no means of knowing, except by ocular demonstration. He thought it probable enough that such was the case, so he carefully hid his light, as he slowly and stealthily approached. A faint gleam, as if a lantern were upon the other side of the door, almost convinced him that he should there find some one; nor was he mistaken, although he would very gladly have found himself so. A turnkey was fast asleep in a recess in the wall upon the other side of the door; while a lamp, placed in a niche



THE TURNKEY ALARMED AT THE SUPPOSED APPARITION OF SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

above his head, had shed the faint light into the passage which had been by Jack observed before reaching the spot. This was really a most serious obstacle. For a few moments it seemed as if Sixteen-string Jack's ingenuity were at fault to know how to overcome this scarcely to be called unexpected, but still most provoking stop to his progress. He advanced close to the little wire wicket, and placing his ear to it, he listened attentively. The regular breathing of the man convinced him, Jack, that he was in a sound sleep. A slight glance through the wicket showed him, too, that a key was in the lock of the door, and that it had no other

fastening. What was he to do? Certainly, sleeping as the turnkey was, and situated as Jack was, nothing could be easier than to kill him; but there was something about the cold-blooded murder of a sleeping man so repugnant to Jack's feelings, that he himself shuddered as the suggestion presented itself to him.

"No—no," he said; "that would indeed be horrible. I cannot kill him as he sleeps. If he were to attack me, and I took his life in self-defence, it would be quite another thing; but I cannot commit a a cold-blooded, deliberate murder even in such an exigency as this. It would be enough to blast with ill-success my whole exertions. I should not deserve to succeed."

He clasped his forehead with his hand, and remained for some few moments in the most profound and painful thought upon the subject.

CHAPTER LXIX.

CLAUDE IN HIS CELL.

It was certainly possible, and only possible, that the turnkey might be so soundly sleeping as to allow Jack to open the door, by putting his arm through the little wicket, and turning the lock, and pass him without awakening. Just possible it was, but very far indeed from being at all probable; and yet, what else could he try?

"It must be so," said Sixteen-string Jack to himself—"it must be so; I cannot, after all my pains to come thus far, go back because I find a sleeping turnkey, when I had fully prepared myself to find waking ones. No—no. It must be chanced. If he sleeps soundly, his life is saved. If he awakens, he is an enemy, and I must take his life, or he will take mine. I cannot, I dare not delay. The attempt must be made at once."

Jack felt what a ticklish thing it was to do to turn the key in the lock so softly as not to awaken the man; but he advanced to do it, and, by coming so close, he saw that the turnkey was aged. His hair, like Hamlet's father's, was a "sable silvered," and Jack looked at him with a dim perception of having seen him before.

"Alas!" thought Jack, as he looked upon the face of the slumbering turnkey, and now fully recognised him—"alas! I cannot kill him. Now I remember him well. He brought me a glass of water upon the morning of my execution, and spoke some kind words to me. No—no. I cannot kill him. Oh, God! let him sleep on, let him sleep on!"

So fervent was this ejaculation of Jack's that he almost uttered the last words aloud. More than ever, then, now intent upon not awakening the turnkey, perhaps in consequence of a certain amount of agitation that came over him, he was less able to refrain from making a slight noise with the key. The turnkey moaned slightly in his sleep, and shifted his position. Jack awaited with the stillness of death for full three minutes, and then, when he thought deep sleep had once again crept over the senses of the man who was so much in his way, he ventured to resume his operations. He thought the best plan was carefully to take out the key from the other side of the door, and put it into the lock on the side where he was. He would then have more command over it, and be much better able to turn it quite noiselessly, than as if it remained in its present position. He released the key from the lock with a dexterity and precision that made it quite impossible that, by so doing, the smallest alarm could be given to the sleeping turnkey, and then, transferring it to the key-hole upon the side where he himself was, he slowly turned the ponderous wards. It was quite impossible to prevent an inconceivably slight grating noise from ensuing, but that was all. It was next thing to an impossibility that so slight a noise should awaken the sleeper; and yet Sixteen-string Jack waited its result with the most painful interest. All was still.

"'Tis well," thought Jack; "I shall be able to pass him now, if the door is easy upon its hinges, but if not, God only knows what will happen. I cannot sacrifice Claude, and I cannot kill this man. Heaven help me now, for my wish to avoid sin, not to commit it; and so I can call upon Heaven to aid me. This is no selfish expedition. I have all to lose, including life itself, and nothing to gain by it; so again I say, help me, Heaven, and deliver me from the temptations to take this man's life, by keeping him still slumbering."

Sixteen-string Jack did not expect any miracle to ensue, for the purpose of helping him to get Claude Duval out of Newgate; but after this odd kind of prayer he certainly felt, or fancied he felt, which was just the same thing, and answered the purpose fully as well, much calmer and collected.

A malediction light upon all musical doors! Who has not had his nerves set all in a twitter by a shriek from some door that will not open quickly without one, or slowly without a lengthened, long-drawn groan, as if it were in the greatest agony in the world?

But what were the creaking of doors of ordinary domestic life in comparison to this abominable creaking door in Newgate? for it did creak, as Jack ascertained, by the slightest possible movement of it. What was he to do? There was nothing for it but boldness.

"Courage!" said Jack to himself, "courage; creaking doors will sometimes yield, like creaking human beings, to resolution; and I have known them to be swung moderately open without making the least sound. I must try, however, come what may."

If this plan were to be adopted, Jack knew well there must be no compromise with it. It was hit or miss—a kind of leap from a precipice in the dark. He might alight with safety, or he might not. All was chance. He tried to ask himself how many chances there were of the door giving a hideous scream, to one that it would open quietly; but the stupendous piece of arithmetic was beyond his power—he only felt that he was running a frightful risk, that was all. Open rushed the door. It did not scream, it did not groan, but it did worse than all that—it struck the foot of the slumbering turnkey, and aroused him in a moment. He started to his feet.

"Hilloa! hilloa!" he cried, "What's that?"

The real truth was, that Sixteen-string Jack was so bewildered at this most unexpected *contretemps* that for a few brief moments he did not know what he did; and yet impulsively, if not reflectively, he dashed through the open door, and gained a few yards beyond it, before he told himself how utterly useless it was now to think of doing any good by flight—flight, which would only take him deeper into the interior of Newgate, with a hue-and-cry at his heels. Sixteen-string Jack turned, and stood with his right hand plunged in the breast of his apparel, grasping the stock of one of his pistols—a weapon which he dreaded to use, and yet felt now that he must use. The turnkey had snatched the lamp from the recess where it was placed, and in a moment he made a rush towards Jack. Another step, and it would have been his last in this world; but he did not take that step. On the contrary, he paused for a moment, and then staggered back, gasping—

"Good God!"

Jack saw his advantage in a moment, and divined at once from whence it arose. The turnkey knew him well, and took him for his own apparition. There was no longer occasion for killing. All Jack had to do was, as the canting religionists say, to improve the occasion. He saw that the man was almost convulsed with terror, and he was determind not to spare him. A good fright breaks no bones, thought Jack. Step by step, with a slow gliding movement, Jack approached the turnkey, who, for a few moments, was rooted to the ground with fear. A cold clammy perspiration stood upon his brow, and his limbs shook under him. At length, as Jack was coming into what he considered awful proximity to him, he managed to shuffle back a little, crying as he did so—

"I know you—I know you. Gracious goodness! I know you."

Jack paused, and in a deep sepulchral voice he said—

"Stop! I may speak now, since mortal lips have addressed me."

"Ye—ye—yes," stammered the turnkey, whose hair was standing on end with fright—"yes—I—I am aware that ghostesses can't speak till things are spoken to them—I—I know, oh, oh."

"Do you know me?"

"Oh dear, yes, I—I know you. You are the ghost of Sixteen-string Jack, who—who—was executed—on the 15th of May, in the year——"

"Peace! No more! Sit!"

"Yes—yes, I—I will do anything you like, anything you please, only don't touch me, for that would, I feel sure, drive me quite mad. I—I am sure it would. Oh, for the Lord's sake, don't touch me. What harm have I ever done to you?"

"None! But in the hour of my mortal tribulation, when poor human nature shrunk aghast at what it had to go through, you gave me a cup of water."

"Yes, I—I did."

"Wait here, I say to you; you shall have your reward. Wait until I come to you again. Do you promise me, upon your soul's salvation, that you will not stir from that seat until I come back to you?"

"Oh, yes—yes, I promise."

"'Tis well. Have no doubts. Look at me."

Jack was exceedingly anxious that, after he had left, the turnkey should not be able to get up the slightest doubt as to his identity; so he advanced just far enough to allow the beams from the lamp to fall clearly upon his face; and then, for almost half a minute, he remained gazing with a mournful expression at the turnkey, who was nearly driven mad by the horror of his situation; for how could he doubt the evidence of his own senses? He had seen Sixteen-string Jack hanged, and he had now again seen him, and spoken to him. Oh, it was terrible!

"Remember me," said Jack, imitating the ghost of Hamlet's fraternal relative as well as he could—"remember me!"

"Yes," gasped the turnkey.

Slowly Jack moved along the passage backwards, until he got to a turning, and then he scampered in a most unghost-like fashion; for much time had been consumed in this rather awkward adventure with the turnkey, who, after all, when alone, might have strength of mind enough to get over his fears, and so commit some other act that might be highly detrimental to Jack's plans. Jack, all along, from his exact recollection of the accurate plan of Newgate he had so well studied, knew precisely where he was, so that he had the great advantage of never going an inch out of his way. At the end of the passage where he was, he knew there was another door which led into a court-yard, and he knew that the little gratings near the roof which let a dim light to the row of cells, in one of which Claude was confined, looked into that yard. But he would have to unfasten a door leading from that yard, and to traverse a passage until he came to a turning at right angles with it exactly, and from that passage opened the doors of the cells, the backs of which looked into the yard. All this was clear enough, if Jack could but get so far without interruption of any serious character. That, however, was the question; and now another consideration came over his mind for decision, which was simply this: provided he found his way safely to Claude's cell, and got him out of it, by what route should he attempt to take him from the prison? It will be seen that from the first Jack had provided against the contingency of having his retreat by the way he had come cut off, by the desperate determination, if such were the case, to proceed to the regular gate at which the man who knew him by sight would be, and pass himself there off, as he had already so successfully done, as his own ghost, so frightening the man into letting him pass out.

This, however, was a most desperate expedient, and, of course, it was a thousand times better to go by the same way he came, if he could do so with any chance of safety. Jack was divided in thought, between these two modes of procedure, as he made his way hastily to the court-yard at the end of the passage in which he had been so unexpectedly delayed by the really perilous adventure that had happened to him, and which might have turned out so much worse than it really

did, although he (Jack) still trembled at what might be its possible results. If anything, however, could save him from any *mal apropos* proceedings of the terrified turnkey, it would certainly be rapidity of action ; so Jack, in his proceedings, now, was resolved to let no grass grow under his feet.

The door leading from the passage into the court-yard was not fastened, except by a latch, so Jack found himself in the court into which the backs of the range of cells looked, in an incredibly short space of time after leaving the bewildered turnkey in his seat. The experience he had now already had of the correctness of his plan of the prison, wonderfully encouraged him, and he proceeded to the door which led to the passage standing rectangularly to the one from which opened the suite of cells, in one of which Claude was imprisoned, without a moment's hesitation. The door was fast. St. Sepulchre's clock, dimly heard amid the stillness of the night, in the prison, struck one. Without a moment's pause than was just necessary to listen to the clock, Jack now set about opening the door. It was only locked, so the difficulty was not great, and in about five minutes it yielded to him, and he at once dashed into the stone passage.

"Now for Claude," he said.

A sudden flash of light from the farther end of the court-yard almost stunned him by the suddenness with which it came across his eyes. He stood as fixed and still as a statue for a few seconds—and then, by a kind of instinct rather than reflection, he closed the open door of the passage in which he was, feeling that, if it were found in that state, it would at once give rise to a host of suspicions, which would eventuate in a search of the prison. Anything in the shape of a thorough alarm or search would, of course, prove fatal to him. He placed his ear flat against the door, and with all the power of hearing he could bring to bear against the slightest sounds, he listened to what was passing in the court-yard. Through a slight crevice, too, he could see the light which the men carried. A faint genial-like ray of it, too, came through the key-hole of the door, and fell at his feet, but he could not for the life of him think what the party of men could be about, with lights at such an hour, amid the cold and dreary intricacies of that mournful building, in which hope itself bids the world adieu!

CHAPTER LXX.

THE ESCAPE CONTINUED.

THE only thing which gave to Sixteen-string Jack a ray of hope that the appearance of the party in the court-yard of the prison in no way concerned him, was the careless manner of the men composing it. If they had been roused up by any alarm, or by any suspicions, there would have been silence, secrecy, and caution in their every movement; but such was very far from being the case, for they talked and laughed together with perfect freedom, and after a few moments, when the hot blood did not bubble so furiously from his heart to his brain, Jack was better able to understand what they said; he found that though there was something to fear, there was not so much to fear as he had at first supposed.

"I really," said one, with a dissatisfied growl, "don't see the utility of this night patrolling. One regular watchman, always on the look-out, is worth half-a-dozen such inspections as this."

"Perhaps so," said another, "but it's the govenor's orders, and so it must be done."

"Oh, of course."

Jack breathed a little freely, for now he knew that at all events, however dangerous the circumstance might be, there was at present nothing special about it as concerned him and Claude Duval, for whom he was attempting to do so much.

He heard them go to various doors, and try them roughly one after the other, and the thought struck him that they knew the door against which he leant was not of great importance; but they would pass through the passage, to try the other one that led to the cells, or perhaps visit the cells themselves.

What was he to do?

In the passage there was not the shadow of a hiding place. The door at the other end might be fast, and what time had he to open it then? It was a desperate resource, but he felt that all he could do was to hold the door against which he leant and listened fast, so as to induce a belief that it was locked, and the key gone. He placed himself against it, and held it with all his force. He dreaded to look for any mode of fastening it, lest, while he was so occupied, it should be suddenly pushed open by some of the party without.

"Have you tried all those doors?" said a voice, apparently in authority.

"Yes, sir," replied a turnkey.

"Well, let us go to the cells, now. Have you got the key of this?"

"No, sir. Mr. Stevens always leaves they key in the lock when anybody is in one of the cells. You know, sir, Claude Duval is in No. 4, if you please, sir, so Mr. Stevens is more than usually careful, knowing what a customer Duval is, and that he has friends ouside."

"Ah, to be sure, Mr. Stevens cannot be to careful of Claude Duval. But I suppose nobody will finger the reward now, as he, in a manner of speaking, gave himself up to the officers."

"I think," said one, "he ought to have the reward himself. Did he not, according to the words in which it was offered, deliver up Claude Duval to the officers and see him safely lodged in custody?"

"Yes, he did, But it would be rather too good a joke to give him the reward for all that. Come, open the door."

"Hilloa! Mr. Stevens has taken the key away."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, the door is as fast as—a—rock. Ah! I can't move it.'

"How could you if it's locked? Oh, it's all right, no doubt. Mr. Stevens knows what he is about, and, at all events, if he has taken away the key, and thinks that's the safest plan, knowing the customer he has got in No. 4, that's his look-out not ours. Come on."

To the immense relief of the listening Jack, the whole party left the court-yard, which in a few moments became again the dark and solitary place it had been before their visit.

"That danger is over," said Jack, as he released the door to which one of the officers had given a most vigorous push—"that danger is over, and a fearful one it was. It is not probable now that there will be another inspection for some hours, if, indeed, at all again, until daylight, so I may proceed in peace."

Sixteen-string Jack now felt much more confidence in the success of his efforts than he had done before, and he had quite a brightened look of hope as he proceeded along the passage towards the only one door which, save that of the cell, shut him now out from the presence of his old friend and dear associate, Claude Duval.

"No. 4," he said; "I must recollect that the cell is No. 4."

This door which shut him out from Claude Duval was fast.

It seemed to Sixteen-string Jack as though this last door being fast was a more troublesome and provoking thing than all the other troubles and difficulties he had met with in his progress put together, and his impatience as he proceeded to use the necessary means of opening it, was so extreme, as for a time, notwithstanding all his skill, completely to defeat him. Of course, though, he could open the door, and in the course of about three minutes it yielded to his efforts.

Now that he was really within a very few paces of Claude Duval, Jack felt as if he could have fainted. For a moment all the strength and all the energy that had so far supported him and urged him on, fled before him, and he leant heavily

against the wall, while a multitude of objects seemed to swim before his bewildered eyes.

This feeling was one which might have been expected under the circumstances; for if ever an enterprise had been undertaken from motives of pure affection, that of Sixteen-string Jack's, to rescue Claude from Newgate, was that one. In the whole affair, there was not the slightest alloy of selfishness; and no wonder, then, that he, Jack, felt, now that he had got so far upon his self-imposed task, a wonderful and overpowering gush of feeling.

"I shall save him," he gasped, "I shall save him!"

Gradually this feeling of utter helplessness wore off, however, and one by one the faculties of Sixteen-string Jack came back to him, so that he was soon enabled to shake himself free of such fancies, and to pursue the enterprise upon which he had staked so much, and in the whole course of which he had never faltered once, for this gush of excitement which he had but just passed through was anything but indicative of a faltering resolution.

"Yes," he said, "oh, yes, I feel that I shall save him."

Animated, then, by such a feeling, he at once walked on, counting the doors, until he came to No. 4. He might have spared himself the trouble of counting them, for the number was legibly enough painted upon it. The key, for greater security against any attempts of Claude from the inside to pick the lock, was left in its place, and in addition, a very heavy, massive bar, was placed across the door. The authorities did not exactly contemplate the idea of any friend of Claude's finding his way, alone, and unknown to them, to that door, and smiled at the futile precautions they had taken to secure their prisoner. But there was Sixteen-string Jack, the truest friend that man could have, with one hand upon the massive key, and the other upon the still more massive door. The hour of deliverance had come. In his eagerness Jack called upon Claude, forgetting that it might be dangerous to awaken an echo in such a place as that, and with such a name, too, as Claude Duval's.

"Claude, Claude," he cried, "are you there, Claude?—are you there?"

The door was too thick to allow the voice of Sixteen-string Jack to penetrate through its massive structure, and Claude made no reply to the summons. This silence, natural as it was under the circumstances, was sufficiently alarming to Jack, in his present state of great mental excitement. His hand trembled as he lowered the bar, and it was another moment ere he found strength to turn the massive key in the lock of the cell door. Again he raised his voice—

"Claude, Claude!"

This time, Claude had become aware that some one was outside his cell door, and he had roused himself from the partial sleep that had crept over him. He hesitated whether to say anything or not, and yet he was surprised at a visit at such a time. The hour was most unusual. Suddenly he sprang to his feet, exclaiming—

"What voice is that? A dream?"

"Claude, Claude!"

"Gracious Heaven! how real—how very real. It cannot be."

The door of the cell was flung wide open, and Sixteen-string Jack stood upon the threshold, and held up the small lantern which he had from the first provided himself with. The dubious flame fell upon the pale features of Claude Duval, who stood transfixed, completely astonished, and doubting his own sanity, as he fully recognised the well-known features of Jack.

"I am mad," he said.

"No, Claude, no, it is, in truth, your old friend."

Claude rushed to him, and clasped his arms round him, exclaiming—

"It is, indeed, no delusion. Good Heaven! who would have dreamt of this? It is too bewildering. In the name of all that is wonderful and miraculous, how came you here, Jack?"

"There is no miracle in the matter, Claude. It is I; and the only means I really had of getting here consisted in a fixed determination that nothing should stop me from coming to you."

Claude still looked bewildered, as, indeed, well he might; but Jack now carefully closed the cell door, lest the sound of their voices should, amid those tube-like passages which abounded in the prison, be conveyed to the ear of some more than usually attentive and observant officer; and then he said, with much emotion in his tones—

"Let us not, Claude, speak of my coming here—it is of our leaving that we must speak. Your better judgment must come to my aid in this matter, when I have explained to you all the circumstances. Listen to me, Claude."

"With all my heart," said Claude. "But——"

"But what?"

"There is only one question I would first ask of you."

"I can guess it, Claude—I can easily guess, and so will answer it by saying that Cicely is well, knows all, and is hopeful."

"It is enough," said Claude; "proceed."

Jack then rapidly detailed to Claude Duval all that he had done, step by step, to get at him, and the precise aspect of affairs, with all the risks and all the chances of failure or success, in leaving the prison. He concluded by saying—

"Now, Claude, you know all; and the question you have to consider is, whether we are to try to leave by the way I came, or by the regular entrance, where the man—who, no doubt, will be frightened at my ghost, as he will fancy me to be—is upon duty?"

Claude buried his face in his hands for some few moments, and then, looking up, he said—

"The way you came, Jack."

"You think so?"

"Yes, there is less risk, I think. But, if done at all, it ought to be done very quickly. For your sake, Jack, I would start at once; but you must lend me a helping hand, first. You perceive they had a good opinion of my powers, as well as my inclination to escape, for they have placed upon my wrists these iron bracelets, which, under any circumstances, I confess I should not be sorry to be at once rid of."

"That is easily accomplished," said Jack, as he produced one of his small, exquisitely tempered files, and soon released Claude from the handcuffs which in that cell he was burthened with, more from a piece of personal spite on the part of the governor, than from any notion that they were wanted for security's sake.

"You are free from that encumbrance, Claude," said Jack, as the handcuffs fell with a clash upon the stone floor.

"Yes, thanks to you," said Claude: "and now let's be off."

"Agreed."

They left the cell, but before doing so, Claude Duval charred the end of a small piece of wood, which he cut from the door with the aid of Jack's knife, and wrote upon the whitened wall of the cell—

"*Claude Duval escaped from Newgate, September* 13*th*, 1778."

"Good," said Jack.

"They may think that a piece of assurance," said Claude; "but it is astonishing how people will take bold assertions for the truth. I will be bound to say, now, that there is not a turnkey in Newgate who reads that, but who will have his energies of pursuit quite crippled at the idea that it is so perfectly true, that any search for me will be useless."

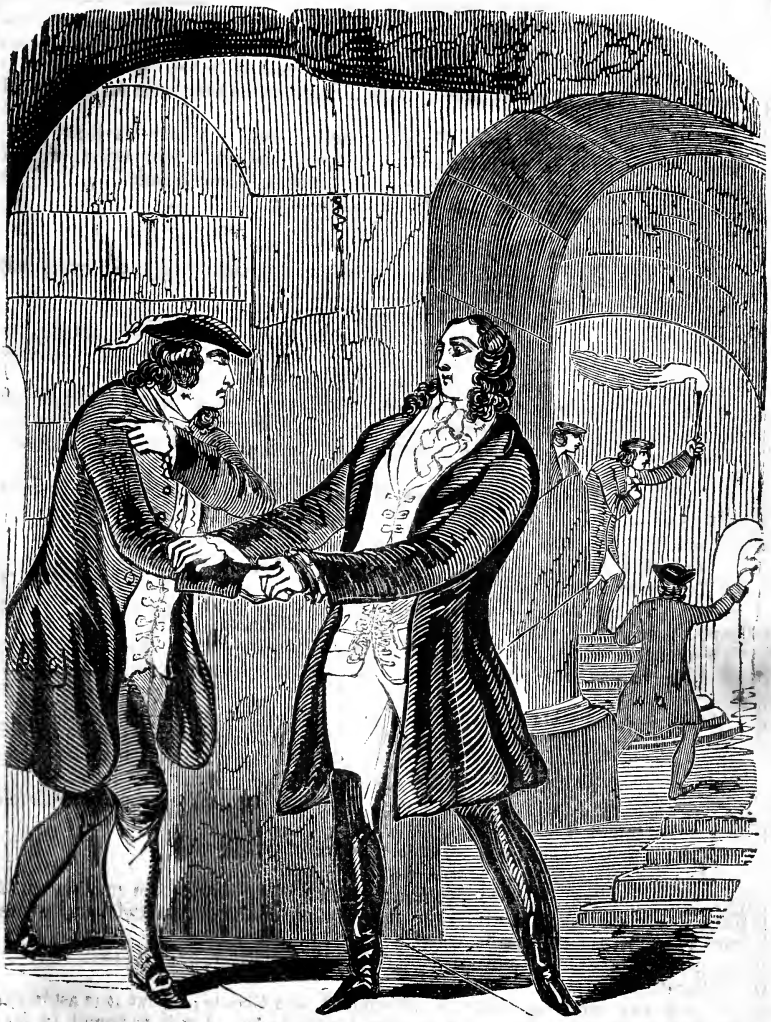
"It will have some effect," said Jack. "But now, Claude, take this."

He handed to Claude Duval one of the pistols with double barrels which he had brought with him, carefully loaded; and Claude at once placed it in his breast, saying as he did so—

"I hope I may not have to use it; but I am struggling for my life, and those who stop me to-night must be made to feel the importance of the stake for which I play. I am now ready, Jack."

"Come on, then. Shall we make the cell door fast?"

"Yes—oh yes."



CLAUDE ENCOURAGING JACK IN ONE OF THE PASSAGES OF NEWGATE.

The cell No. 4 was duly bolted, locked, and barred, so that if any visit of inspection were made to the long, narrow corridor from whence it opened, no one would suppose that it had been in any way disturbed. Jack being familiar with the route they were to take, led the way, and certainly two more determined or powerful men could hardly have been found than those who now stealthily made their way along the gloomy passages of Newgate.

"I think we shall see the daylight soon, Jack," said Claude.

"I'm sure of it," said Jack. "Push on."

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE OLD PRISON WELL.

THEY both paused as, with a faint sound, the clock of St. Sepulchre's came to their ears, proclaiming the hour of four.

"We have plenty of time," said Claude.

"Yes," replied Jack. "The night has seemed an amazingly long one to me. I thought it was at least an hour later, but we don't know yet what delays we may meet with on our route. This way, Claude, this way. In truth, I feel now as familiar with the various intricacies of Newgate, as though I had been its architect."

The small, short passage, with the two doors, leading, is it was now traversed, from the corridor of the cells to the little court-yard where the inspecting party had so lately appeared, was soon traversed, and the cool fresh air of the yard, fresh and delightful to Claude, in comparison to the close atmosphere of his cell, came in a most welcome gush upon his brow.

"I breathe again," he said.

"Ah, Claude, you shall breathe freer still than this, if we are but successful."

"Where else, then, upon our route does this yard lead to?"

"There are two other doors leading from it besides that which we shall leave it by and that by which we have entered. One of these doors leads to the interior of the gaol, and the other is a place which is marked in my plan as a deserted well-yard, where there are some cells which have gone to ruin and are not used."

"Is yonder door the one?"

"Yes; in the explanation appended to my plan there are the words 'never opened,' as regards that door."

"They will have to build a new Newgate, Jack, if they want to keep it secret from you, I see," said Claude.

"They will, indeed. I have not had much time to study it, but my knowledge of it shows only how quickly one may acquire anything when one really sets about it with a will."

"True, Jack, true; and now I presume this turnkey, whom you so much astonished, is our principal danger; in reality, if we pass him we shall be comparatively safe?"

"I think so, and I hope so."

"Well, then, let us push on, with the sincere hope that his superstitious fears have kept him chained to the spot upon which you left him."

"Which may or may not be," said Jack. "If he has recovered he has given an alarm, and then we are lost. Many men in my circumstances, and with such an object in view as I had, would not have scrupled to take his life; but I could not do it. No, I did think of it, but I could not bring my mind to do it."

"At which, let the consequences be what they may, I rejoice, Jack. Let me tell you, that if you had been the sort of man who, under the circumstances, would have deliberately murdered that turnkey, you would not have been the sort of man to have at all thought of undertaking your present noble expedition to save a friend. No, Jack, this is, if I may be allowed the term, a kind of congregation of thoughts and opinions, by which, if you know one important feeling or action of a man, you may almost with a certainty pronounce upon his line of conduct under other conditions."

"I have often thought the same myself," said Jack. "But we are close by the passage in which I left the man, and the most absolute caution must be the word with us."

It was true, indeed. They had both arrived at the end of that most critical passage in which Jack had encountered the turnkey, whose superstition had got so completely the better of his reason at seeing what he certainly very naturally, if

he admitted that there were such things as ghosts at all, took for the apparition of Sixteen-string Jack. Jack went first as they traversed this passage, for if the turnkey was still in his place, and at all dubious upon the matter, it might fairly enough be supposed that the second apparition of Sixteen-string Jack would have a great effect upon him, and probably induce a relapse of his fears. By far the greater probability, however, was, that he had been visited by the little party who were doing the duty of inspecting the prison, and in that case it was not at all to be supposed for a moment that he should have kept what had appeared to him a secret. If he had disclosed it then to the authorities of the gaol, one of two things must have been the consequence, either that the whole matter was believed to be a mere dream of the turnkey's, and no notice to be taken of it beyond laughing at him, or that it was thought there was matter in it worth attention, in which case Jack and Claude were likely enough to meet with rather a warm reception in the passage. As they crept on slowly, they soon began to feel assured that things were not, at all events, exactly as they would have ordered them if they had had the power of so doing. Jack turned, and laid his hand upon the arm of Claude Duval, as he said to him in the lowest possible whisper—

"Hush! there are voices."

"Where?" asked Claude, in the same tone.

"In advance."

"Well, Jack, I think I am calmer than you are, for great anxiety for my escape has rather shattered your nerves, so allow me, for both our sakes, to go on a little and listen."

"Do so."

Claude crept on so silently that it was quite impossible that any one could have heard him, and in this way he succeeded in approaching quite near enough to hear the dialogue that was proceeding, and which was evidently taking place around the turnkey who had been so much terrified by Jack.

"But I tell you I did see him," persisted the turnkey; "I saw him as plainly as I now see any of you."

"And you spoke to it?"

"I did; and another thing that makes me quite clear about it, too, is its mentioning, as I told you, about the glass of water that I handed to Sixteen-string Jack before he stepped into the cab to go to Tyburn. You may laugh at it, or make what joke of it you please, but I shall believe it to my dying day, for I cannot find the slightest room for any doubt about it."

"And you say this ghost promised to come again? That's the point, you know, for us to know."

"Yes, it did."

"Very well, then I promise myself the pleasure, if it does come, of making its ghostly head acquainted with a pair of slugs from my pistols. I have been in Newgate some time, and never heard of any ghosts till to-night, I'm sure."

"Perhaps, Master Watts," said the old turnkey, "you will come to hear more of this than you exactly like."

"Very well, it's time to cry out then. In the meantime here I wait."

"And so do I," said another, "there are three of us altogether, and I think we may consider ourselves a match for a ghost, at any rate."

Claude Duval had heard quite as much as it was necessary for him to hear; he felt that the danger of proceeding any further in that direction was immense, and he slowly and cautiously, as he advanced, made his way back to Sixteen-string Jack, and related to him word for word the conversation that had taken place.

"What's to be done?" said Jack.

"I really don't know," responded Claude. "What do you think of trying the regular gate in the Old Bailey; the risk of doing so is, I dare say, quite terrific, but it seems we have no choice."

"It does, indeed; it would be only over the dead bodies of three men that we could proceed by the wall I came, and that we are not the sort of persons to think

of. Well, Claude, come to the gate; if we meet no one as we go, there is a chance for us then."

"A forlorn one, Jack, but a forlorn and faint hope is infinitely better than none at all, so go we will."

Jack knew the way perfectly well, and he turned off to the right, and was proceeding without much thought of danger, when a broad flash of light came across their eyes, and caused them both to pause. At the same moment, in a strange, monotonous kind of way, a bell began to toll.

"What is the meaning of that?" said Claude.

"Lost! lost!" cried Jack.

"How do you mean? Come, come, Jack, do not give way in this manner."

"You are lost, Claude; that bell announces to the whole of the officials of the prison that a prisoner has escaped, or is attempting to do so, and has left his cell. There is no longer a hope; in the course of a few moments the whole place will be, as it were, under arms. Alas, my poor friend!"

Claude passed his hand across his brow, and, for a moment or two, felt confused and irresolute, but that feeling, along with the first start that Jack's doleful words had given him, soon passed away, and, starting like a man who had newly awakened from a fearful dream, he said—

"No—no—no!"

"What do you mean?" said Jack.

"That I won't give up so easily. Do you not hear, Jack, that footsteps are advancing?"

"I do, I do."

"A party of men is evidently then coming down the passage; if we do not choose to fall into their hands let us hasten ourselves. This way, Jack, this way."

"The way we came?"

"Yes. What other is open to us?"

"Oh, Claude, Claude, you will not again visit that cell?"

"Not in this life, Jack, you may depend. When I bade it adieu, I did so with that motive; I know that I shall be kept a close prisoner in chains until my execution, if I be captured now, after the attempt at escape; and that is a fate that, I think, death in any shape is infinitely preferable to. Jack, I do not intend to be taken alive."

"Nor I, Claude."

"Then we will die together, and I think it is highly probable we shall make the officials of Newgate remember this night's work as one of the most important in the chronicles of the Charter House. But we will not throw away a chance. Come on, Jack, come on. Good God! you seem paralysed. Oh, Jack, rouse yourself from that mental stupor, which I thought had left you for ever. Rouse yourself, Jack, I pray you."

"Oh, Claude—Claude!"

"Jack, my old friend, I implore you to rouse yourself. If you do not, you will sacrifice me, for I will perish by you. Let me implore you to shake off this blight which at times obscures your mind. Come, Jack, tell me that you are all right again."

"I—I am!"

"That will do; now what we have to do must be done boldly, or it must fail. Do you hear, Jack? We cannot, must not attempt to leave Newgate just now. It would be to court destruction if we were to attempt to do so."

"What shall we do, Claude? my mind leans upon yours. Only tell me what I am to do?"

The light that had so disagreeably surprised them now flashed more brightly, and the sound of advancing footsteps was much more plain than it had been before. Sixteen-string Jack still stood irresolute, and no doubt would have fallen a victim to the officers of the prison, had not Claude been with him at that most critical and important moment. Without saying another word, Claude held Jack tightly by the arm, and led him along swiftly and unresistingly by that way which they had

come. To have proceeded in any other direction would have been madness. Claude Duval, as he had followed Jack through the various passages leading from his cell to that spot upon which they had paused with a consciousness of so much danger, had been far from unmindful of the route which he had taken, and now he pursued it with unerring exactitude. There was no close pursuit, for the officers knew not where any intruder or partially escaped prisoner was to be found. They only knew that there was an alarm of something of the kind, or else the bell would not have been sounded, and that it was now their duty to leave no spot of the jail unvisited, so that Claude (when with Jack he reached the court-yard, from whence, in their progress, Jack had told him of several outlets) had fully time to think and to speak to his now somewhat reserved companion.

"Jack," he said, "I am certain that any attempt to leave Newgate now would be madness, but from the inscription upon the wall of my cell they will think me gone; and as for your coming, they know nothing of it at all, if we except the turnkey's story of a ghost. Our plan, then, is to find some hiding place, if we can until the present agitation and pursuit is over. Can you hit upon such a place? If we can hide until nightfall again, we shall have every chance of escaping by some means. Do you understand me, Jack?"

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE ESCAPE.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK was slowly recovering from the shock that his mind had received, consequent upon the apparent failure of the means he had adoped to insure the escape of Claude from that gloomy home which held him in its stern embrace, and he could now, with something of a feeling of energy, listen and reply to Claude in that hour of their mutual danger.

"You are right, Claude," he said, "we have no resource but to hide, and there is no likelier place than that court-yard with the well in it, that in my plan is named as being never visited."

"Come on, then—come on; now, Jack, you are yourself again," said Claude, as he nimbly clasped Jack's arm. They now rapidly proceeded to that part of the prison which presented such a chance of concealment for them.

The great utility of the plan of Newgate, which Sixteen-string Jack had with so much difficulty obtained, was never more apparent than now, when probably, upon the promptness with which they could reach the place they had been speaking of, depended their safety from immediate arrest. Anything in the shape of incertitude, which would have led to wandering about the gloomy passages of the prison, would have been attended by more than danger, for capture would have amounted to a certainty. A very few minutes, however, with Jack's excellent local knowledge of the place, brought them to where they wished to be, and the door which led to the deserted place, and which, by its appearance, had evidently not been opened for a long time, was before them. The sounds of alarm from the other parts of the prison still came plainly upon their ears, although they felt that they had very considerably distanced the party of officers who, but a few moments before, had been so immediately in their vicinity.

"The great object in opening the door," said Jack, as he produced his skeleton keys, "will be to leave no marks of its having been meddled with."

"Certainly," said Claude; "but that, I fear, Jack, you will not be able to do; at all events, delay to us is death, so open it, I pray you, come what may, and that quickly, too. Are you calm and cool enough to do so, Jack?"

"Quite."

Jack soon proved nothing but the truth, for with great care he forced back the lock of the door, and then it yielded upon its rusty hinges with a dull creaking

sound, displacing no end of spiders' webs, for the long legged spinners had taken possession of that door, as though it had become their undoubted property, and no doubt were proportionally indignant at the manner in which they were now so rudely ejected. They both now paused for a few moments before passing that doorway, in order that they might come to some correct conclusion as to the whereabouts of their enemies. The sound of pursuit seemed to be dying away, rather than approaching, and it would appear as though, without the least suspicion of where the party was of whom they were in quest, the officers were ranging about the prison, seeking for some evidences of the mode of flight that had been adopted by Claude Duval. Indeed, it was then the fixed opinion of the officials that, by some means, he was out of Newgate. It was the hand-writing upon the wall which had produced almost as much sensation upon them as upon the monarch of old in his banquet halls.

"Close the door, Jack," said Claude. "Close the door. What a strange earthy smell there is in this place. Do you not remark it?"

"Yes. When the old Newgate that was burned down was built, this spot was a burying-ground within the walls. The architect of the new structure rejected it, and left it as it was. No doubt that strange smell partly proceeds from the former use to which the place was put, as well as from its confined and long disused situation."

Jack found rather more difficulty in locking the door again than he had found in opening it; but he did, however, succeed in doing so, after a few moments' striving, and then they both tried to pierce the darkness that was around them, in order to discover the precise localities of that spot, which might or might not be a place of safety for them.

"How very dark," said Claude.

"It is, indeed."

"I suppose, Jack, it would be imprudent to show a light here?"

"It would, Claude, for although there is no one here to see it, yet some reflected ray from our lantern, were we to light it, might find its way into some portion of the prison, and betray us. No, Claude, we must trust to our other senses here, if we cannot, amid the darkness, make that of seeing sufficiently available."

"Agreed, Jack; I think I can discern objects a little now."

"And I."

"A cloud or two, no doubt, has passed over the night sky, leaving it clearer than before, or else we are like the cats, getting so accustomed to the darkness that we can see in it almost as well as with a light."

"What do you see?"

"Some dark object about a dozen paces to the left, Jack."

"Oh, it is the old deserted well. It is described in my plan as an old fashioned cord and bucket well with a windlass, such as are fast disappearing even in the country places of England. It must be that which you see, Claude."

"I have no doubt about it. What is that?"

Suddenly one of the walls of the place in which they were had upon it a long streak of glittering light, which, after flickering for some few moments to and fro, disappeared, making, by the contrast that it had established, the darkness look much more profound than it had before been, as well as filling the minds of Jack and Claude with amazement to know whence it could have come. For the space of about a minute they both remained silent, and then Claude drawing close to Jack, said, in a cautious whisper—

"Danger!"

"Do you think so? Where did the light come from, Claude? Can you form any guess concerning it?"

"No, Jack, but I have a certainty. It came in from a wide crack at the top of yon door, through which we have just passed, and I have no sort of doubt but that our enemies are upon the other side of it."

"Ho! ho!"

"Hush! Creep forward with me, for we ought both to be convinced. Creep forward with me, and let us listen."

Jack did this, and in another moment he and Claude had laid their ears close to the door, when they plainly heard upon the other side the murmur of whispered conversation. What was said, however, was uttered with so much caution, that not one word of it could be distinctly heard; so that our adventurers could gather nothing that would suffice to let them know what amount of information their enemies had, or if it were, after all, only suspicion upon which they were proceeding. But in either case the danger was of the most imminent description, and required from them the most prompt action to meet it, and counteract it, if indeed that, under the circumstances, were at all possible. At all events, they were not induced to succumb to adversity.

"Jack!"

"Yes, Claude."

"What are they doing there? No good. Let us go down the well."

"Down the what?"

"Down the well, Jack. Now, listen to me: those fellows upon the other side are fumbling with the lock of the door in a manner that quite convinces me they have not got the right key. That circumstance will delay them for some time, but not for very long. During that time, you and I must do something, Jack, and I think you do not intend to be taken?"

"No, Claude, not while there is one breath, or above one, left in my body."

"Very well; then the well is our only resource, Jack. It may be that there is water enough to drown us or not. At all events, we can but try; possibly it may never strike the officers that we should seek such a place of shelter, and then we may save ourselves; but if they do think af it, I am of opinion it will require more cool courage than any of them possess to come down to look for us. What say you, Jack—do you agree with me or not?"

"I do agree with you, Claude. I will descend with you at once. Come on; we are in desperate circumstances, and desperate chances in the shape of remedies must be the order of the day. Come on. But yet one moment. I think I can, without the observation of those on the other side of the door, increase the difficulty of undoing it. You have a ring upon your finger, Claude?"

"Oh, yes! I did not think of that. Fall to, Jack."

Sixteen-string Jack took the ring which Claude handed to him, and violently inserted it into the keyhole of the door, where it would be an insurmountable obstacle to any key or picklock acting upon the wards of the lock. Nothing now but downright force could suffice to open that door. It was almost questionable whether the object of merely looking into that court-yard, with the very forlorn hope of discovering there Claude Duval, would be sufficient to induce the officers to take so much trouble.

Suddenly, however, the state of doubt was put an end to; for a voice cried out without any caution at all, "Break the lock off. We cannot stay here all night."

It was the voice of the governor himself, who, while he felt that he should be obliged to tell the sheriffs that he had searched everywhere in the prison, yet did not by any means relish the job of doing so, at such an hour especially.

Now that the governor had set the example of abandoning all caution, the officers followed it, and one said, "There is something in the lock, sir; nobody can open it."

"But it must be opened. Fetch a mallet and chisel, one of you. We must look everywhere, or I shall not be able to make my report, although I think he is fairly gone."

"Courage!" whispererd Claude to Jack; "our danger is not, after all, so great as I apprehended. Truly that announcement on the wall of my cell has been more implicitly believed than I should have supposed possible in such an atmosphere as this."

The court-yard in which they were was three-cornered. There was not throughout it the veriest shadow of a place of concealment besides the well, so

that if the door should really be forced open, of which there now seemed to be no doubt at all, the discovery of the fugitives became a positive certainty unless they were in the well, or the officers shut their eyes. Now the first of these conditions was probable enough, but the second by no means bore such an air, and, accordingly, Jack and Claude with stealthy steps made their way towards the well. They found, both by the feel and by observation in the faint night light, that the bucket was down in the well, and the cord all unwound from the windlass, conditions which they considered to be favourable, inasmuch as they could easily slide down by the cord to the depths below. It was certainly rather a nervous, uncomfortable thing to do, in the dark, too, and with such utter ignorance regarding the depth and construction of the place to which, upon a dependent cord, they were to make their way; but, as Claude said, truly the preponderance of evils was the other way, so he clutched the rope firmly, saying to Jack—

"I will descend first, and if there should be no possibility of reaching the bottom in consequence of the depth of water or otherwise, we must both keep to the rope until the officers have made the inspection of the court-yard."

"Very well, Claude; but let me go first."

"No, Jack, no. 'Tis for my sake you have come into such danger, when you might have remained in safety, and I shall take the first of such chances as these, at all events, upon myself. Say no more, Jack; I am resolved upon it, and here goes. Perhaps, after all, it is right enough, for the old well may be dry."

"Be careful, Claude, be careful—I implore you be careful."

"All's right," said Claude, as he flung himself from the edge of the wall by the cord, "all's right, Jack—good bye!"

The cord snapped in a moment, and down went Claude from before the eyes of the agonised Jack to the bottom of the well. It would be quite impossible for any language to do justice to the state of Jack's feelings at this moment. He saw Claude cast his feet off the edge of the wall with something of a shudder, as though a presentiment of what was about to occur had come at that moment over him. He had heard the old rotten rope make a crack, and then part its threads with a sudden snap; and he had seen Claude, the dear companion of his life, disappear to what surely could be nothing but certain death. Oh, who could paint the desolation of Jack's soul at that dreadful moment? Great griefs come with a stunning effect upon the mind, and so, for a few moments, Jack stood upon the spot he occupied as still as though he had been turned to stone. Then, with a deep groan, and giving up all hope or desire for safety for himself, he fell in a strange huddled-up position, with his head resting upon his hands, at the side of the well.

"Lost, lost, lost!" was all he could say.

Alas, poor Jack! and is this, indeed, the reward of all your romantic devotion to your friend—is this to be the melancholy end of all your cogitations—all your plans and projects, and vast exertions! Is Claude, whom you love, to vanish from you to death in such a way; and are you never again to look upon that face, or hear that voice call you friend? Alas, again we say, poor Jack! If all this be so, then, indeed, will the bitterness of death be past. Better for you had you remained unrestored to that troublous existence, which had passed away from you, before that man of much skill, and no honesty, had resusciated you to make you the victim you were for a time made.

"I will perish, too," cried Jack, rising, "I will spring down the well."

"Stop, Jack," said the well-known voice of Claude, in an anxious whisper; "mind what you are about; it is only about five feet deep, and quite dry, and a lot of straw at the bottom of it."

Jack's brain absolutely reeled at this most unexpected turn of fortune, and he had to hold by the framework of the old windlass to save himself from falling, while for the space of about half a minute he made sure that he should faint. All the blood seemed to have crowded round his heart.



THE PURSUIT AFTER CLAUDE AND JACK.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE SHERIFF.

CLAUDE, when he felt the rope of the old windlass cracking under his weight, certainly had made one desperate effort to reach again with his feet the brink of the well, but he failed in so doing, and at the moment that the last thread of the rope parted, he gave himself up for lost, and experienced all the mental agony inseparable from such a condition. The reason that, upon finding how much he was deceived as to the depth of the well, he had not upon the instant told Jack of

his safety, was simply that he was unable to do so. His nervous system had received a shock of no common severity, and the imagination for a few minutes so far got the better of reason and facts, that he lay upon the straw and hay, and rubbish, which was at the bottom of the shallow well, quite as incapable of movement as though he had fallen fifty feet instead of only five. It takes some time before a man can positively assure himself of safety after he has previously assured himself of something very much indeed the reverse. During the period, then, that it took Claude Duval to recover, poor Jack suffered all the mental agony to which we have alluded, without having the power to depict it in absolute words, and now that he, Claude, had spoken to him, Jack, it was his turn to be astonished at getting no answer, for Claude did not, at the moment, exactly think or contemplate that joy ties the tongue sometimes as effectually as any other sudden shock. At length he got alarmed.

"Jack," he said, "what is the matter with you? Why don't you speak?"

"Yes, Claude, yes," was all Jack could say.

"Oh, I understand," said Claude. "You had given me up, Jack?"

"I had, indeed."

"Oh, you should not have done that, Jack, I begin myself to think I have as many lives as a cat. I could not have fallen upon any feather-bed that would have been more soft, and really more comfortable to the bones, than the mass of straw and hay and other matters in this place. It is a puzzle to me, completely."

"So it is to me," said Jack. "But I care for nothing, now that I know you are alive, Claude. Oh, I shall never be able to tell you what I felt when I saw you go."

"And I, Jack, shall never be able to tell you what I felt when I felt myself going."

"No doubt, Claude, it must have been most horrible."

"Such a sensation once in a life is quite enough, or rather this, it is once too many."

"It is, Claude. But hark!"

As he spoke, they both heard distinctly the sound of hammering at the door leading to where they were, which was sufficiently suggestive of the fact of the arrival of the mallet and chisel, which the governor had sent for a short time before. It was pretty evident that the door would soon yield to the persuasive influence of the blows that were given to it by a vigorous hand.

"Now we are lost," said Jack.

"Not at all," said Claude,—"not at all."

"But what shall we do?"

"I will tell you. Come down here, by me, Jack. There is soft rubbish enough at the bottom of this place to cover us up most completely; and that is the only chance we have. The officers may be content with a very cursory observation of this place, in which event we are perfectly safe by covering ourselves up in the straw. Always recollect, Jack, that there is one thing in our favour, and that is, that they don't expect to find anything here at all, you know."

"I admit that, Claude," whispered Jack; "and I likewise see that what you advise is the only thing that can be done, so the sooner we do it the better. Mind yourself, Claude—here I am."

"All's right,—jump."

Down jumped Jack, and found indeed, as Claude had said, that the bottom of the well was same feet thick of hay and straw, although how it got there was quite a mystery to him, as well as to Claude. However, they were not disposed to waste precious time in conjectures respecting a matter which, let it have occurred how it might, was quite a subject for congratulation to them both.

"We must not be very particular," said Claude, "whether we are smothered or not, so long as we elude the officers; so come, Jack, let us burrow down in this straw and hay, as far as it will by any means allow us so to do. Hark! hark!"

"I hear," said Jack; "they have broken down the door at last, and will be in

the court-yard now before we can count four. Now, Claude, I think we shall do. How do you feel?—comfortable, I hope?"

"All the better for finding you in good spirits, Jack. I think we are as completely hidden as the babes in the wood, when the birds—so says the myth—covered them with alder leaves to get rid of them."

"Hush!—hush! They come, now—they come now! Do not speak or move again, for our lives' sakes."

They were now perfectly still. The hay and straw was about two feet above them, and, save that the surface had rather a tossed and tumbled appearance, no one would for a moment have suspected that any one was there. It was quite a pity that they had no means of righting the disordered surface of the rubbish that was above them. But it was not to be thought of, and in a few moments they were completely engaged by listening to the conversation of the officers and the governor, who all entered the yard in rather a tumultuous manner, several of them speaking together.

"Silence!—silence!" said the governor, "we shall do no good with all this noise. Hold up the lanterns."

Several lanterns were held up at arm's length, and they sufficed to shed sufficient light over the place to make every portion of it clearly visible, but yet sufficiently visible to prove that no one was there crouching in any corner for concealment. A pause ensued while the lanterns were thus held up.

"Oh, of course, there's no one here," said the governor; "how should there be?"

"Yes," said an officer, "it was all very well to come here, because we were going over the prison; but if I might presume to have an opinion, I should say that it's likely enough Claude Duval is on the western road by this time, and has cried "Stand and deliver!" to some one with a sufficiently heavy purse to make it worth his while."

"I don't know that," said a third, "how did he leave the prison, if he have left it? Show me his mode of leaving, and I'll be among the first to say good-bye to him, but I am not going exactly to take Duval's own word that he has left old Newgate so cleverly. Out of his cell he may and has got, but there's a fire as well as a frying-pan."

"Oh, very well, Mr. Long," said the governor; "we all know your tact in these things, that is your opinion is it? Very well, Mr. Long, as you think that Claude Duval is not out of Newgate——"

"Which is just what I do think," said Long, rather unceremoniously interrupting the Governor.

"Well, then, we will look in impossible places for him."

"The well, for instance, there," said Long.

Both Jack and Claude at these words gave themselves mentally up for lost. It seemed to them quite impossible now that anything could prevent a thorough investigation of the well. They dared not speak to each other, even in the faintest whisper, for fear of being overheard, but, with each a double barrelled pistol in their hands, they prepared themselves for the worst, with a fixed and thorough determination that they would neither of them be taken alive by the officers, who would so glory in their defeat. The light flashed from wall to wall of the old deserted court-yard, and when the officers surrounded the old well, they looked like a parcel of wild religionsts coming to celebrate some abstruse ceremony at that still hour, when no eye save their own and those of the Eternal could look upon their actions.

"I never was here before," said the governor, "although I have resided in Newgate now for five years. Is it really a well?"

"Yes," said Long, the officer. "I have heard speak of it. There was some underground communication between it and some vaults, it is said, that ultimately led out into a cellar in Newgate-market, and that was the reason bricks and dry rubbish were shot into it, until it was nearly filled up, they say. You see there's a lot of straw there now."

"And how came straw and hay there, I wonder?" said the governor. "It don't seem a likely place for such matters."

"Why, I have heard," said Long—who, to Claude Duval's apprehension, seemed to know a great deal too much—"I have been told, that many years ago, when the sheriffs visited Newgate, their horses were always turned into this yard, and that in one corner of it there was constantly kept a quantity of fodder, which may account for the hay and straw that from time to time have collected in the old well."

"Oh, very likely. Very likely," said the governor.

There was a pause of some few minutes' duration now, after which one of the officers said—

"Well, I don't see anything."

"Are you speaking to the well?" said Long.

A general laugh resulted, which somehow did not please the governor, who said rather tartly—

"Mr. Long, you seem to know or to suspect more than any one else does in this affair. Pray take your own course, and you will oblige me. If you make any discovery, of course it will render it very much to your advantage with the sheriffs, but you know all that, I dare say. You may get into the well if you like."

"No, thank you, sir."

"Then what do you want to do?"

"Ahem! only to try an experiment. I have got here my pistols, loaded with a pair of bullets each, and I only intend to fire them into the old well, that is all. It is a fancy of mine, in which I hope I may be indulged."

"Oh, certainly."

It was evident that Mr. Long had his suspicions, but nothing more, that Claude Duval might be hidden in the well, and he thought that if he had been there, and any one had proposed firing a pair of pistols into it, loaded with a couple of balls each, he would certainly have jumped out and given himself up. He was rather disappointed there, as all remained perfectly quiet as before he had made his speech.

"Very well," he said, in a loud voice. "I shall now proceed to fire into the well, just for the fun of the thing."

All remained perfectly still, and the governor gave a stout laugh, as much as to say—"Well, this, in my opinion, is rather absurd. I don't know what you expect."

Long was getting very much nettled at the grin that his brother officers had upon their faces at the great defeat of his cleverness. It was rather in anger than with any other feeling that he drew one his pistols from his pocket, and presented it down the old well.

"You are more fond of throwing away powder and ball than I should be," said the governor.

"I don't believe now," said Long, "that it was of any use, but it was worth the trial. However, as I said I would have a shot into the old well, I will do so, and here goes, come of it what may."

Bang! went the pistol. The officers hardly felt interested in the result of the shot, so convinced were they that Long's cunning for once had completely failed him; and when the smoke cleared away, and everything was as quiet as before, they were not at all surprised, nor in truth was he, for he considered that the threat ought to have been amply sufficient to disclose to light any one who had sought refuge down the old well. Mr. Long reasoned like many of his betters namely, upon what he himself would do under certain circumstances, and then concluded that that was just what everybody else would do. A very popular mistake that of yours, Mr. Long.

"Perhaps you are satisfied now, Mr. Long," said the governor, "that there is no one in the old well. Are you?"

"Yes, I am, sir," said Long; "but still I thought it was quite necessary to try

the experiment. I once got a prisoner out of a coffin by the same means: at the last moment, just as I was about to fire, up he jumped and gave up."

"But if the prisoner had not been in the coffin he could not have jumped up," said one of the officers, gravely,; "and in the present case nothing will convince me that Claude Duval is not at liberty. I feel as sure of that, as that we shall have him again some day. Everybody has his time, though, and his, I think, has not yet come, that's all.

"Well, come along, then," said the govenor; "I am tired of the night air if you are not."

It was evident to all that the governor was not only not sorry at the supposed escape of Claude Duval, but that he viewed with anything but eyes of favour any exertions that were made to capture him again. Why he did so was, after the scene that had taken place in court, at Markham Brereton's trial, sufficiently apparent. A few moments more and the court-yard, with its old well, was in total darkness and silence. It seemed, for a few minutes, as though it would be years again before a human voice would awaken the echoes of that old, deserted, and most melancholy place. But for all that, there were living, beating hearts close at hand, who would soon banish desolation and silence from that spot;—it was not quite sacred to the worms and beetles of Newgate.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

BARNES COMMON.

All was still as death itself for the space of about a quarter of an hour, and then a faint voice spoke. It was the voice of Sixteen-string Jack, but weak and trembling. Under any other circumstances Claude could scarcely have said that it was his old friend's tones that smote his ears.

"Claude, Claude, speak to me, if it be but one word, to tell me you are not hurt."

"No, Jack, no. Are you?"

"Thank—God—I——"

"Speak again—speak again. What would you say, Jack? You do not know how much you alarm me by breaking off in such a way. For Heaven's sake, Jack, let me hear your voice again!"

All was still. No voice responded to this earnest appeal of Claude's, and, quite unable longer to control his impatience to know what was the matter with Jack, he threw off the heap of rubbish that had so well concealed him in the well, and again cried, as he struggled to his feet—

"If you can speak to me, Jack, and it is only one word, it will be the most acceptable favour you could ever do me in all your life."

There was no answer. In perfect desperation Claude felt about him until his hand rested upon a face. It must be Jack's; but it was cold, and the damp of death appeared, to Claude's imagination, to be upon it.

"My poor friend," he cried, "my best, bravest, and most devoted Jack, they have killed thee, have they? Oh, how much rather would I that the bullet had found its way to my heart than to yours! I am more desolate without thee, Jack, than as if all the world had slipped from me. I scarcely know if my own Cicely would have been a greater loss to me than you are, my old and true-hearted comrade."

Claude had become regardless of his own safety now, and he sat upon the edge of the old well, and covering up his face with both his hands, he wept like a child. There came no sound upon his ears but the mournful echo of his own deep sobs. He felt how truly alone he was. But this gush of warm natural feeling was not

likely to last long with such a man as Claude Duval. After the first effort of grief for his old friend, indignation against those who had taken his life became the uppermost feeling in his mind.

"Wait awhile, Mr. Long," he said; "wait awhile. You and I will meet again in this world yet, when I shall be able to pay you for your wonderful cleverness in firing into the well, and the payment shall be of a character that I doubt not you will consider to be much more than ample."

These thoughts of avenging Jack's death recovered Claude from the deep dejection into which he had fallen, and he soon set about taking active steps for placing himself in a very different position to what he then was. First of all, though, he determined upon taking a last look at the face of Jack, and for this purpose he took from his pocket some phosphorus matches and prepared a light, by the aid of which he stooped down into the well and removed the straw and other rubbish from off Jack. His first sight of his old friend horrified him, for blood was upon his face.

"Oh! Jack, Jack!" he said, "hear me, thou good spirit, and I will swear——"

"Claude," said Jack, "is it really you?"

Had a thunderbolt suddenly fallen at Claude's feet, he could not have been more thoroughly astounded than at this most unexpected incident. So firm had been his persuasion, he knew not why, that Jack was dead, that he had never thought of the possibility of his only being in a state of syncope or swoon; but now that truth, for a truth it was, flashed across his mind in a moment.

"He lives! he lives!" said Claude. "Oh, yes! he lives! Speak again, Jack!"

"Where are we?"

"In the deserted well in the old court-yard of Newgate. But tell me, where are you hurt, Jack, and how do you feel?"

"Faint! faint!"

"And I cannot aid you—not even a drop of water."

"There's a small flask of brandy in my left-hand pocket, Claude. The rascal hit me somewhere in the shoulder, and pain, or loss of blood, made me faint away, I think. Oh, I remember it all now."

"Do you?"

"Yes, yes! Oh! Claude, we have much to do—I shall now only encumber you, and so, Claude—so you must now make up your mind to leave me."

"If I do, may I be d—d."

"Hush! hush!—not so loud. The brandy has revived me, Claude. If you could manage to tie a handkerchief or two round my wound, I really think I might move. But be careful of the matches, Claude. Here is the lantern; it will be better, I think."

Claude lit another phosphorus match, and by its light he saw the small lantern, which he soon ignited; so that he was able to throw a good ray of illumination upon Jack, as he now sat half up in the well, with his hand upon his wounded shoulder.

"Courage, courage!" said Claude. "You will do well yet, Jack. Don't you think, now, that the worst danger is really over?"

"I hope so, Claude."

"Then—then, I think, by making this one handkerchief up into a kind of ball and binding it tightly down over your wound with the other, that I shall stop the bleeding for you. How do you feel, Jack?"

"Much better—much better. But, Claude, you must make me one promise."

"A hundred, if you like. What is it?"

"If I faint again at any moment which is critical as regards your escape, you must promise that you will not let me be an impediment, Claude."

"Oh, Jack—Jack!"

"What is the matter, Claude?"

"Nothing, only I find that we are not quite so well acquainted with each other as we ought to be—that's all, Jack; but say no more. There, you can stand very well, and you have, I see, the use of both your arms, notwithstanding the wound

in your shoulder; all's right. Do you think you can really climb a rope yet? Oh, yes—you smile. Come, that's a good sign, at all events, Jack. Now lean upon me, old friend, and out we go from Newgate. Why, this affair will be spoken of yet, and the way Claude Duval and his friend Jack escaped from Newgate will form many a comment. Come, come, all's right. Why, you are as well as ever, now!"

"Nearly, Claude; but we have much to do yet, you know."

"Of course, we are not dead, and in this world, Jack, there is always something to do."

After Jack had walked a little, and taken another dip at the brandy, he felt so much better, that he got quite in good spirits, and said—

"Now, Claude, we must pass the turnkey, who was frightened at my appearance before. Most likely he is alone again now, as the alarm has subsided, and I am quite convinced that that will be a safer course than making any attempt by the front entrance, although a man is on the look-out whose senses are a little shattered."

"I think so too, Jack. Let us proceed at once; this state of suspense is worse than anything. I will follow you, but not so closely as to be seen."

They easily made their way now through the various doors which before they had passed, and when they were tolerably near the narrow stone vaulted passage, in which the turnkey sat, Jack thought of a plan of increasing the supernatural character of his appearance, which Claude, when he saw the effect, admitted did so considerably, and yet it was very simple. It merely consisted in placing the small lantern they had at the back of Jack's neck, so that while it, as the source of the light, was comepletely hidden, the effect produced was as though he were walking in a mysterious kind of halo of light emanating from himself in faint rays all round him. Jack adopted, too, a solemn gliding movement, and thus slowly advanced. Now, the terrified turnkey had not left his post, but he had got another man to stay with him, and they were both sitting close together, whispering and talking quite mysteriously about all the well-authenticated ghost-stories they had ever heard in all their lives from time to time—a theme certainly not over well adapted to calm their fears. They had just got into the thick of such an ill-timed conversation, when the turnkey glanced in the direction of the passage over his comrade's head, and his eyes dilated to an enormous extent.

"What's the matter?" said the man.

"Oh! oh! oh!"

The man jumped up and looked behind him, for his back had been turned towards the passage, and there, sure enough, to his horror, he saw a figure gliding towards him, lighted by no seemingly earthly light. Indeed, to his terrified apprehension, the figure seemed to move in a strange and awful kind of luminous cloud. Terror for a few brief moments seemed to choke his utterance, as well as to freeze up all capacity to fly. He stood like one transfixed by some magic spell, and slowly on came Jack. It was by a frightful effort that the man at length uttered a shriek, and broke the fascination of the spell that bound him. He then made a rush, in which he upset his comrade, nor stopped until he had darted down a cross passage, and disappeared. As for the turnkey himself, he lay upon the floor without sense or motion. All was accomplished that fear could accomplish, and Jack turned, and beckoned to Claude, who was considerably in the rear, to come on. This Claude was not slow in doing, and in one minute more, the barrier which they had considered to be the most formidable obstacle to them was safely passed.

"We are saved!" said Jack.

"Nay, nay," said Claude, "be not over sanguine. The walls of Newgate yet encompass us. Do not say we are saved yet."

"On, on!"

Jack hurried forward, and to his great joy, he found as he reached them, that his ropes had not been discovered by the authorities of Newgate. If they could get into the attic from where he had came, all would now be well.

"Claude," he said, "you will be upon the road again in a few hours."

"Think you so? Where is my gallant horse? Alas, I shall miss it, indeed!"

"You know the cottage on Barnes Common, where we have had shelter more than once?"

"Well, well?"

"There, then, is your horse, and it is there that I wish you to got at once, as soon as we are free of Newgate. Come on—climb, Claude, climb the rope, and I will follow you quickly."

"No, Jack, you are weak from your wounds, and I have made up my mind that you shall go first when safety is before and danger behind. It is of no use your expostulating with me, Jack. Follow you now I will, or go not at all."

Jack knew too well the determined character of Claude, when he spoke as he now did, to attempt to argue the point with him, so, as time was precious, he ascended the rope first. Claude followed him closely. They met with no obstruction, and reached the walls of the prison, exactly opposite to Jack's window, in safety.

"Save yourself," said Jack, "I faint again. The handkerchief has fallen from the wound, and I—I bleed—I fear to death."

"No—no."

He fell at Claude's feet insensible.

It took Claude but one moment's thought, and then a moment's action, to remedy this disaster. Lifting Jack in his arms, he placed him upon his back, and tied his hands together round his (Claude's) neck, and then he launched himself upon the rope. It vibrated and creaked beneath the double weight fearfully. But the passage was short, and in the space of half a minute, Claude, with his burthen, rolled through the attic window on to the floor.

"There are the cats again," said a voice; "I thought they'd come. Hist! hist! Oh, drat you, I say! Hist! hist!"

CHAPTER LXXIV.

HUE AND CRY.

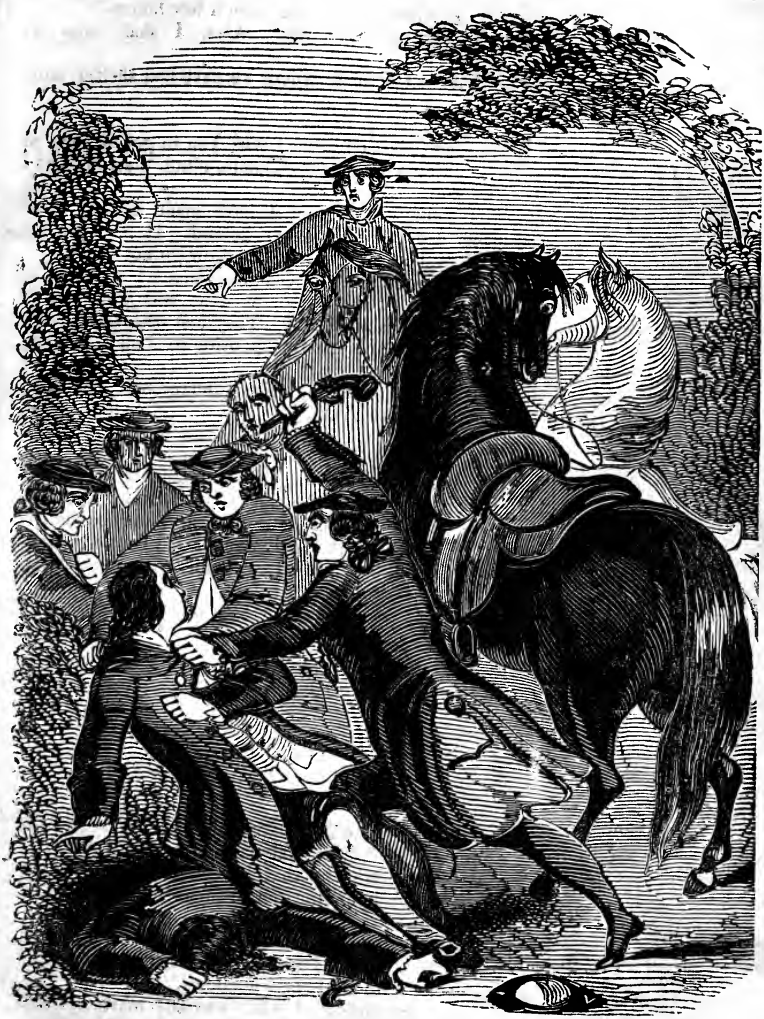
CLAUDE heard these odd sounds with some degree of alarm, for Jack had told him that the attic window was closed, and quite untenanted, except by himself. The most profound darkness was in the attic, so that he could see nothing, and the only course he could bring to bear upon the whole affair now was that of remaining silent.

"Drat the cats!" said the voice again, which was that of a female; "drat the cats, I say! Who is to get a wink of sleep, I wonder? I wish some people, when they go out, would be so good as to shut their windows."

Claude now began to have an apprehension of what was the matter, and he went to the attic door in order to try if it were really quite fast. It was so.

"So far, so good," he said. "And now, Jack, we must not remain long in this place; but all will depend upon the capacity you have to move about."

He soon lit a match, and, by its flickering glare, he saw a candle ready for lighting upon a table, and in a moment the attic was sufficiently illumined for Claude to see well about him. He carefully closed the curtain over the window, and again satisfied himself that the door was fast. Then he raised Jach from the floor, and placed him upon the bed that was in one corner. A very superficial examination of Jack's condition sufficed to let Claude see that the bandages had come off his wound, and that it had again bled freely, which, no doubt, had been the immediate cause of his fainting; but now Claude was in a better condition to apply such surgical knowledge as he possessed to Jack's case. In the course of



THE CAPTURE OF SIXTEEN STRING JACK.

ten minutes, he had successfully again stopped the bleeding, and bound up the wound in such a way that nothing but the very roughest usage indeed could dislodge it. He then dashed cold water in Jack's face, and soon had the pleasure of seeing him open his eyes, and look about him.

"Newgate?" said Jack.

"No, the attic," said Claude. "All's right."

"Oh God! can it be?"

"It is, Jack. Make yourself comfortable now, old friend. We have done

what so many have tried to do and failed—escaped from Newgate, and in a manner, too, that will be remembered."

"Yes, Claude, those words that you wrote upon the wall of your cell were prophetic."

"They were. But now comes the most important question of all, Jack. Do you feel yet strong enough to move?"

"Oh, yes, yes. I am convinced the ball from Long's pistol went quite through my shoulder, breaking no bones, for a wonder; so I shall soon be better. But, Claude, the safest and the best course in the world would be to leave me here."

"No, it would not, Jack, for then I should have to stay with you. By some means or other, I will get you to the cottage at Barnes. There I shall have no objection to leave you, because there I know you will be kindly treated, for your own sake as well as for mine. Now don't say a word about it, Jack. It shall be so. Can you walk?"

"Oh, yes, yes,"

He rose from the little bed, but, to his great concern, Claude saw that he reeled a little in his gait; and there was no mistaking the fact, from the expression of his face, that he was in very great pain, although he would not vex Claude by owning that such were the case. But still, what could be done? There was really no help for it. Leave that place they must, and that too immediately, for by the morning, no doubt, all the particulars and mode of the escape from Newgate would be known, and then they would be caught in the attic, like rats in a hole. Claude sat upon the side of the bed in deep thought. A hackney coach could easily be got to take them to Barnes, but then, by its means, nothing would be easier, when the hue-and-cry was raised upon the morrow, to learn the route they had taken; so that would not do. To be sure, Claude might take a coach, and then, when they got out of town a little way, dispose of the coachman, and drive the vehicle himself the rest of the distance. But that was what he did not like to do. It was making war against the poor, and that he had not stooped to yet. But still, something must be done, and that quickly too, for the morning was coming on apace. He started from his thoughtful position by the side of the bed, and said—

"Jack, we must trust to good fortune in this matter entirely. We must go into the streets at once, and see what fortune will do for us in the way of providing some vehicle for conveying us to Barnes. Come, lean upon me. This atmosphere is full of danger."

Jack suppressed carefully whatever feelings of pain and weakness he might have; and, assisted by Claude, he managed to descend the stairs pretty well. They met with no sort of obstruction, for, with the exception of the old woman who had given utterance to such anathemas against the cats, there was no one but themselves stirring in the house at that hour. Claude carefully removed the fastenings from the street-door, and in another moment they both stood in the street, and felt the cool morning air blowing upon their faces. It was a grateful feeling to both of them, for, to their perceptions, although not many feet distant, the air within the prison had a very different flavour to the air without; and this was not altogether fancy.

"What's that?" said Jack, as a carriage of the most gaudy description suddenly flashed by them, and was soon lost in the dim distance at the farther end of the street.

Before Claude could make any reply, another vehicle passed, and then another.

"I can understand what this means," said Claude: "a civic entertainment has taken place, and the mirth and the feeding have been practised until this hour. The guests are returning, you see, Jack."

"That's it, no doubt," said Jack. "Ah, Claude, one of those equipages would soon take us to Barnes."

"Indeed, yes, Jack; but they would rather condescend to carry us to Newgate. But come this way, Jack. I think we are safer in a crowd and bustle, than in the lonely solitude of this place; and if we can get to the river-side by Southwark, who

knows but I may get hold of a boat? I shall not be very scrupulous, Jack, in borrowing one for this occasion."

"It is a good thought, Claude."

Jack leant upon Claude's arm, and they proceeded together along Newgate-street to Cheapside. As they went they met more and more evidence of the fact that the night had been devoted to a civic feast, for carriages were dashing about, and now and then some gorgeously appareled footman with links in his hand crossed the roadway, jesting and laughing. By the time our hero got to King-street, he found that at Guildhall the entertainment had taken place. We say had, for there were unmistakable evidences that it was breaking up.

"Sir Thomas Grampus's carriage!" roared one. "Way for the sheriff. Links, here—links. Constables! Clear the way for my Lord Mayor!"

The trampling of horses feet and the flaring of links, made up a scene of great confusion, and in the midst of it a footman laid hold of Claude by the arm, and said—

"*Fallow*—a—a—hold them *osses eds*, a—a—while *oi* look for me *leday*—*oi*—a—a—*fallow*."

"Certainly, sir," said Claude. "Anything else?"

A splendid carriage was close to the footway, and a pair of greys were stamping in their impatience to be gone. The coachman was refreshing the inward man at a public-house close at hand, not expecting to be wanted quite so soon, and the footman suddenly found it his duty to go and escort his lady, whoever she was, to the carriage, since, from the crowd and rush of the vehicles, the carriage could not be brought to her. Our private information informs us that this was the carriage of the Lord Mayor's chaplain, as greasy a hypocrite as chaplains usually are, and that his lady was one of those sweet specimens of female humanity, who modestly imagine that the world was specially made for them and their convenience. After this, the sympathies of our readers will not be violently excited if some little inconvenience falls to the lot of the chaplain and his amiable lady. Jack looked up at the box of the carriage, and so did Claude. It was empty. The footman had darted away with a link in his hand, never doubting for a moment but that the person he had ordered so to do would mind the carriage until the fat coachman could bustle out of the public-house.

"Jack," said Claude.

"Yes. Yes."

"Get in."

"What? in—the—the—carriage, do you mean, Claude? Good God! don't you think that such a step as that would be rather—too—too—bold?"

"Get in."

Claude clambered up to the box and seized the reins—Jack opened the door of the carriage, and at once dashed in among its soft luxurious cushions. One touch to the impatient greys, and away they dashed at a smart trot down Cheapside. Claude drove as coolly as possible, and Jack lay at the bottom of the carriage, scarcely sensible in his fright of where he really was. The rapidity and daring boldness with which this action was done constituted its safety. The least appearance of timidity or irresolution would have ruined all, but Claude was so self-possessed, that nobody thought of looking to see if he had livery on or not. If they had looked for that insignia of his genuineness, in a little while they would have been deceived, for there was a large great coat, with about a quire of capes, upon the box, which he stopped at the corner of Newgate-street to put on. Then off he dashed again at a rattling pace. Truly, Claude did not spare the parson's greys. He dashed down Snow Hill, and then he began to ask himself which would be the best way to go to Barnes, for thither he determined to give the horses a trot. Hammersmith Bridge had not then been thought of, but old Battersea Bridge was there, and Claude thought that his best plan would be to drive either on to that, or cross old Westminster, and so take his way to Barnes. He trotted down the Strand while he was considering, and as he passed Northumberland-house, he was for the moment much startled by feeling a touch

upon his arm. Upon starting half round, he found it was Jack, at the front window of the carriage.

"Oh, Claude, is it possible?" said Jack. "Can it really be that you have got clear off with the carriage?"

"It looks like it," said Claude.

"And it was done for my sake?"

"Not much merit in that, Jack. How much have you done for my sake? But tell me, shall we go by Westminster to Barnes, or by Battersea?"

"Westminster, Claude. You will excite less attention.

"Be it so then. Now, Jack, you sit down gently and comfortably, and don't make yourself at all uneasy. All will be well. No one will think of interfering with us now, and if they did, I think they would repent of it in a short time."

Having determined now his route, Claude put the horses to better speed, and they went on with the carriage as though it had been a child's cart behind them. The old bridge of Westminster—old then—was passed over, and the vehicle made its way into that den of houses that flank the river upon the Surrey side, where squalid poverty and brazen vice seem to be ever alike at home. Claude would have liked much to know how Jack was, but while they were in the vicinage of houses he did not like to pause and descend from the box, so he drove on until gradually the open country began to show itself. The fresh morning air brought out the fragrance of flowers, and although a chilly dew was upon all things, there was an invigorating feel in the atmosphere, which to Claude, after his incarceration in Newgate, was specially delightful. There was not the least appearance of pursuit, and indeed there can be no doubt but that, as good fortune would have it, Claude was out of sight with the chaplain's carriage before it was missed, and its disappearance was involved in perfect mystery. We need not trace the whole of Claude's route to Barnes: suffice it to say, that when he got within a mile of the place of his destination, he stopped the horses and alighted.

"Jack," he said, "how are you now?"

"Much better," was the cheering response. "I have scarcely felt the fatigue of the journey at all, Claude, since we got off the stones."

"That is all right. Now, can you walk a mile, think you?"

"Two, Claude, if needs be."

"That's right. I do not wish to bring this vehicle so near to Barnes, that it shall become a sign-post to direct people where we are; so I propose leaving it close at hand here, and giving the horses their liberty. Here are plenty of fine meadows for them to graze in, and they will enjoy themselves exceedingly. Hold fast a moment, Jack, where you are."

Claude drove the carriage into a road-side field, and then some distance along behind a tall hedge and broad ditch. He then once more alighted, and having taken the horses out, he freed them of all harness, and sent them capering away by giving each a touch with the whip. He then, by the assistance of Jack, finally upset the carriage into the ditch, where it lay, with so little of it visible, that it could not be seen from the road, and so was likely, for some time at least, to escape any observation.

"Now for our friend at Barnes!" cried Claude. "Lean upon me, Jack, and put the best foot foremost, for the daylight, you see, has already made some progress, and the sooner we now get housed the better it will be for both of us."

Scarcely had these words passed Claude's lips, when he heard the distant sound of horses' feet upon the road behind him. Some one was evidently coming on at a quick rate.

"An enemy?" said Jack, inquiringly.

"We shall soon see. Walk slow, Jack, I have the pistol you gave me all ready, but I may as well look to the priming, at all events."

Jack looked back as Claude examined the priming of his pistol; but an exclamation from Jack interrupted him.

"Good God, Claude, who do you think that is?"

"Eh?—Who?"

"Long, the officer; I know him well by sight—I should know him among a thousand. 'Tis he—'tis he, Claude; but what, in the name of all that's horrible, brought him down this road?"

"Information of some sort, you may depend, Jack. But we are one too many for him. Ah! there are three other horsemen behind him. To the hedge, Jack, to the hedge. Don't expose yourself to the officers. This way! this way!"

Claude seized Jack by the arm, and they both darted through the hedge. It would appear, however, that Long, the officer, who rode a little in advance of three men whom he had with him, had seen the fugitives, for he suddenly cried out—

"Come on, and seize that man who has just crept through the hedge. Take him dead or alive. He may be our man. Quick! quick!"

These words, of dire import as they were, came plainly enough to the ears of Claude and Jack, and they now saw nothing before them but to sell their lives as dearly as possible. But Mr. Long, after coming up to within about twenty paces of the hedge, somehow or other hung back. How strange and true it is that all great talkers are cowards!

"Come on! come on!" he said to the men he had with him, "come on, my brave fellows. You shall be well rewarded, I will take care of that. Come on now, at once; don't be afraid!"

"We ain't afraid," said one of the men in a loud voice, laying an emphasis on the "we." "We ain't afraid, Mr. Long, I assure you."

Stung by this reproach, Long did approach nearer to the hedge, and taking a pistol from the holster of his saddle, he said—

"By all that's sacred I will fire into the hedge if you don't come out directly, whoever you are!"

Claude Duval had in his hand the pistol that Jack had given him, and he took a careful aim at Long. He whispered to Jack—

"This fellow has had one shot at us, and it is fairly my turn now."

On the instant, then, he pulled the trigger, and when the smoke cleared away, the saddle of Long's horse was empty, and that voracious and notable officer lay upon the ground, with a small hole in his forehead that was quite sufficient to let out his modicum of life. The other men rode up instantly.

"Claude," said Jack, "if you don't be still and let me have my own way now, I swear to you, by the memory of all our friendship, if you are taken, I will blow my own brains out."

"Good God! what do you mean?"

"You shall see in a moment, Claude, what I mean," said Jack. "See, there are no less than seven men on horseback!"

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE RESCUE.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK was quite right. There were now upon the spot, immediately in front of the hedge, no less than seven mounted men, for more followed hard upon the track of the three who had been with Long. Resistance was madness, but yet Claude was not prepared for what Jack was really about to do.

"Promise me, Claude," said Jack.

"But——"

"Then here goes—good bye!"

Jack placed the muzzle of the pistol in his mouth, and Claude had just time to clasp his hand and say—"I promise anything, Jack."

"Good. Remain quiet here, then, Claude, and remember that you have now

passed your word, which to me you never yet broke. We may meet again some day. God bless you."

Before, then, Claude could say another word, or move a finger to prevent him, Jack burst out of the hedge in front of the horsemen, and cried in a loud voice—

"Further resistance is useless against so many—I give myself up."

The men had pistols in their hands, and at sight of Jack, one in his hurry fired, but the bullet went wide of its mark, and then two of the others flung themselves off their steeds, and took hold of their prisoner roughly.

"I am wounded," said Jack.

"Who are you?" cried one, "who are you? Are you Claude Duval, you vagabond?"

"I am no vagabond; I wonder that you should not see at once that I don't belong to your family; you must be a fool."

"I'll fool you," said the fellow, and he raised his hand to strike Jack, but one of his comrades interposed, saying, in an indignant voice—

"For shame, Atkins—for shame! What do you mean by behaving to a man in that way? He is our prisoner. Surely seven of us are enough to take care of him without any ill-usage as well. Just do strike him, and I'll have you off your horse before you know where you are."

Atkins growled out something that was unintelligible, but he lowered his hand without striking Jack, and some of the others soon tied a cord round Jack's arms, and they looked at Long, who, if he had been looked at for an age, could not have returned the compliment.

"You have done for him," said one of the men to Jack.

"This wound in my shoulder came from his hand," replied Jack.

"Why, he did not fire."

"Not here, but he did in Newgate."

"Then you are Claude Duval! Comrades, we have recaptured Claude Duval, that the sheriff offered £200 reward for. Not a bad morning's work. Let's sling the dead body of Long across one horse, and put our prisoner on another. The sooner we now get to London the better."

"Yes," said another, "but I vote that we leave the body at the first public-house we come to. There will be an inquest on it, of course."

"Very well—come on."

Jack was placed upon a horse behind one of the officers, and to their great surprise he said, with an air of fervour that could not but be sincere, as they trotted off—

"Thank God!"

"What for?" said the officer.

"No matter," replied Jack. "I am very well pleased, that's all, and so I may thank God, I suppose, and give no offence to any one?"

"Oh, none in the least, only it's very odd. Make speed, friends—all's right; who so welcome as we to-day at the gate of old Newgate, I should like to know? Ha! ha!"

Off they went, and in two minutes the clatter of their horses' hoofs had died away into but an indistinct murmur in the distance. Claude Duval rose up, and bursting through the hedge, stood in the centre of the road, shading his eyes with his hands, and trying to catch a last glance of that dear friend who for him had made so noble a sacrifice, but a turn of the road completely hid him from sight.

"Gone!" said Claude.

Then a choking sensation in his throat seemed to prevent him from uttering another word for some minutes, during which he did not move from the spot. Suddenly, then, he dashed his hand across his eyes, and, without saying a word, started off in the direction of Barnes. He had not walked far, before he saw, some short distance to his left, a hillock, which was of sufficient height to command a view of the surrounding country for a considerable distance. Claude made a leap

over a hedge, and then ran towards it. He reached its summit, and fancied he saw the horsemen who were conveying Jack to prison some miles off.

"And do you know as yet so little of me, Jack," he said, "as to suppose that I would allow you to make this sacrifice for me, and then desert you? No—no—no! May heaven at my utmost need desert me if I do. I will save you, Jack, yet."

He slowly descended the hill, and at a rapid pace pursued his route. He had not proceeded far when he heard the neigh of a horse behind him; he thought it as well not to hurry himself, for that would excite suspicion, nor would he look round except very cautiously to see who the horseman was; but it was little he could see of him, except that he was enveloped in a large cloak, and rode a powerful looking bay horse. What was his surprise, however, to hear a voice say—

"Is it indeed you, Claude Duval?"

Claude turned on the instant to make what defence he could; for the idea that, like Ishmael, the hands of all men were against him, and his hand against all men, was strong within him; and yet had he been in a calmer frame of mind, he would then have detected more melancholy in the stranger's voice than enmity.

"Ah! it is indeed you," said the stranger, and dropping the cloak from before his face, he disclosed to Claude the well-known features of Markham Brereton.

"Is this possible," said Claude, "or do I dream?"

"This is do dream," said Brereton; "and I can easily account for my presence here. I was released from Newgate, as you are probably aware, by an order from the Secretary of State, and since then I have been unwearied in my exertions to try to procure a remission of your sentence. It was all in vain; and you may judge of my joy when the rumour of your escape reached my ears two hours ago."

"But how came you upon this road?"

"I have seen Cicely, and she confided to me the fact that you had an interest somewhere in this direction; my errand is to do you what service I can. If you want money, here is my purse; if you want a horse, take this one; if you want a friend, look upon me, and only say what I can, by any possible exertions, do for you?"

"This from you?" said Claude.

"Yes; and why not?"

"I thought I had removed your anxiety by yoking your sister's fortunes to mine. I thought that you would never be able to tolerate the highwayman."

"Do not speak of that. Did you not come forward and save me from the base machinations of Tom Brereton, my own near relation, and that, too, at the imminent hazard of your own life? Can I do otherwise now than hold out my hand to you in true friendship and call you brother?"

Claude clasped the extended hand of Markham.—"I—I—only wish," he said, much affected, "I only wish I were not what I am. But it is now a vain regret."

"Not wholly."

"What mean you? I have gone too far in my present career ever to embrace another."

"Nay, in some other land you may be blessed by peace. I have means—how I came by them will be the subject of another conversation with you. But why will you not leave England with Cicely and me, and in some other country go by a different name from that which you have here?"

"If I could."

"You surely can. The coast may be easily gained; I have a friend at Southampton who will give you a shelter, if you can get there, until Cicely and I join you, and from that port nothing will be more easy than to get to the continent. Only say that you will attempt it, and I shall be happier than I have been for many a long day."

"Listen to me," said Claude. "I have a story to tell you, and then you will be better able to jude of the value of the advice you give me. Just listen to the story of my escape, and then tell me what you would do."

Markham Brereton was profoundly silent while Claude, having one arm upon the saddle of his steed, related to him all the various particulars of his escape from Newgate, by the aid of Jack, and the subsequent conduct of Jack when he was upon the verge of a second captivity.

"Now," he said "ought I to desert Sixteen-string Jack?"

"No," said Markham Brereton, "it would be base."

"I knew you would say that. It would be base indeed. So, you see, I am yet doomed to remain and fulfil my destiny here in England. If Jack can be rescued from his present position and taken with us, I will gladly embrace your proposition, but I cannot go without him. The ties that bind me to him are by far too strong for any feelings of self-advantage to break asunder."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"At the cottage at Barnes, to which I am now bound, I shall find ample means of disguising myself, and when I have done so, I shall proceed to London to see what can be done for Jack. I hope for the best, and fear the worst."

"Shall I accompany you?"

"No. Do not; that would be an ill-judged step. Your being with me might provoke suspicion, but by myself I shall get on very well. Go home again, and if you remain with Cicely, and she is where I left her, expect me in the course of a few hours."

"I will. I have that abundant faith in your tact and your resources, that what you dictate as best to be done, under such circumstances as the present, I am inclined to believe is the best. Come to us as soon as you can, and we will see what can be done."

"Depend upon me," said Claude. "I don't think I shall have any real difficulty now. The only party, as you find, who had taken this road after me, is disposed of. I may be in London sooner than you expect. Remember me to Cicely, and think of me as kindly as you can yourself."

Claude waved his hand, and giving one of his fascinating smiles to Markham, he walked rapidly on.

"Alas!" said Markham Brereton, as he turned his horse's head towards London, "what might not that man have been under different circumstances? How truly are we the slaves of past actions. Claude Duval will go down to posterity as a robber, while men who are far worse robbers than he would ever dream of being, are venerated as bishops, or respected as ministers of state."

Markham Brereton was quite right. Truly, some great day is wanted, upon which folks will find their level, and if such a day should ever really dawn, how many a piece of gilt iniquity will shrink into the nothingness of its natural individuality! We shall see—perhaps!

* * * * * * *

It was about two o'clock upon that day, that Markham Brereton and Cicely were sitting together in a small, but comfortable room, when the servant of the house came, and said—

"If you please, sir, a Mr. Lee wants to see you."

"Mr. Lee?"

"Yes, sir. Oh, he 's coming up stairs. This is the gentleman."

A tallish, slim, gentlemanly-looking man, with light hair and a sandy moustache, scrupulously dressed, entered the room, and in a slightly foreign accent, but very indifferent English, said—

"May I have the honour of seeing Mr. Brereton?"

"Yes, sir, my name is Brereton."

Both Cicely and Markham were rather surprised at the stranger's manners. He walked to the door, which had been closed by the servant, and opening it a short distance, he listened attentively; then closing it again, he advanced and said—

"Is it possible that my disguise is so perfect, that even you do not know me, Cicely?"

"Claude, Claude!" she cried, "it is our own Claude!"

"Hush! hush! Walls have ears. Hush, dear one, be calm—the slightest

hint of who I am might be fatal. Ah, Cicely, at times I doubted if I should ever have the joy again of seeing you, but now to hold you in my arms is a rich recompense for all I have suffered." Cicely hung on his bosom weeping; but she felt the necessity there was for composure, and managed to put on a calmness



"Spy!" said Claude. "Fool as well as knave! What made you set your life upon such a cast?"
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she was far from feeling. Markham congratulated Claude upon the admirable manner in which he had disguised himself, and then Claude asked for May.

"She is from home," replied Cicely, "but will soon be here. Oh, Claude, you will stay with us now. Say you will, and you will likewise do what Markham has advised you about leaving England. Say you will."

"When Jack is safe and free to go with us, Cicely, then speak to me of such a plan with a certainty of receiving my hearty concurrence with it."

"Is there any news of Jack, Mr. Brereton?"

"None whatever."

"What, have they not yet brought him to town?"

"Not that I know of. I have made the most careful inquiries, and heard nothing of him. It is to me quite inexplicable; I cannot make it out, and, indeed, I can come but to one conclusion, which is, that something serious has happened upon the road."

"Then I must go," said Claude, as he rose; "I must go and ascertain what it is. I do not think that Jack, in his disabled condition, could make, with any degree of success, an attempt to escape; and if he really has got away, it is by some accident, such as might not happen once in a hundred years; nevertheless I must inquire."

"Oh, Claude, do not go into danger," said Cicely.

"Danger! Is not the very atmosphere I breathe full of danger to me? Am I not surrounded by dangers in every shape and way? Who shall say that if I go going east, west, north, or south, I run into the most dangers? No, Cicely, I do not fancy that I am running a greater risk by going to see after the fate of Jack than by staying here. I will return as soon as possible, you may depend. My horse is at a friend's house."

"Be careful; return you must, Claude," said Markham.

"Oh, I can trust the 'family,' as we call them; all is right upon that score; and mind, if anything happen to me, always make inquiries of Joe at the 'Saddle Bags,' in Picket Street until the first of next month. Once a month I change my confidences."

"Your life is a strange one," said Markham.

"It is, indeed, one made up of all strange chances; but all must end somewhere. Farewell, Cicely; you need not weep, for you will see me again, I think, before the hour of midnight. Adieu!"

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE ROSE INN.

We return to Sixteen-string Jack. The wound in his shoulder was really much more serious than Jack would even admit to Claude. The pistol bullet had not, as Jack had supposed, made itself a passage and escaped. On the contrary, it still rankled in the wound. Moreover, if any set of circumstances more than another could have tended to the aggravations of a wound, they would be the mental and physical exertions which Jack had gone through since the time of receiving the hurt. A certain feeling that if he gave way he should become a serious encumbrance to Claude, had hitherto kept him up. It is truly astonishing how mind will triumph over matter; but now that he was in the hands of the officers—and, oh! joy of joys to him!—now that he had fairly succeeded in giving Claude another, and a fairer chance than ever of escape—Jack no longer felt the same necessity that he had before felt for battling against his own sensations. A faintness came over him, and a perceptible shudder passed across his limbs.

"What's the matter?" said the officer, on whose horse he was.

Jack could not answer. The world seemed to be slipping from him, and then all consciousness was gone.

"Holloa! stop, stop!" said the officer to his comrades.

"What is it now?"

"I do believe he is dead."

"Dead?" they all cried; "oh, no, not that. Who knows but there might be some cavil about the reward if he were dead?"

"I can't help it. All I can say is, that he don't seem to have any life in him."

Certainly Jack's appearance warranted the alarm of the officer; and when the others gathered round and looked at their prisoner, they fully shared in their comrade's alarm.

"Confound him," said one, "that's just like his obstinacy, now; I thought we should not get him to London quite so easy as we might have wished. What is to be done now?"

"There's the Rose Inn, about half a mile further on, close to the common," said one; "and what is to hinder us leaving Long's dead body there, and likewise waiting a little for the recovery of our prisoner? I must say it will be but half a triumph to carry a dead Claude Duval to Newgate instead of a living one."

This seemed to them all to be good and judicious advice, so they made up their minds to follow it forthwith, and putting their horses to a canter, they soon traversed the half mile, although it was somewhat of a long one, that lay between them and the old Rose Inn. The arrival of seven men on horseback, a dead body, and a fainting prisoner, with his dress and person sprinkled with blood, produced rather a sort of sensation at the inn. The landlord looked, indeed, as though, of the two, he would rather not have had the honour of the visit; but with a laudable fear of the licensing magistrate before his eyes, he did not exactly like to say anything that could be construed into an anti-welcome.

"Dear me—dear me!" he said. "What's amiss? Who have you got, gentlemen? for I see you are officers."

"Claude Duval," said one.

At the mere pronunciation of this well-known name, the greatest interest was at once excited in the inn. There was not a person there that did not press forward to obtain a sight of one who had made so much noise on the road; and among them all there was only one rough-looking farmer, who shook his head as he looked at Jack, and said—

"Be sure this be your mon?"

"Yes, wiseacre," said one of the officers. "We are sure, though none of us have seen Claude Duaal before, except Long, and he is shot."

"Well," said the farmer, "I have seen Claude Duval before; and much good may your prisoner do you, that's all. Ho! ho! ho!"

"Pho! we are satisfied. You mind your own business. Now, landlord, you must have this dead body laid somewhere, for there will be an inquest at this house. It's Mr. Long, the officer; Claude Duval has done for him, and we want a bed and doctor for Claude himself; for, to tell the truth, we want to get him to Newgate alive and kicking, and you see what a state he is in now."

"Why, he's a dead 'un, too," said the landlord.

"Not a bit of it. He's only done up, that's all, and has got a wound, you see, in his shoulder. That's it—all right—up stairs, is it? Very well—gently—gently. Is there a doctor near at hand? That will do—let your boy run for him at once."

Jack was laid upon a bed, and the nearest medical man was sent for, pending whose coming the officers enjoyed themselves with a draught of old ale, and told their story at the bar of how, with extraordinary valour, they had captured Claude Duval, and fully expected the sheriff's reward for so doing. They did not forget to make the most of their adventure; and when the nearest surgeon arrived, two of them accompanied him up stairs to the room in which Jack, insensible as he was, had been securely locked. They found him still in the same state, and the surgeon, who was a skilful man enough in his profession, extracted the pistol bullet from the wound in Jack's shoulder, and bandaged it properly up before he would take any means to recover him from the state of syncope into which, from pain and exhaustion, he had fallen.

"There is no occasion to arouse him," he said, "until I have done all that is necessary for him; but now that is over, we will hear what he has got to say."

By the application of some pungent essences, Jack was soon recovered, and

looked about him with rather a puzzled expression; but he recovered his consciousness of what had happened much sooner than any one would have imagined, and when one of the officers said—

"Well, Claude Duval, how are you now?"

He smiled faintly, and just murmured—

"All's right—all's right."

Truly it was great joy to Jack to find that they still continued in this mistake, for he knew that each minute that was gained was of the most vital importance to Claude.

"He seems pleased enough," said the doctor; "but if he be moved for some hours, there is every chance of his wound inflaming to a sufficient extent to endanger his life. I suppose, though, that really don't much matter, for he will be hanged if he be taken to Newgate, I presume?"

"Yes," said one of the officers, "but it does matter. We want to get him to Newgate alive; so we will wait—at least a couple of us will, until he is a little better, while our comrades can ride on, and take the news of the capture, putting in our joint claim for the reward."

"As you please," said the medical man. "If you don't remove him, I shall see him again in a few hours, when I shall be better able to judge of his condition."

Jack overheard this discourse, and he closed his eyes, trying to think what would be the best policy for him to adopt under all the circumstances of the case. He was resolved to keep up, as long as he could, the delusion that he was Claude Duval; and at the same time, he was better pleased to be at the Rose Inn than in Newgate. Had he a hope that Claude's fertile brain would devise something in his favour? We rather think that at the bottom of his heart he really had. Who can wonder at the wondrous faith Jack had in the resources as well as in the courage of Claude? The officers carried out their expected determination, and only two of them remained at the inn, to keep charge of their prisoner. They considered that the condition he was in afforded a fair enough warrantry that he would make no sort of attempt to escape. Quietness surely must be to him the greatest of earthly blessings now. Under these circumstances, it was no wonder that the officers made themselves quite comfortable, and by no means disturbed themselves about their prisoner, whom they thought so very safe in more ways than one.

"There will be a pretty good purse for us all."

"To be sure," replied the other; "and it's a lucky job that Long got that pistol-shot."

"So it is."

"You may say that, for if he hadn't, I know as well as possible he would have tried on taking the whole of the reward himself, and only handing us a few guineas for ourselves."

"Not a doubt of it; but there he lies up stairs stiff enough. Come, it's about dinner time now. Let's have something nice, now."

It was about half-past two o'clock now that a man in a respectable groom's livery rode up to the Rose Inn, and said—

"Hilloa! Have you room for my master for a few hours, landlord?"

"Ay," said the landlord, "and for a dozen masters, if you had them, old fellow. Who is he, I should like to know, that he's so afraid of not getting room at the Rose Inn, he's forced to send you on afore?"

"He's a Frenchman, and his name is Monsieur Resolut; but, he is a good master for all that, and he pays his way like a trump. You know he can't help being a Frenchman."

"Oh, no—no, certainly not. We oughtn't to think ill of a man 'cos o' things he can't help, no how. Frenchman or not, if he's a gentleman, and behaves himself as sich, he's welcome as the flowers in May to the Old Rose Inn."

It was Claude himself, in the same costume that had so successfully deceived even May and Markham, who now rode up to the inn door, where one of the

very officers who would almost have given his ears to capture him, was lounging with a pipe in his mouth. But Claude felt that he was perfectly safe.

"If they take Jack for me," he said to himself, "they don't know me, that's quite clear."

The officer looked at Claude as carelessly as a man who can have no possible interest in another might be supposed to look; and as Claude dismounted, the only remark that was made was by the landlord, who said—

"He ain't a bad-looking fellow, though he is a Frenchman."

"Quite the reverse," said the barmaid.

"Anything, but—" said the landlady.

"Quite a love," said the landlady's niece, a young lady of about fifteen, who was very romantic; but she did not give utterance to her opinion aloud.

Claude was shown up stairs; and as they were opening a room door for him, he laid his hand upon the lock of another.

"Not there, sir," said the landlord; "there's a prisoner there—the notorious Claude Duval."

"Indeed," said Claude, with a well-imitated foreign accent, "I shall not for to go there."

"No, you shall for to go here," said the landlord, who had the common notion that a Frenchman understands bad English better than good; "Claude Duval is a highwayman, and he has shot an officer, the dead body of whom is in yon further room."

"I not understand too much," said Claude.

"Oh, bother him," muttered the landlord, "I dare say, a stupid like, he don't know one half what one says to him. Who would be a Frenchman if he possibly could help it?"

CHAPTER LXXVII.

A SURPRISE AT THE ROSE INN.

THE door was closed upon Claude, and then he stood profoundly still, in an attitude of listening: all was still as the grave upon that floor; and after a few minutes of the most intense listening, Claude opened the door and stepped out into the corridor, from which several doors opened, both to the right and to the left. To have a thorough idea of the plan of the premises was now Claude's great object, and he stepped lightly across the corridor and tapped at a door opposite. There was no reply, so he concluded the room was empty. Upon opening the door he found he was right. It was a bedroom leading into the stable-yard, beyond which yard was the open country. He saw his horse in the yard undergoing a slight grooming from a lad, while the servant he (Claude) had brought with him, was leaning upon a gate opening into the meadows at the back of the stables. All these things Claude noted accurately, and likewise saw that the descent from the window of the room in which he was, to the yard, would be a matter of no difficulty whatever. Quick in motion and fertile in resources, Claude at once made up his mind as to what was to be attempted, and he retired to his room again, resolved upon at once commencing operations, for he was timidly afraid Jack might be hastily removed from the inn. Claude rang the bell, and was calmly reading a newspaper that had lain upon the table, when the landlady's niece, who was upon the romantic side of twenty, made her appearance in answer to the summons. Claude felt, from the first moment that he looked at this girl, a strange desire to trust her, but still it was rather too hazardous a thing to do so all at once, and he looked at her in silence for a few moments. What was his surprise when she cautiously closed the door, and with much agitation of manner said—

"Sir, I know you."

Claude started for the moment, and a flush of colour visited his cheeks at the thought of the possibility of all he was try ng to do or Jack being defeated when it was most promising of success; he did not, however, lose his presence of mind.

"Do you, indeed, know me?" he said. "If so, you will have no objection to name me."

"You are Claude Duval. Pray do not be alarmed: I owe you a favour, and will repay it if I can. When the wounded man, who lies in the next chamber, was brought here, they told me it was Claude Duval. I knew they had made a mistake, and I said so, but he looked reproachfully at me and said, 'Indeed I am;' from which I guessed the truth, assured that he was making a sacrifice for you."

"Then you will not betray me?"

"Betray you?"

"Pardon me for using the word; I *am* Claude Duval, and my errand here is at the risk of my life, if needs be, to rescue my wounded friend. But how came you to know me?"

"By your voice. You once stopped the Exeter mail. I and my mother were passengers, and we had about us our little all (£20). I told you it would make us destitute to take it, and you said but two words—'God forbid!' Can I be otherwise than grateful to you? Oh, no, you have but to command me, and I will do you any service. My poor mother is dead, and that £20 smoothed her passage to the grave."

Claude was much affected at the simple and earnest gratitude of this girl—a gratitude, too, that he felt his claim to was very doubtful indeed. Nevertheless, at that time he was glad to take the advantage of any circumatance that promised him aid in the deliverance of Sixteen-string Jack from the officers.

"I see but one man in the yard," said Claude, "and all I want you to do is, if you can, to keep him out of it for ten minutes, and to let me know when those ten minutes begin, and when they will be likely to happen."

"Can I do nothing else?"

"Nothing but hold me as well in your esteem as your better feelings for such as I am will let you; believe me, I shall not forget to my dying day the kindness you show."

"You must wait until five o'clock," she said, "and then our man Sam will come into his tea, which I can make take him half an hour. During that time the yard will be quite free. Besides, if you wish it, I will manage to hold both of the officers at talk at tea for as long. I don't think they will refuse an invitation from me."

"A thousand thanks."

"Not at all; you don't know how happy it makes me to show that while I always try to forget an injury, I never forget a word of kindness, and how much more, than a word of yours was."

Claude, we must confess it, kissed the fair cheek of the blooming Kate—yes he did, and Kate, too, was her name, and we cannot at all blame Claude for doing so—do you, gentle reader, or otherwise, as the case may be? Ah, no! Kate blushed her exit.

"This is a godsend," said Claude, to himself. "I shall save you now, Jack; and I shall begin to think that even a negative good action in this world does not go without its due reward in the fullness of time. But now for a visit to you, Jack, if it be safely practicable, for I must risk as little as possible."

Claude listened for a few moments, and found that the coast was clear, after which, stepping lightly along, he reached Jack s chamber, and opening the door, he glided in instantly. Claude's first glance around the apartment showed h m a cupboard, and before approaching the bed, he glanced into it and saw that it was large enough to hold him. He then walked up to the bed, and saw that Jack's eyes were closed. Is old friend was either really slumbering, or though proper

to sham that state for the purpose of avoiding any conversation with the officers or the surgeon. He little expected who was now bending over him.

"Jack," said Claude, "be quiet."

Jack started, and sprung up in the bed.

"Hush—hush—'tis I——"

"Claude—Claude—oh, why are you here? Will you render all that I have done in vain? Oh, Claude, for the first time I am sorry to look upon your face."

"Nonsense, Jack. Attend to me. Are you well enough to ride?"

"Quite—but——"

"Hush, listen to me. Be too bad to move from here—rave a little—anything to induce them to keep you here yet awhile, and expect aid from me. All will be right. God bless you, Jack. Did you think I would desert you? Ah, Jack—Jack."

Claude moved towards the door, and as he did so he heard a step in the corridor, and a loud voice from below cried—

"You will find the door unlocked, doctor. We ain't afeard of him now. If he moves off, it will be out of the world."

"D——n it," said Claude, and in an instant he was in the cupboard.

The surgeon stood by Jack's bedside. Jack shut his eyes fast and tried to compose himself. The sudden appearance of Claude had much agitated him, but he recollected the advice that had been given to him by his old friend, to seem much worse than he really was, and even to sham being delirious to some extent, the better to impose upon the surgeon and his captors.

"Well, my man, how are you?"

Medical men are exceedingly fond of using the words "my man," to what they consider to be their *un*-equals.

"There he goes," said Jack, feigning delirium; "spread his brains on a brick-bat and give them to a mad cat in the family way!"

"What, what do you say, man?"

"Here we are in the gutter—now—now—wash out the stains—where's the pitchfork?—Shake hands with a toad, and measure the distance between Tyburn Gate and the devil with your entrails. There they go—whoop! whoop! off and away."

"Quite delirious," said the surgeon, lifting up his hands; "I must confess I did not expect this exactly; what odd things he says, too."

Jack gave such an awful groan, that the surgeon quite started back; and then affecting suddenly to fall into a deep sleep, Jack was profoundly quiet again. The surgeon was a little puzzled. He rubbed his chin with one hand, and conceiving himself to be quite alone, he said—

"I hardly know what to do with this case. I certainly expected some amount of fever, but not this delirium. And of what a novel character, too. What awful reminiscences must this wretched man have upon his mind! I wish I could recollect what he said exactly. Something about a mad cat in a delicate situation, I think. How sound he seems to sleep now. It's rather a curious case; and the best thing I can do is to keep it as long as possible. I'll tell the officers that he ought not to be removed, unless they wish him to breathe his last before they get him to the door of Newgate. That will stop them, I dare say."

The surgeon, to Jack's and Claude's great relief, stepped lightly from the room, and closing the door again, he made his way down stairs. When he was thoroughly out of hearing, Claude emerged from the cupboard, and spoke again to Jack, saying—

"Expect me at dusk, Jack, and until then keep up your spirits, my old friend. All will be well; for believe me, I have one of those presentiments that don't ever fail me that neither your time nor mine has come yet. All will be right; but don't over-act your part, if they should visit you again."

"No, Claude, no, I will not; but I implore you to consider your own safety as paramount. From what you say, I suppose I have over-acted my part a little?"

"Why, I confess, Jack, the mad cat took me a little by surprise; but it is of no consequence. I am glad to see that smile upon your face. Farewell, Jack, for a short time. I hope to see you in safety before another day dawns; and I will, or my name is not Claude Duval."

Claude did not wait for a reply; the danger to them both of staying where he was he felt to be imminent, and he at once sought his own room, there to wait until the young girl who had promised him assistance should come to him to say that the time for action had arrived. Not the shadow of a doubt of her good faith crossed his mind, and indeed if it had it would have been to her the most cruel injustice. As he paced the room, Claude's thoughts were busily occupied with the past and the present; and for the first time since he had embraced his present hazardous and adventurous course of life, he took a keen retrospective glance at his life. He saw himself a young lad upon Hampstead Heath, with his sister May by his side; and there came before him vividly in his mind's eye the gibbet upon which hung all that remained of what he had once called father. Then came the act of retribution at the hands of the boy against the proud, strong man; and he remembered the cry with which Sir Lionel Feversham had fallen down the precipice upon that awful night. Then came his meeting with Sixteen-string Jack, and the various scenes that followed; and as he recollected what Jack was when he first saw him, and contrasted his bold slashing bearing then with what he was now, he could not but sigh to think how such a spirit had been broken. And thus the time passed on, until the dim shades of early twilight began to creep over the scene, and then Claude stepped into the corridor, and listened. All was still. The inn clock struck five, and he began to get right, when he heard a light, hurried footstep upon the stairs, and at once he retired to his room again. He expected it was Kate; but then it might not be her, and caution was necessary. It was Kate. She entered the room with her face flushed, and her bosom heaving with agitation. It was some few moments before she could speak; and then her voice was broken and tearful.

"I have done what you wished," she said. "No one is now in the stable-yard. God speed you, Claude Duval; we may never meet again; but when you think of me, tell yourself that I tried to be grateful. The officers will be engaged for the next half hour. Farewell."

"I shall never forget you, Kate."

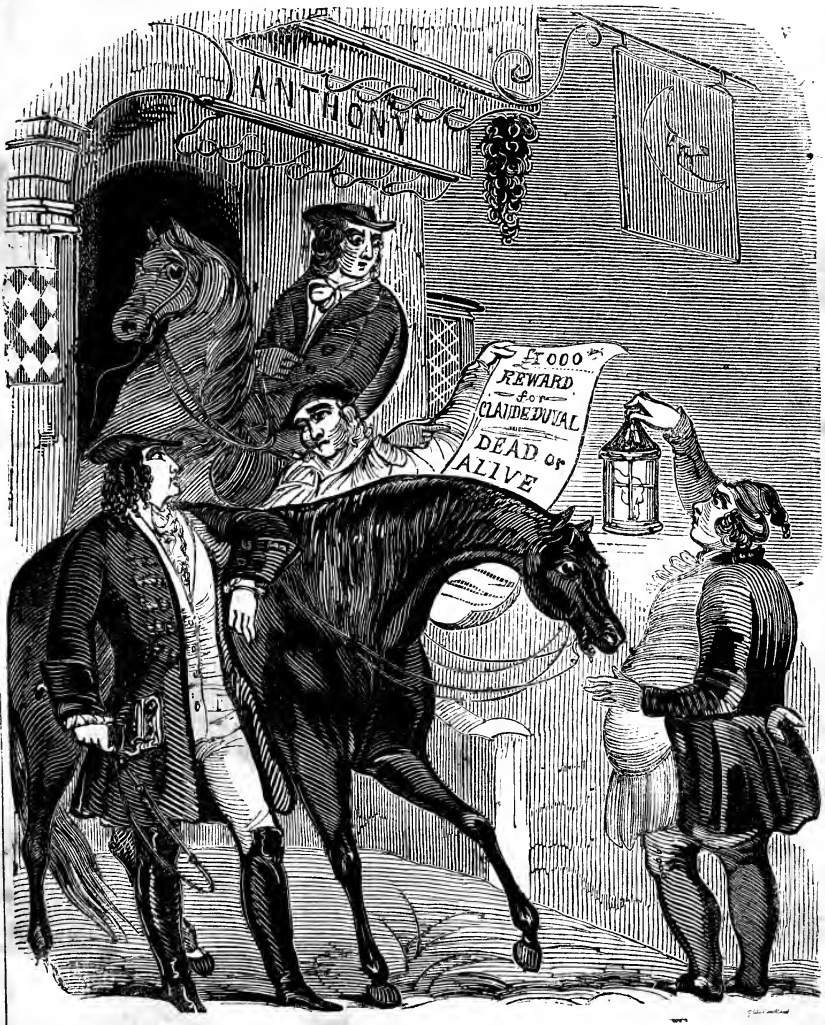
She held out her hand to him, and he shook it cordially. He was about to speak to her again, but she vanished from the room, and as she went she seemed to take with her the small portion of daylight that had yet lingered in the western sky. Claude started from a sort of reverie that had stole over him; and walked to the door of his room. From thence he proceeded to the head of the stairs, and listened. He heard loud laughter below, and doubted not but that the officers were making themselves as comfortable as possible, and flattering themselves they stood high in the graces of the pretty Kate. The time for action had arrived. Now, Claude was thoroughly determined to carry out this affair to the rescue of Sixteen-string Jack at any risk; and, with a full perception of all the possible dangers and difficulties that might beset him, he commenced operations. He looked carefully to the priming of his pistols, and feeling confident that the two pair he had with him were effective, he sallied out of the room, exclaiming—

"Now, Jack, for liberty or death!"

One of the great secrets of Claude Duval's success in many of his daring exploits consisted in the cool rapidity of his proceedings. When once he commenced an enterprise, he went on with it without flinching, and often had it completed within the time that many other persons would have been looking and peeping about to see if the coast were clear for action. Then, again, he made his arrangements so perfectly beforehand, that, unless some very cross accident happened, nothing went amiss, and nothing was left to be decided upon at a time when it ought to be done. Claude's first care was to let Jack know that the time for action had come; and with a light, noiseless step he again sought the room where his comrade lay.

"Up—up—Jack, and be ready," he said, "there is no time for delays; I will be with you again in a few moments."

Jack would have said something in the shape of renewed caution or exhortation to Claude to be careful of himself, but the latter was gone as noiselessly as he



CLAUDE DUVAL AND JACK PAY A VISIT AT THE OLD MOON TAVERN, DRURY-LANE.

had come. Three strides brought Claude to the spare bedroom opposite to Jack's apartment.—He opened the window—hung an instant from the balcony—and then dropped safely into the yard, upon a quantity of hay that was there. There yet lingered sufficient of the day to guide him, without any difficulty, to the

stables where his mare was put up. He then blew a whistle, but so faintly that it more resembled the call of some bird to its mate than anything else. In a moment the man who played the part of his servant made his appearance, from where Claude himself could hardly, in the twilight, discern; but there he was.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

OFF TO LONDON.

Both master and man looked at each other intently, for fear of a mistake, and then Claude said—

"It's you, Bill? all's right."

"What's the fakement?" said Bill. "Is the iron all hot, Captain? Blaze away."

"Hush! all's right. Get the horse all ready for a start, and open you gate leading to the meadows. Jack is in no state to ride a steeple chase, although he will be on the back of one who could do it."

"Yes, Captain, she can go it: kick out the man in the moon's eye, and then away like a handful of squibs. Blaze away!"

Claude immediately went back to the window from which he had dropped into the yard, but he found it was too much of a spring up to reach the little balcony, and looking to the stable where Bill was putting the saddle on his horse, he said—

"I must have her to reach the window with. Come along, lass."

The creature knew Claude's voice in a moment, and gave a short neigh of congratulation at finding herself with him again. He led her beneath the window, and then, with great agility, mounting and standing upon her back, he easily got into the spare bedroom again. Leaving Bill there to finish accoutring the horse, he made his way again noiselessly and swiftly to Jack's chamber. He had no sooner reached it than he heard some one, mounted, gallop up to the door of the inn.

"I'm ready," said Jack.

"Hush! let me hear who this is that has just arrived. We ought to know as much as we can in our present circumstances, Jack, of everybody who comes here just now. Hush—hush—just for a moment, Jack,—only a moment."

Claude went close to the window and heard the following brief but significant colloquy—

"Hilloa!" cried a loud voice. "Is this the Rose Inn?"

"You are right for once," said some one, in a bantering tone from the inn door. "It is the Rose."

"Come, come," said the stranger, "don't trifle with me; I have ridden hard from Mr. Gregson's, the sheriff, in Ludgate, and know all about Claude Duval. Is this the house where he is in custody of the officers?"

"Yes," replied he who had before conversed. "This is the house. But don't you know that Claude Duval is sorely wounded, and can't be moved?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Gregson has heard all about that—tell somebody to take care of my horse, will you—as I was saying, Mr. Gregson has heard all about that, for they sent for him to Newgate as soon as the express of Claude's capture came in, and he says that he'll have him in Newgate to-night, wounded or not wounded, for he knows he has as many twists and doubles as an old fox, and he shan't be content until he's under lock and key."

Claude did not wait to hear more. He knew now that nothing but promptitude could save Jack; but as he turned from the window, he could not help hearing the new arrival add—

"The sheriff sent me, you see, because I know Duval well by sight."

"The deuce you do," thought Claude, and then turning to Jack, he said—"Are you ready?"

"Quite, quite. But Claude——"

"Come, come, this is no time for exceptions. This way, Jack; I can tell you what we are to do as we go along. When you are once mounted, and in the open air, mind you are to keep the remains of what sun-set you will see for this half hour yet, on your right hand. You understand me, Jack?"

"Yes, Claude, I do. But——"

"There you are again, Jack, with your buts. Now attend to me. Come along, this way; you see I know the old Rose Inn pretty well. Push on to Battersea Fields as hard as you can, and get to Westminster. Then make your way direct to the Old Moon in Drury Lane. Anthony has ways and means of taking care of you, which he will do for your own as well as for mine; and upon no account stir out, for so sure as you do, you will get into mischief. Leave me entirely to my own resources. Promise me that Jack."

"Well, well, Claude, I suppose I must."

"That will do. You know Bill Deerhurst, old Anthony of the Moon's nephew?"

"Yes—yes. Well?"

"He is in the stable yard. He will assist you to mount, and show you the way into the fields; and good luck attend you. Don't stop another moment—I won't hear one word."

"But Claude——"

"There, that will do. Bill?"

"Here yer is!" said Bill, from below the balcony, on to which Claude had hurried Jack. "Here yer is, my masters. Blaze away! righ-too-looral-loo! Kim up."

Claude now gave an illustration of that amazing strength which upon emergencies he could put forth, for he lifted Sixteen-string Jack fairly off his feet, and over the balcony into the yard, where Bill received him, and got him safely to the ground.

"Mount, and away," said Claude, "mount, Jack, and away, if you love me!"

Claude closed the window. But he lingered in the room a moment, until he heard the clatter and dash of a horse's feet, and through the glass he saw the dusky figure of the gallant steed and its rider dash away into the night air, among the meadows at the back of the old Rose Inn.

"It's done!" said Claude. "It's done, thank God. If Jack manages affairs with common prudence only, now he is free. Oh, what a load this is off my mind, to be sure; I can now really breathe a little freely."

Claude knew now that his own situation was one of immediate peril. He was there among foes without a hope, and the man who had so recently come from London, had declared that he was sent purposely on account of being so well acquainted with Claude's person; so that from his scrutiny he had everything to dread, notwithstanding the perfections of his disguise. As he was traversing the corridor a thought struck him, the carrying out of which was more of a boyish whim than anything else. He proceeded to the room opening from the same corridor in which the dead body of Long the officer was; and striding up to the bed upon which it lay muffled in a sheet, he took it in his arms, and carrying it to the bed so recntly vacated by Jack, he placed therein the dead officer, and covered him up with the clothes.

"Now, gentlemen, below," said Claude, "I think I have given you the means of enjoying a little surprise when you do come up stairs."

When he reached his own room he rung the bell. Kate answered the summons—she was pale and anxious.

"Is he gone?" she said.

"Yes" replied Claude, "all is right, thanks to you. Say that I orde red coffee

as soon as possible, and that I want to go to town in half an hour; and order my horse, mind, Kate. Sooner or later its absence must be discovered, and it may as well be so as soon as possible."

"Yes—yes. Oh, how I tremble."

"For what?" said Claude, with a smile.

"For your safety; a man has arrived with an order from one of the sheriffs of London to bring you up to town directly and lodge you in Newgate."

"Not me. You forget, Kate, that I am Monsieur Resolut, and that the order relates to the occupant of the adjoining room. I am quite safe so long as my disguise lasts me, and perhaps even after that. But do not create suspicion by remaining here, Kate."

Kate was rather surprisd and alarmed at the curious movement of Claude's. He was evidently slowly walking round her so as to get between her and the door of the room, but before she could say a word upon the subject he suddenly flung the door open, and a waiter of the inn fell into the room upon his face and hands.

"Lost—lost!" said Kate.

"Not at all," said Claude. "I heard this fellow out side. Then we are safe enough.

"Help —mur—oh;" said the waiter, who felt the cold muzzle of a pistol against his temple, and heard the click of the lock as it was put upon full cock. His hair visibly moved upon his head, and his features assumed a pallid hue.

"Spy!" said Claude, fool as well as knave. What made you set your life upon such a cast as this? Answer me. Who am I?"

The fellow's teeth chattered so much with fear that he could not speak a word.

"Hark you," said Claude, "for the next hour you must take up your abode in yon cupboard; and as I am living man, if you speak or move, or so much as breathe heavily, I will send a brace of bullets through the pannelling; and when I am gone from here if you say one word to anybody of what you have heard, or even so much as hint anything to the disparagement of Kate, I will seek you out if you should be hidden in the pulpit of a church, and blow your brains out."

"Oh—oh—oh, gracious goodness."

"To the cupboard."

"Oh, do'nt; it won't hold me. The shelf will cut me in two, and I can't cram myself in underneath, Have mercy upon me, and let me go; I wont say anything, indeed I wont."

Claude seized him by the collar, and thrust him underneath the shelf of the cupboard; then resolutely closing the door, he forced the unfortunate wretch into such a narrow compass that he must have been awfully cramped—but it was better than killing him.

"The key," said Claude. "The key."

"Here," said Kate. The room door-key locks it.

"Thanks. I warrant myself, now, against this rascal's interference, and I think his abject cowardice will save you, my dear Kate, from any annoyance from him when you release him, which you can do when you like, after I am gone."

"Oh, would that you were gone!"

"Do not fear, Kate. We are not all lost who are in danger. Go and order the coffee and the horse for me. I must now be guided entirely by circumstances."

Kate was nearly in tears as she descended the staircase; but before she had got halfway down, a grand bustle of people ascending occupied all her attention. This awakened the liveliest fears of Kate for the safety of Claude, and she flew back to his room to warn him, but she met him upon the threshold.

"Hush!" he said, "go rapidly down stairs. Say nothing, and know nothing. Leave all to me."

Kate disappeared again down the stairs, and Claude, tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, wrote upon it the words "Bill, saddle any two horses you can find, and be at the gate leading to the meadows." Claude hoped to find the opportunity of delivering this to the man whom he had brought with him, and whom he knew

was courageous enough for anything. He would have made his way into the spare bed-room again, from whence Jack had escaped, and trusted to finding Bill within the stable-yard; but he heard those who were upon the stairs too close at hand. By the sound of feet, he was sure there were four or five persons; and as they reached the head of the stairs, he heard one say—

"It's the sheriff's express orders, so, come what may of it, nobody's to blame. He must be taken to town, and he must be bad, indeed, if a post-chaise will hurt him. You have seen the sheriff's order, so come on."

"Very well," said one of the officers.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

CLAUDE'S DANGER AT THE INN.

Claude was now perfectly aware that an eclaircissement would take place very shortly; and he was not a little curious to knew how the surprise that was in store for the sheriff's man and the two officers at the inn, would be taken by them. As the party passed his door, he heard some one say—

"Who is in that room?"

And then the voice of Bill replied—

"Why, my master, Monsieur Resolute, is there. He's a Frenchman; but, of all things, I should like to see Claude Duval. He robbed my master once, near Winchester."

Bill accompanied this speech by a sly kick against Claude's door, and the whole party passed on to the room, where they fully—with the exception of Bill, who knew so much better—expected to find their prisoner. It was quite dark enough for lights, and the landlord, who was likewise upon the spot, carried a lighted candle in his hand. Claude would have given anything for an opportunity of slipping the little memorandum he had written, respecting the horses, into the hands of Bill; but just then it could not be done. He did not despair, however, of very shortly finding a means of doing that much, and he kept close to the door of his room, holding the handle of the lock, so as to be ready to turn it at a moment's notice.

"This is the room," said one of the officers, opening the door of the chamber that had been Sixteen-string Jack's temporary prison. "Here he is."

They all went in, and Claude at once opened his door and looked out. A glance showed him that Bill lingered behind the others. Rapidly traversing the few steps between the two doors, Claude placed in Bill's hand the little mission he had written, and was back again like a flash of light. Bill's head was in the room, so that no one there could say he was for a moment absent; but his hand was without, and it closed upon the little despatch in an instant. He expected fully something of the sort from Claude.

"Yes," said one of the officers approaching the bed, "here he is safe! but not sound. Ha! ha! Oh! He's dead!"

"Dead?" cried the sheriff's messenger. "You don't say so! Dead?"

"As mutton!"

They all crowded round the bed, and the officers pulled from over the face of the corpse, the sheet which Claude had laid over it, adding—"Well, you may take him to London now and welcome. There he is. He won't run away any more, I'll be bound."

"You idiots!" said the sheriff's messenger. "You incorrigible geese! Why, you have killed the wrong man—that's no more Claude Duval than I am."

"Not Claude Duval?"

"No—not at all like him."

The officer looked earnestly at the corpse, and then he cried—"May I die this instant, if that is the man we brought here wounded."

"Look at him," cried the other. "Why, Jarvis, don't you know that face? It's poor Long, that Claude Duval shot. There's the scar on his nose. Don't you know him?"

They all looked thunderstricken, except the sheriff's man, and he calmly enough put his hands in his pockets, and whistled a tune.

"Ha! ha!" he then said. "It's all right—oh, of course; I knew it was no go. I took the liberty of saying as much to the sheriff. I could have sworn it would have turned out something extraordinary. Oh, dear me; you don't know Claude Duval so well as I do. He ain't to be nabbed, or kept when he is nabbed, quite so easy. Oh dear, no! So it's all ended in a bottle of smoke."

"But we had him!" cried one of the officers, with an oath.

"Don't make too sure of that, my good fellow. You fancied you had him, I have no doubt, and you fancied you had nothing to do but to walk up here and find him; and instead, here is Long, who is the only one who finds the whole affair something worse than a hoax!"

"Damn it! I could eat my own head."

"No doubt of it. But I am not at all disappointed. Oh dear, no. 'Caught Claude Duval!' says I, 'have they? Very good. When I see him, I'll believe it, that's all.' Why, what do you think he did now? I'll tell you, though it's been kept snug. He actually, when he got out of Newgate, walked to Guildhall, and took the Lord Mayor's chaplain's own carriage, and drove off with it. What do you think of that? Lord bless you, Claude Duval is not so easily nabbed as you all seem to think. Oh dear, no!"

The jeering upon the part of the sheriff's man was more aggravating to the officers even than the loss of the prisoner, and it went a long way to keep their faculties in a confused state.

"Confound you," said one of them, "for a gabbling fool. You go on, talk—talk—talk, and don't give one leave to think about the affair. How came Long's body here, I wonder?"

"I suppose," said the other, "Claude Duval, when he walked off, put it here for the fun of the thing."

"It must be so, and he pretending to be so bad too."

"Master—master—master!" cried a voice from below. "Master!"

"What now?" cried the landlord. "What is it, Sam? Who's chimney's on fire?"

"Nobody's sir, but I have just been to the stable, and I can't find the Frenchman's horse, sir."

"The devil you can't."

"No, sir. It's gone, and the saddle and everything else with it, sir, as clean as a whistle, sir. I had put it in a loose box, sir, as he seemed an out-and-outer, and now it's gone, as safe as last Christmas was a twelvemonth, sir."

"Oh dear, yes!" said the sheriff's man. "Oh, yes, of course, we shall find it all out by degrees. Ha! ha! Claude Duval, or the devil, or whoever you had or fancied you had here, wounded or not wounded, has helped himself to this Frenchman's horse, you hear."

"It must be so," said one of the officers, in a tone of the bitterest vexation. "And it has all happened while we were swilling tea and quizzing at the baby-face of a barmaid."

"And while I was a taking my pipe quite promiscuous," said Bill, "on the bench at the front door, as innocent as a baby or a *vaxy dollikins*. Oh! oh! shan't I catch it? Why, that *ere* 'oss costed I don't know how much."

"More fool you, then, you great blubbering goose," said the sheriff's man, "for not taking better care of it. You had better let your master know at once. Well, gentlemen all, I think this is about as outrageous a *do* as anything I ever heard of."

"Can't we go after him?"

"East, west, north, or south, stupid? After Claude Duval! Why, he has as many hiding places as a fox. No—if you really had him, he's off. I say, you great gaby, what's your master's name, eh? I'll go and speak to him myself about his horse."

"Risolut is his name," said Bill; "but I'll tell him himself. He's rather a passionate man, and as he's sure to blame me, I'll have it out with him at once."

"Then I'll go with you. What sort of horse was it?"

"Why, sir, you see," said Sam, the ostler, who had come to the top of the stairs to tell his tale, "it wasn't exactly a horse, seeing as it was a mare—a kind of mouse colour, with the finest legs you ever saw in your life, and the cunningest looking face and ears as ever a hanimal had in this here world. She was always a looking at you as much as to say, "Well, Sam, old fellow, and what do you think o' things in general?"

"Humph!"

Bill did not at all like this graphic description of Claude's celebrated mare, and he thought that he saw a thoughtful expression upon the face of the sheriff's messenger. He felt that Claude's situation was getting awfully critical; as yet too, he had had no time to read the little scrap of writing that Claude had put into his hand, so that, take things altogether, poor Bill for a few minutes felt as miserable as any human being could feel.

"Well, well," said the sheriff's man in the tone of one who was playing a part, "I ought to apologise to this French gentleman for what has happened, and to tell him that he has a claim on the county for the value of his horse. Which is his door? I'll be down directly."

The two officers and the landlord descended the stairs, and the sheriff's messenger tapped at the door of Claude's room It may be supposed that Duval had lost not one word of the preceding conversation, and he felt his danger, but the confidence he had in his disguise supported him, and he said, in a firm voice but a foreign accent—

"Come in."

The sheriff's man opened the door and walked in; Sam, too, stood upon the threshold, and Claude rose, cautiously saying—

"Sir, I shall ask you to sit you always."

"Thank you, sir, I have only come to say that I am sorry your horse has been stolen."

"Vat you say—my horse—stoled? Sacre!"

"Yes, sir, Claude Duval, a celebrated highwayman, has stolen it. Nobody can help it. Gone it is, and there is an end of it. I think you may make good a claim against the conny, but I don't say so for certain. However, sir, it's worth the trial."

"*Diable*! *Quel betisse*!" exclaimed Claude. "I must go for to think. Carry to me one chaise post at the door immediatement. I shall go at London."

"Very well, sir, the chaise shall be got ready. You will soon have it, for one was ordered and nearly ready for another purpose only just now. Good-morning, sir."

"*Bon soir*! *Sacre—ou est mon cheval? Le voleur de grands chemin.* I shall go at London with much complaints."

"It's your best plan, sir. And any assistance the police can render you, of course you may command."

The sheriff's man made his bow and trotted down stairs. Claude mad a sign to Bill, who had off his boots in a moment, and went noiselessly after him. There was a door at the foot of the stairs to the left, which opened to the parlour. To the right it led through another door, the upper half of which was glass, to the front passage, and so on out into the open air past the bar. It was the left-hand door that the sheriff's man opened and passed through. It shut behind him with a weight and pulley, but Bill pushed it open about an inch, ahd peered into the room. The two officers and the landlord were there. Bill was witness now to rather a curious scene. It will be remembered that this same sheriff's messenger

had talked a great deal about his own cleverness, and vapoured, in fact, so much that, to take him at his own account, one would have considered him something more than a match for half a dozen Claude Duvals both in courage and artifice; but certainly his appearance now by no means corroborated such opinion concerning him, even if they had been for a moment entertained. He was ghastly pale, and his knees were shaking. His tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth, and it was quite clear that for some few moments he had not power to utter one articulate word. When the landlord and the two officers saw him in this condition, they stared at him as though he was bewitched, and the silence, accompanied by the look of consternation that prevaded the whole party, had about it something essentially ludicrous. It was the landlord who first found breath to say—

"Bless my heart and life, what is the matter?"

"Hush! hush! hush!" gasped the sheriff's man, as he sunk into the seat that was nearest to him. "Hush! hush!—I—I—hush!"

"What is it?" said both the officers in a breath. "What is it?"

The terrified man waved his hand, and again said, "Hush!" Then, having to some extent recovered from the shock he had received, he said in a whisper—

"Claude Duval is up stairs. Hush!"

"The deuce he is!"

"Hush! Don't you know him? How many men's lives do you think he always takes care to have in his power? I tell you we shall have him, but we must be cautious. If we now—four men that we are, counting the worthy landlord—were to go up stairs to take him, he would, as sure as fate, shoot two of us, and the question is, who is to be shot?"

"I beg your pardon," said the landlord, "it's no question at all as far as I am concerned, for I won't go on any consideration whatever. What have I to do with it!"

"Hush!" said the sheriff's messenger. "Hush!"

"Hush!" said the two officers, who now had become to the full as fearful as he. "Hush!"

Then they all inclined their heads together, and said in whispers, "What's to be done?"

Bill had heard enough to convince himself of the imminent danger to which Claude was exposed, and he darted up stairs again, and into Claude's room. When there, he uttered but one word, and that was, "Blowed!"

"What!" said Claude, "you don't mean to tell me, Bill, that that stupid looking fellow has penetrated my disguise, do you?"

"Blowed!"

"The duce it is. How could it be? Ah, I see."

Claude took a look at himself in the glass, and he saw that one of his false moustachois had given him the slip. This at onee accounted for the discovery which the sheriff's messenger had made, and which gave that individual much more terror than it did Claude himself. He hastily heard Bill narrate what had passed in the room below, and then seizing his hat, he said—

"Come along, Bill."

"Blaze away," said Bill; that's the ticket. Oceans of pluck."

Claude darted across the corridor and into the spare room opposite. To lock the door upon the inside was his first movement. Then he said—

"Bill, are you sure there are horses in the stables?"

"Yes: two rum 'uns. The officers', you know."

"Good; come along, I'll give you a twist over."

"Murder! Thank you," said Bill, as the next moment he found himself sprawling in the yard, having been twisted over the little balcony by Claude with a vengeance. The quantity of stable refuse, however, that was just there, saved him from any hurt, although he rose in not the most savoury condition. Claude was at his side in a moment. The yard was pitch dark now.

"The horses! the horses!" said Claude.

"All's right—down as a hammer," said Bill. "I knows the way to the hanimals' cribs. Hold hard, and I'll bring 'em to the gate at end there, afore you can say John Robinson."

Bill flung open the stable door; but at the moment he did so, Sam, the ostler, appeared from the inside with a small lantern in his hand.



"I arrest you, Claude Duval," said the sherriff's man, "and I claim the reward."—"Take it," said Claude, "and make the most of it." PAGE 323.

"Holloa!" he said, "what's the row?"

"Nothing," said Bill, and with a slashing blow in the ostler's face he sent him insensible to the further end of the stable. "Blaze away! all's right. Now my peonies, kim up."

Bill got hold of the horses' harness, for he had noticed where it was hung, and

he flung the two saddles and accoutrements towards the gate leading to the meadows, where Claude was standing. Then, liberating the horses from the halter that confined them, he took hold of an ear of each and led them quietly enough across the yard.

"Now, Captain," he said, "all we have got to do is to saddle the hanimals, and shove a bit in their mouth, and be off. Blaze away!"

It would have been no easy matter for persons unaccustomed to the care of horses, to make those two fit for service in the dark; but Claude and Bill were experienced, and they had got about half through this work when the ostler, who had been stunned, recovered sufficiently to know what had happened, and rushing out of the stable, he made his way towards the house, crying as he went, in a voice loud enough to wake the dead—

"Murder! thieves!—Murder! thieves!"

"Blowed again," said Bill.

Claude did not speak, but rapidly proceeded with placing the bridle properly upon the horse. The creature was, no doubt, alarmed at the sudden cries of the ostler, for it began to get rather restive. Every moment was of vital importance; to attempt an escape on foot, and leave the foe's horses with which to pursue them, would be madness.

"Are you ready, Bill?" said Claude.

"Not quite. Blaze away! blowed again! Here they is,"

The cries of the ostler had been effective. At the end of the yard, nearest the house, appeared the two officers, the sheriff's messenger, and the landlord. The latter carried a couple of lights, and as the night was a still one, they burnt well, and cast a faint gleam upon Claud, Bill, and the two horses.

"There they are! There they are!" cried the sheriff's messenger. "Remember, the reward for Claude Duval is three hundred pounds, and therehe is."

These words were intended to stimulate the two officers and the landlord to lend their aid in securing Claude, while he, the sheriff's man, had a lively hope of being able himself to pocket the reward.

"Shall I shoot that fellow?" whispered Bill.

"No, no," said Claude. "Do not fire unless they do, and then don't throw away a bullet."

"We are too many for you, Claude Duval," said the sheriff's man. "You had better give yourself up without bloodshed. Alive or dead, I must and will have you."

Claude never spoke, and then one of the officers, drawing a pistol, said, as he fired it at Claude—

"He'll be off, as sure as fate, if you don't touch him with a bullet. Come on, under cover of the smoke."

The assailants made a rush forward, and Claude was upon the point of firing at the officer who had already attempted to shoot him, when he heard a scream from one of the windows of the house. It was Kate, anxious for his safety, who uttered the cry; and it had the effect of distracting his aim, for although he did fire, the bullet flew wide of its mark. Bang went one of Bill's pistols at the same moment; and Sam the ostler bawled out that he was wounded in an ignoble part of his animal economy.

"If it must be, it must be," said the sheriff's man, and taking a deliberate aim at Claude Duval, he fired. The bullet whizzed past his face in rather disagreeable proximity.

"I owe you one for that," said Claude, and he pulled the trigger of another pistol. It missed fire.

"Hurrah!" said one of the officers; "he has thrown away his pistol-shots. Come on! We have him! Hurrah! Three hundred pounds are lying in this stable-yard, and I'll pick them up."

He made a rush forward, but bang went Bill's other pistol, and he fell to the ground with a deep groan.

"Number 2! Blaze away, my tulips,"

"Now for it," said the sheriff's man; "they have fired two shots each, and that uses up a pair of pistols each man. Come on. We are all safe now. Hurrah! Here's more force. This way, gentlemen. Follow me."

A couple of rough-looking men had now come from the part of the house where they had been drinking porter, to the assistance of Claude's assailants; but the sheriff's man reckoned without his host when he thought it was safe to run in upon Claude, for the latter had a pair of well-charged pistols left, although Bill had no more than he had used.

"I arrest you, Claude Duval," cried the sheriff's man, "and I claim the reward."

"Take it," said Claude, "and make the most of it."

As he spoke, he fired over the horse's back into the fellow's face. He sprung up into the air with a yell, and then fell huddled up and shivering upon the cold stones. The landlord had followed with the two lights so close upon the sheriff's man, that he fell over him, but rolling a pace or two, he half rose, still holding the lights towards Claude Duval, in an attitude as though he were imploring him not to take his life, as he had just taken that of the wretched man who lay in a death struggle within a few paces of him. Claude had but one pistol now left, and he cried—

"I have a life still at my disposal; whoever his tired of his existence may come on and lose it."

"Rush on him. He will miss. It's a £100 a-piece," cried the officer who now succeeded, "and that's worth a chance shot!"

They made a dash forward, but there came suddenly a blaze of light from the other side of the gate leading to the meadows. There was the tramp of a horse's feet, and Claude, upon looking round, beheld a sight that filled him with astonishment. A couple of swarthy looking men, with crape over half their faces, held lighted flambeaus, and close to the gate was Sixteen-string Jack upon Claude's horse, holding a pistol in each hand, pointed at the paralysed throng in the inn yard.

"Mount, Claude, and away," cried Jack. "Did you think I could go further from here, than sufficient to pick up some assistance for you? Oh, no—off and away! Now, you rascals, come on, and you'll every one of you be food for worms."

"Mount," said Bill. "Blaze away. The osses is right as trivets. Here goes."

He and Claude were mounted in a moment. Then one of the rough-looking men with the torches sprung up behind Sixteen-String Jack, and Bill made good room for the other. All this was done so rapidly, that the people in the yard, who had made so sure of capturing Claude Duval, stood like statues. Claude took off his hat gracefully, as he said—

"Gentlemen, I have the honour of bidding you all good night. I suppose you have had enough of us for this time, but if not, you can hunt me up again, and I shall be happy to see you upon the same terms."

"Blaze away!" said Bill, "and douce the glimmeries!"

The flambeau was extinguished in a moment, and off flew Claude and his friends into the profound darkness of the open country, leaving those in the inn yard in a state better to be imagined than described.

CHAPTER LXXX.

A RESOLUTION.

It was a quarter to twelve, upon that night, while Cicely, Markham and May Russel were sitting together, in most anxious consultation concerning Claude, that the servant of the house, where they had taken up their lodging, came and

said, that a Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones had called, and wished to see Mr. Brereton. Markham could hardly command his voice, as he said—

"Show the gentlemen in."

Two well-dressed persons were ushered into the room, and the servant closed the door. There was a few moments' silence, to allow her to get out of hearing, and then one of the new comers walked up to Cicely, and said—

"My darling!"

With a cry of joy she flung her arms around him—

"It is our Claude!"

"Hush! hush!" said Claude. "Be discreet both in joy and in sorrow. You see, Markham, I am safe, and I have performed my mission, This is my friend Jack. By-the-bye, how does your wound fell now, Jack?"

"Much better. It is so well bandaged, that I have but little inconvenience from it. Ladies, I feel that I ought to apologise for this intrusion, considering who and what I am."

"You are my husband's friend," said Cicely, "and that is a sacred title. I recollect and know nothing else of you. Be seated. Oh, Claude, Claude, what have I not suffered in anxiety since I last saw you, and what may I not still have to suffer."

She wept convulsively upon his bosom, and May could not conquer her tears either. It was then that Markham Brereton spoke, saying—

"Now, Claude, will you listen to me? You see me; you see Cicely, whom you love; and you see your sister May, whom you love likewise. I am inclined to think that for me you have a friendship. You hear, I say, nothing of yourself; but now at this time that you are free, I ask you to think of the happiness of those who are about you."

"Yes—yes!" said Cicely.

"Say on!" cried May. "Say on!"

"Do you listen to me, Claude, with anything like seriousness?"

"I do."

"Then you remember, Claude, what I said to you once before. I implore you to leave England, and seek for reputation and happiness in another land."

"How can I? What means have I?"

"Leave all to me, Claude. If you will say that you will leave England for ever, you shall have the means. I am now in a condition to provide means for us all. Indeed, with the hope that I should be able to do so much as to prevail upon you to follow my advice, I have already made some arrangements. Your consent is all that is wanted. I wait your answer, Claude."

"And I too, Claude," sobbed Cicely. "I—your wife!"

"And I too, Claude," said May. "I—your sister!"

"God of Heaven!" said Claude, "what would you have me do? Am I not a proscribed man? Is not a price set upon my head? Am I not described to the very passengers of the streets in hand-bills, so that all men's hands should be raised against me? And yet you ask me to do this or to do the other, as though, like yourself, I were free to go hither or thither, and no man could say to me, nay!"

"Hear me out, Claude," said Markham.

"I will."

"Then let me assure you that the reasons against your going from England are the very reasons why we wish you to go. We cannot say that you will succeed in going; but what we wish is, that you should make the attempt to get to some place where you will not be proscribed, and where you will be free to go hither or thither as you please, and no one to say to you, nay."

"And your plan?"

"It is this. If you can make your way to Southampton, you will find at the mouth of the Itchen a small bark, called the 'Rendezvous,' bound to Cherbourg. Go on board and say you are No. 1, when it will push off at once with you. Once landed, you can write to me, and we will all three meet you by the speediest means of conveyance."

Claude was silent.

"My Claude," said Cicely, "the life of alarm I lead will kill me."

"Jack," said Claude, holding out his hand, "will you go with me?"

"To the end of the world, Claude. You know you have but to say the word to me, and I am game for any plan, here or elsewhere."

"And what think you of this plan?"

"I like it. Besides, Claude, I think you are bound to attempt it in deference to those whose happiness depends upon you. We will go together, if you like."

"I am determined," said Claude. "Let it be so. If those who of late have hunted me will let me go in peace, I will go."

"Oh! joy—joy!" cried Cicely. "We shall be happy yet."

"It is joy, Cicely," said Claude, "to hear you speak in such accents. The bloom, too, of old times, comes once more to your cheeks. Do with me what you will. Direct me at your pleasure. Heaven knows I have sufficiently been the bane of your young existence, not to hesitate to take any step which promises you something of your former happiness. I will leave England if I can, Cicely."

She could not reply to him for the tears that crowded to her sight, and she looked a thousand things that no tongue could utter. Claude's resolution was fixed.

"Hear me, Mr. Brereton," he said. "When I say to you that I will do this thing, I really mean it. If those who now persecute me will allow me in peace, with Jack, to leave England, I will leave it; but if in the attempt to do so I am hunted to desperation, woe be to those who so hunt me, for I will turn again and discard from my heart all feelings of pity that have hitherto influenced me, and against the powerful and the rich I will, in this country of weak piety and religious cant, wage an exterminating war!"

"But you will succeed," said Cicely. "Yes, Claude, you will escape."

"I hope so. But now at this moment I seem to feel——"

"What?—Oh! what?"

"No matter. You will all of you call me superstitious, so we will say no more upon that head. Jack, you and I must carefully think over the best plan of carrying out this resolution."

The feeling which had come over Claude was a dismal presentiment of failure and misery, that were to be consequent upon the enterprise to which he had now pledged himself. A sort of shudder came over him, but he repressed the exhibition of the feeling, and having once passed his word to make the attempt, he would not draw back. The presentiment of evil was true, though; for although this was the most extraordinary of Claude's adventures that he was about to undertake, so was it in its results the most calamitous to him.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

A MAN HUNT.

As Claude Duval is now at the commencement of that string of extraordinary adventures and audacious proceedings which have been hitherto kept secret from all chroniclers of the career of that wonderful man, it becomes necessary that we should briefly state the position in which the authorities found themselves with regard to him. His repeated and daring escapes had got up a feeling of aggravation in the minds of the London and suburban police, which had completely turned into a personal feeling against Claude; and although no one could say that he had taken a life except in self-defence and to avoid arrest, and then only when hard pressed, the higher authorities of the country chose to brand him as one of the worst of murderers. Now Claude Duval was a highwayman, and as a highwayman he

"Did his spiriting gently."

He robbed the rich, and he robbed without violence if he could. He always treated females with courtesy, and an appeal to his feelings or his generosity was never made in vain; but he was, to all intents and purposes, a highwayman, and what is worse, he had escaped from Newgate. He had enlisted upon his side all sorts of popular sympathies in consequence of his conduct in the affair of Markham Brereton; he had defied the authorities, and finally, he had shot Long, who was one of the pet officers of the Home Office. The result of all this was, that Lord William Bathurst, who was then Home-Secretary, sent for the sheriffs, and said—"Gentlemen, a £1000 is at your disposal from the Treasury so soon as I am assured of the apprehension of the notorious Claude Duval. Let him be taken dead or alive: but, mark me, gentlemen, he must be exterminated!"

"Your lordship may depend upon us," said the sheriffs.

Within one hour after this interview it was advertised and placarded over the city and the suburbs, that one thousand pounds would be paid for the arrest o Claude Duval, dead or alive, to any one or more per ons who would bring him or his dead body to Newgate. This set every officer in the metropolis on the alert, and there commenced what may be literally called—*a man hunt*. We shall see how Claude Duval, accompanied by his old friend Sixteen-string Jack, got through it; and now for "danger the first" which they had to encounter. The servant at the house where Markham Brereton, Cicely, and May lodged, had found out that there was some mystery going on; and when Claude and Jack arrived she went into the next room, and by placing her ear against a small hole in the wainstcot, where a knot in the wood-work had been removed, she heard something, but not all that passed. In about a quarter of an hour that servant crept down stairs into the kitchen, and so frightened was she at the mere name of the renowned Claude Duval, that she there and then, after trying to say something to her mistress, fainted away. This extraordinary conduct upon the part of the servant naturally alarmed her mistress. Some hasty but efficient restoratives were used upon the spur of the moment, and the girl recovered sufficiently to pronounce the name of Claude Duval.

"Who?" said the landlady. "Why, what is the girl dreaming about?"

"Missus, missus, Claude Duval is up stairs, and he's going to Southampton on board a ship; but before he goes all our throats are to be cut across and across!"

Upon this, being seriously affected by the vision of the throat-cutting, which she owed entirely to her own imagination, she fainted again. Now, the name of Claude Duval had scarcely less effect upon the mistress than upon the maid, and leaving the servant in her state of syncope, she ran out of the house and round the corner to a public house, the landlord of which was a constable in his own right, and rushing into the bar, she screamed—

"Claude Duval! Claude Duval!"

Now, the landlord of the Cat and Cucumber was not a hero, and he forthwith thought that this was no other than Claude Duval himself in some artful disguise; so he popped into a cupboard and shut himself in, clutching the door fast by the panneling, at the expense of all his finger nails. The woman who had so terrified him flung herself into a chair and while she screamed out at the top of her voice, "Claude Duval is in my house!" she executed a fit or two of hysterics after the most approved fashion, and alarmed the whole house in the course of a few minutes. Landlady, chambermaid, cook, boots, pot-boy, and bar-maid, all congregated around her, and then the landlord emerged from the cupboard. He fully intended by so doing to exercise a pacifying influence upon all persons there assembled; but somehow or other he failed, as very many people do, of producing the effect he intended, but was strikingly successful in producing the very reverse, the more especially as he prefaced his appeal with the exclamatory observation of "Here I am! here I am!"

Who could the assembled commons suppose it to be but the veritable Claude Duval himself! and therefore it was no wonder that the chambermaid fell over the landlady, and the pot-boy fell over the chambermaid, and everybody else fell over these.

"It's me, I tell you!" cried the landlord, and he danced round the throng like a wild Indian; and then the idea struck him that the information he had received might be worth something, so snatching his staff from a peg, upon which it proudly hung by the side of a silver tankard and two punch bowls, he rushed from the house and made the best of his way to Newgate. The valorous landlord of the Cat and Cucumber was not disappointed. His information was valuable, and highly appreciated in the classic regions of the Old Bailey; and while he is there making a sensation, we will return to Claude and his friends. They had not the remotest suspicion of what an untoward accident had occurred to already proclaim Claude's whereabouts, and the consultation continued, and ended by Claude and Sixteen-string Jack agreeing that their best plan would be to start at once, and make a first stage on horseback as far as they could conveniently go, so as to leave London and their more immediate enemies behind them. Both Jack and Claude were quite familiar with the road they were going to travel up on as far as Bagshot, and they did not expect to reach so far before finding it necessary to halt to refresh their horses, which were now at the public-house yard in Drury Lane, where Claude had directed Jack to go from the inn near Barnes. We will, therefore, now rapidly shift the scene, and get our readers to stand with us at the door of the Old Moon Tavern in Drury Lane. Two horses are there ready caparisoned, and upon one of them is Sixteen-string Jack already mounted. The other stands close to the foot-way, and Claude Duval has his left hand over the saddle, while with his right hand he is shaking the landlord by the digits.

"God bless you, my body," said old Anthony, "take care of yourself."

"I mean to do so," said Claude, "and if we should ever meet again, Anthony, you will hear of me."

"Meet again? Pho! We shall meet again, lad, take my word for it. You are a Knight of the Road, and a Knight of the Road you will be till——but no matter. They won't let you go, boy, I tell you; but you can try it. I say we, shall meet again."

A lad came up at the moment, and said—

"Anthony, can you hold that lantern up a bit, and give a fellow a light?"

"Ay—ay, that can I. You are one of the right sort."

The lad had a piece of printed paper in his hand, which he was about to twist up for the purpose of making a pipe-light of it, but touching his hat to Claude, he said in a voice of respect mingled with affection—

"Captain, you would perhaps like to see this first?"

"Do you know me?" said Claude, as he took the paper.

"Yes, captain. You saved me once from the grabs, at the risk of your own capture. Read it."

Claude took the paper, and saw it was the notice offering the thousand pounds reward for him. He handed it back with a smile, as he said—

"Do people light their pipes here with thousand pound notes? Why, here I am, and any stout fellow might take me, or shoot me at all events."

The lad shook his head, and lit his pipe with the placard.

"Ah, Claude," said Matthew, "you leave good friends behind you; but if you will be off—good-bye, and the sooner you go now the better."

Claude shook hands with the lad, and then vaulted into his saddle. He gave the rein to the noble steed he bestrode, and he and Sixteen-string Jack trotted over the uneven pavement of Drury Lane, and making the best of their way westward they soon cleared the houses, and got upon the high-road to Brentford, hoping at all events to reach Staines before it would be necessary to make any very considerable halt. They were both plainly dressed, but each had strapped to his saddle-back a small vallaise, in which there were materials for some very opposite disguises, and each had a good pair of pistols upon which he could rely. And now we must for a very short time indeed leave them to trot down the Brentford Road, while we state that they had not left the lodging of Markham Brereton, Cicely, and May, a quarter of an hour, before a quiet ring came at the

area bell, and the servant, who had recovered by this time, crept into the area as servants will do at times, to ask who was there? She was yet all of a tremble as she afterwards declared, with the idea that Claude Duval was still in the house, although she had heard the street-door opened and shut once very recently, as if to let some one out of the house.

"Open the door as quietly as you can," said a voice, that sounded like some one trying to file the teeth of a saw as harmoniously as it was possible to conduct such an operation.

"The Lord be good to us, who are you?"

"Don't ask questions, but open the door at once, or you may have your throat cut."

This speech so chimed in with the girl's fears, that she was near fainting again, but she did manage to crawl up stairs and open the street-door, when she fell upon her knees to beg for mercy and protection—a proceeding of so unexpected a character to the man upon the step, that he at once fell over her, and lay sprawling in the passage, making more noise than was sufficient to alarm the street. He swore and the girl screamed, so that if Claude had still been up stairs, it would not have been their fault if he had not suspected something was amiss. Five more men, who had been dodging about the neighbouring doors, came up, and they assembled in the passage, drawing each a pistol from his pocket. The one who had fallen, and who had been sent forward, on account of his skill in finesse, to get the door open, gently gathered himself up, crying—"Guard the door, you two. Guard the door as agreed, you two. The rest follow me. It's as good, one way and another, as two hundred pounds a-piece. Come on."

The four, leaving two to guard, commenced an active search, holding their pistols ready to fire; and there can be no doubt that these six officers, who had come direct from Newgate, had made up their minds to shoot Claude the moment they should clap eyes upon him, since the reward of one thousand pounds was to be paid for him alive or dead.

"What's the matter?" said Markham Brereton from the top of the stairs although he guessed pretty well what was the matter.

"There he is! There he is!" cried one. Bang! went a pistol, and then they all saw by the light that Markham carried, that he was not their man. Luckily the shot missed him, and Brereton, as he entered his room, cried—"Thieves! Thieves! I'll soon give them a warm reception. Where are my pistols?"

"No, no!" shouted one of the officers, "Good God, no! It's a mistake. We are police officers. Don't, sir. We are looking for Claude Duval."

"Yes," cried the servant, who had recovered sufficiently to sit upon the door-mat, "and he's up stairs, and he said he was going to Southampton to bid England a *doo*. I heard him say a *doo*. If there's any reward a going, perhaps, gentlemen, you'll think of me, Susan Grates, with only eight pounds a-year, and find herself in everythink."

"Claude who?" cried Markham.

"Duval, the famous highwayman," said one of the officers. "Remember it's felony to harbour him, sir."

"Stuff, I know nothing of Duval. Now that I know who and what you are, you may come and search and welcome; but I'm not at all obliged to you for the pistol-shot you sent at me."

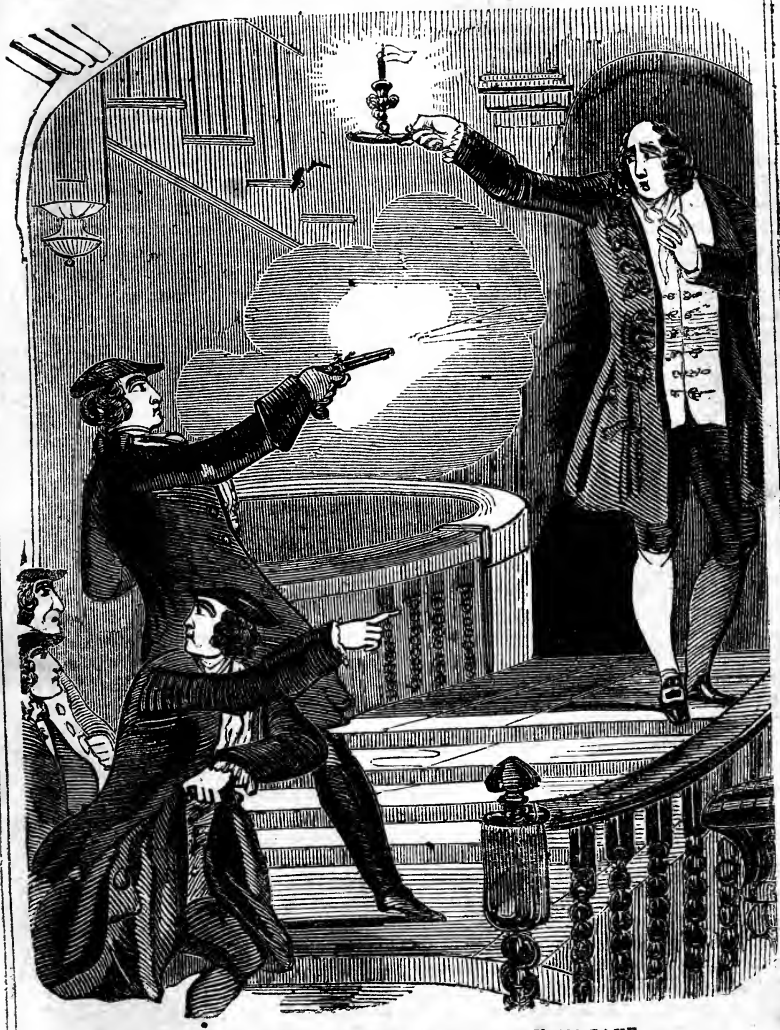
"Never mind it, sir. It wasn't meant for you. If so be as it had hit you, it would have been all a mistake, so never mind about that, sir."

The officers had concluded their search of the lower part of the house, and now they mounted the stairs; but their tact in such matters soon convinced them that if the bird had been there at all it had flown, and they looked amazingly disappointed, as one of them said, "Why, the girl here declares she heard Claude Duval himself speak of going to Southampton, and so on to leave the country."

"The girl may declare just whatever it may please her whim or fancy, but

there is no Claude Duval here to my knowledge; I and these ladies may have been talking of him, as many folks do, and that may have misled the servant, who has been listening probably at key-holes."

"Very likely," said the principal officer. "Come along, comrades; I see it is



MARKHAM BRERETON IS FIRED AT BY MISTAKE.

all a mistake. We must wait for better luck; and I can only say, sir, that we apologise to you for the trouble we have given you."

"Oh, I suppose you must do your duty."

The officers all left the house, but when they got round the corner of the street, he who had last spoken, said—

"Comrades, the information was correct—I know that fellow. It's Mr. Brereton; and you may take your oaths Claude has been there, and has gone. We will be off to the sheriff's at once, and something must be decided on. That was the nest, although the bird was not in it."

At the very moment that the officer was making such a sagacious remark, Markham Brereton said in a whisper to May and Cicely—

"Claude's route is discovered, and some means must be taken to warn him; I will think and act as quickly as possible."

What measures they were that Markham Brereton took, we must leave to be developed by circumstances, while it behoves us to detail the extraordinary steps which the police authorities, backed by the Home Office, took for the apprehension of Claude. A body of men, no less than thirty in number, was collected together; and, as the authorities did not for a moment doubt that it was really the intention of Claude to get to Southampton, whether for the purpose of embarkation or not, they, by hard riding across the country, stationed these men in parties of three along the high-road, with directions for them to trot for some miles to and fro upon the road, and intercept any one suspected. Now, the clear distance from London to Southampton being seventy-five miles, these thirty men commanded the road extremely well, and more particularly so, as they did not commence their surveillance until they got to Hounslow and its vicinity. Their orders distinctly were to capture or kill Claude Duval.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

CLAUDE'S PROGRESS.

Again we ride with Claude and Jack upon the high-road to Brentford. The night was anything but pleasant. A drizzling rain was falling, and the boisterous south-west wind was blowing, which, when it came across the trees, made such a howling and wailing noise, that one would have thought a thousand devils were trying to tear them up by their roots. They did not ride fast, for Claude was desirous of sparing the horses, not knowing what untoward circumstances might yet disturb the serenity of their route. It was a wise precaution, although neither he nor Jack had the least idea that their intentions were known, or that such formidable preparations were making against them. They had passed through the long straggling town of Brentford, and were half way to Staines, when some clock in the vicinity of where they were struck three. Claude counted the strokes, but just as he said "three," Jack held up his hand and cried—

"Listen!"

Claude inclined his ear, and heard quite plainly the tramp of a horse's feet coming after them upon the road they had taken. It was quite clear, from the sound, that it was only one horseman, and Claude said—

"Let us go on at a walk, Jack, till this horse comes up to us. I suppose we are a match for one mounted man, if he should prove an enemy?"

"Hush!" said Jack again. "What's that?"

"What's what, Jack? You are full of alarms to-night, or rather this morning."

"No, Claude, no. Hold my horse while I dismount a moment, and listen closer to the ground, for my ears much deceive me if I do not catch the sound of horses' feet in the meadow to the left. I shall soon know, Claude."

Jack dismounted, and crouched down with his ear almost touching the long grass on the way-side, and then springing up, he cried—

"I was right, Claude. Some horsemen are coming at a hard canter across those meadows."

"Never mind those just now, Jack," said Claude; "but remount, for our

friend in the rear, if he be one, will be upon us directly, and here he is. Hold!"

Claude wheeled his horse into the middle of the road, and faced the advancing rider, who reined in his steed with a force and suddenness that threw it upon its haunches, as he cried, in the well-known voice of Markham Brereton—

"Thank God, I am in time! Claude, I have news for you."

"For me? Of Cicely? Oh! tell me—she is well?"

"Quite. But your route and intention of escaping are both discovered, and the bloodhounds of the law are now upon your track. £1000 are offered for you, dead or alive; and exertions, such as never were before made, are now making for your apprenension. Thank Heaven, I have overtaken you to warn you!"

"You hear, Jack," said Claude, in a saddened tone. "My prophetic feeling was correct. I thought that we should not be permitted to go in peace. Mr. Brereton, from my heart I thank you. Go to London again, and protect Cicely. Do not risk being seen here in bad company. If I succeed in what I am attempting, you will hear from me; if I fail, you will hear of me. Farewell, sir; I owe you much, and you have had much to forgive in me."

"No—no, Claude. No."

"Hark!" said Jack; "they come."

"They?" crid Brereton. "Whom mean you?—enemies?"

"To us, perhaps, Mr. Brereton, but not to you," said Claude. "We hear some horsemen hurrying across the meadows. I pray you leave us, and do not stain a spotless reputation by even seeming to exchange courtesies with such as we are. Farewell!—farewell!"

"No, Claude—hear me. You are now engaged upon, perhaps, the only enterprise of your life with which I can truly sympathise. You are seeking the road and the means of procuring an honourable career, and it behoves me to help you on. I will not desert you. If thess be foes who are approaching, they must be met. Better for three to meet them than two. I am armed."

"And will you, indeed, aid in my defence, knowing who and what I am?"

"Yes; for you are endeavouring to be that which you are not now. I am not helping the highwayman, but I am helping Claude Duval, who is trying to be honourable and honest."

"Here they are!" cried Jack. "Here they are!"

Six horsemen dashed through a little edge, and gained the highway.

"Stand!" cried one. "In the king's name, stand, whoever you are! We are officers! Declare your names and condition, or we will fire upon you! Our present duty doesn't stand on ceremony!"

"Forward!" cried Claude; and he spurred his horse towards the officers—"Forward against the bloodhounds who are in for a man-hunt!"

He fired one of his pistols as he advanced, and Jack did the same. The officers hastily discharged a volley at Claude and his friends, and then they were all mingled up together. Claude struck one officer senseless from his horse with the heavy silver-mounted but-end of his discharged pistol. One had been shot. Jack grappled with another, and Markham Brereton was assailed by two, one of whom had to hold his horse until the other should get a fair aim at him to shoot him. Claude flew to his rescue and dashed down another of the foe, at the same moment that Jack and the one with whom he was struggling both fell from their horses together. Jack, contrived, however to keep his horse's bridle over his arm; but the officer disengaging himself, and finding that his party was getting the worst of it, ran off on the London-road, shouting "Murder! murder!" at the top of his lungs. Markham Brereton had knocked down the one with whom he grappled, and who so obligingly tried to hold him to be shot; and the sixth, who had fired, but ineffectually, two pistols, and kept rather aloof of the fray, set spurs to his horse, and galloped off at a break-neck pace, expecting every moment to hear a bullet whizzing after him.

"Jack—Jack, are you hurt?" cried Claude.

"No, Claude! And you?"

"Not a scratch!"

"Nor I," said Markham Brereton, "to signify. Claude—Claude, what will you do now?"

"Pursue my journey, and by the high-road, too. I know my danger. I will do what I have undertaken if I can, and woe be to those who stop me. Your hand, Mr. Brereton. The successful issue of this first struggle I owe to you. And now I implore you to leave me. Remember that Cicely and May, if I fall, have no friend in the world but you."

"That is true. I thought, at the moment, of going with you; but you have decided me. Farewell, Claude, until we meet again. Farewell!"

Claude and Jack had now mounted again, and Markham Brereton turned his horse's head to London. Claude waved his arm, and then off they went separate ways; but Markham Brereton, with the honest heart his bosom had ever known found his feeling in favour of Claude Duval had reached its highest pitch, at the very time he believed him to be, in a manner of speaking, doomed to destruction; for he did not think it at all possible that Claude could escape the powerful means now resorted to for his apprehension.

"He is doomed!—He is doomed!" was the exclamation of Markham Brereton, after he had left Claude and Sixteen-string Jack. "He is doomed! and, as he truly says, I shall be the only friend of poor May Duval, and of my sister Cicely."

Jack and Claude trotted on about a mile before either of them spoke; and then Claude, rising somewhat in his stirrups, said—

"Jack, where are we now? Can you guess? That little racket with our old friends the police, has, I confess, put me somewhat out of my reckoning."

"We must be close to Staines," said Jack. But, Claude, tell me trully what you think of our chances?"

"Just what I always thought, Jack, neither more nor less."

"And that?"

"That is, that we shall fail. Now look you, Jack. My crimes, as they choose to call them, are nothing in the eyes of the officers, but only consider how valuable I have become. I am a £1000 note, you know, dead or alive, to whoever can take me, and do you not think that amply sufficient to arm half the nation against me? No, Jack, we will try to do this, because I have promised it to those whom I love; but we shall be battled with, and taken back once again into the angry turmoil of life. Be assured we shall not escape."

"Then why not strike across the fields to Hounslow at once!"

"I have promised Cicely."

"Well, Claude, you shall take your own way; and, fail or succeed, I am with you. And there is one thing I have made up my mind to, which is, if they do kill you they shall kill me too, for I will only live long enough after you to baulk some of them of the enjoyment of the expected reward."

"You must think differently, Jack. But come on. Our horses don't fail, and we may get through Staines yet."

The rain had by this time blown off, but the wind was high and squally; and when they came near to any open space, it blew in such buffeting gusts against them, that the horses frequently swerved from the high-road several paces to avoid its violence, and in this way they got on for a couple of miles further, when the lights of Staines became distinctly visible to them. Thus provided, they found no foes to oblige them to forego their intentions, and they resolved upon waiting for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to give the horses some refreshment. They wanted nothing in particular themselves, but they both felt of what importance it was to keep the cattle in condition.

"Stop, Jack," said Claude, "at the first inn you see. It can't matter which; and by no means go inside, or stray above a few paces from your horse. One don't know who in Staines might be glad of a £1000 this damp and gusty night. Push on, we shall be there in ten minutes."

They put their horses to increased speed, and soon reached the picturesque suburbs of Staines, and drew up at the door of a comfortable-looking little inn, in front

of which was a good horse-trough and a pump. A man was quite busy pasting a bill upon the face of the pump, and whistling carelessly as he did so. How heedless was he of the pang that bill might give to some fellow-being! Claude, as he dismounted, glanced at it, and saw that it had at the top, in large letters, "£1000 Reward." He knew those letters at once. He had seen one of those bills in Drury-lane. Claude reached close up to the pump, and read the bill through, which the man observing, he said—

"Do you think they'll catch him, sir?"

"No," said Claude.

"Well, they means to try arter it. Three of 'em galloped through the town arter giving me twenty-five of these here bills to stick; so, in course, I'm a sticking of 'em; howsomdever, I do hopes as they won't nab him, arter all. I've heard some good of the chap."

Claude walked slowly away and rejoined Jack. The ostler of the house had issued forth to take charge of the horses, and touching his cap to Claude, he said,

"Will you leave 'em here in the yard, sir? Capital 'commodation, here, sir."

"No," said Claude; "rub them down a little, wash their feet, and give them a few mouthfuls of wet hay. That will do."

"Wery good, sir—wery good. Humph! a precious knowing-looking blade that."

The landlord now came out, and waving his hand in quite an oratorical manner, he said to Claude and Jack—

"Walk in, gentlemen—walk in; everything of the best, gentlemen. Private room, or capital parlour. We pride ourselves on our ale, gentlemen; this way, if you please."

"No, thank you," said Claude. "We make no stay; but bring a couple of glasses of ale, if you please, and we will drink them. Your accommodation inside is so good that if we were to cross the threshold, who knows but we might not be able to tear ourselves away?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the landlord; "very good. Well, gentlemen, it's as you please, of course. I'll bring the ale in a moment."

The ostler, with the hissing noise peculiar to his class, rubbed down the horses with a whisp of straw, and the landlord appeared with the ale, while Jack was reading the bill on the pump.

"Ah, gentlemen!" said the landlord, "it's a shocking thing to see £1000 notes flying about in such a way, ain't it? It would be the making of me now if I could nab him. Ah, dear me! a £1000! What a set-up to a struggling man."

"Well," said Claude, "I only wish you may get it. Are the horses ready, ostler?"

"Yes, sir, here they is, as fresh as daisies, and as rosy as apples in August. Thank you, sir. Hilloa!—more customers; why, what is the matter? They seem half dead ones."

A strange cavalcade was within sight of the inn. It was now about five o'clock in the morning, and there was sufficient light just to make it a puzzle to know if it were best to have a lantern or not; nevertheless, those who approached carried a light, and it was evident that some of them were wounded. The idea that they might be the officers with whom he, Claude, accompanied by Jack and Markham, had had the recent encounter, crossed his mind in a moment, and touching Jack upon the arm, he whispered—

"Mount, and away!"

"All ready," said Jack, as he vaulted into the saddle.

Claude followed his example; and then that strange spirit of fun or mischief, call it what you will, which was a part of his nature, came over him; and at that inopportune moment, and regardless of the possible inference that might be drawn from his conduct, he beckoned to the landlord, and when that worthy came close to his stirrup, Claude touched him, and said to him in a confidential sort of voice—

"My friend I don't think you will ever be set up by the £1000 you will get

for the apprehension of Claude Duval. Good night!—you are too wise here by a good deal."

Claude touched his forehead with his finger, and then accompanied by Jack, galloped from the door of the inn, just as the approaching cavalcade of men on horseback and on foot were within fifty paces of the door.

"Now, Jack," said Claude, "this will be a case of the devil take the hindermost. Hold on, and scamper away as though the dead Jew doctor were behind you, who brought you to life again, after your little adventure at Tyburn."

"Don't mention it," said Jack; "that's a subject I never willingly refer to."

"Excuse me, then; but ride on."

"Most willingly."

They both now put their horses to their utmost speed; for from what Claude had said to the cunning landlord of the public-house, as well as from the descriptions that would be given of them, there could be no doubt that they would be hotly as well as immediately pursued, and they wished both to get such a start of the party who would follow them as, at all events, not to be at the mercy of every little petty accident that might happen to them on their route. Thus far this desirable state of things would certainly not fail to be soon accomplished, if they continued at anything like their present rate for long without pursuit; but that was not to be. As Claude had foreseen, the advancing party soon found they were upon the track; and although now those who came on foot were completely thrown off the chase, the horsemen, stimulated both by cupidity and by revenge, took to the road in good style, and it would evidently be no fault of theirs if they did not hunt to death the man upon whose head society had set its bane and its price. Alas! poor Claude.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

CLAUDE AND JACK IN NEW CHARACTERS.

"HARK!" cried Jack; "do you hear anything, Claude?"

"No—no. Don't draw bridle up yet, Jack; push on one mile further, if you think your horse will stand it."

"Not at this rate, Claude."

"Then slacken a little."

They now decreased their speet nearly a third; but yet they went at rather a slashing pace, and got over in the next five or ten minutes a considerable stretch of ground; so that even Claude began to think it would be just as well to listen a little to ascertain if their pursuers were or were not upon their track.

"Now, Jack," he cried, "hold in a bit."

Jack did so, and the panting steeds, with right good will, paused in the middle of rather a miry piece of roadway. As soon as the clatter of their own horses' hoofs ceased, there could be no mistake about the fact of their being pursued, although it was quite clear that they were considerably in advance of the mounted party who were so anxious to come up with them.

"Jack, where are we?" said Claude.

"I am looking about me to find out. Ah, I know now. Why, we have got into a cross-road by some means, and have passed Bagshot."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, Claude, indeed we have, and what is worse, I know we are near a public-house called 'The Weavers' Arms.'"

"Friendly?"

"Quite the reverse, Claude; let us avoid it by all means. It is kept by a man named Clink, who is one of the greatest rascals unhung. He has committed crimes all his life, but continued, somehow, to keep upon the right side of the law.

He would give us up for ten pounds, and go twenty miles to see us both hung, if he were promised our boots for his trouble."

"The deuce he would! Trot on, Jack."

They were now trotting along the road, and Jack added—

"Yes, Claude, I know the rascal well. He keeps the house with his wife and niece, and does little business; but some say they would not sleep there for a night for five hundred pounds, or the hopes of it, if they were alive in the morning to claim it."

"Humph! You know, Jack, that our great object just now will be to put our pursuers upon a wrong scent."

"Of course. Shall we strike into the meadows?"

"Why, no, Jack; I have made myself a positive promise that I would go to Southampton if I could, and by the high-road, too; and, please the pigs, I will do so if I can. I don't mean to say that I would hesitate, if obvious reasons demanded it, to turn aside from my path into the open country, but I will only do so as a last extremity."

"That is like you, Claude; but, for God's sake, listen."

"I hear them coming, Jack. Ah! what light is that I see glimmering yonder, like a faint star amid the trees? Do you know it?"

"Yes; it is at the door of the Weavers' Arms."

"Come on, then, I have thought of something which may answer our purpose, and which I will communicate to you as we ride on. Desperate circumstances, you know, Jack, require desperate remedies."

"They do, indeed."

As Claude and Jack now rode rapidly on, the former, in a very few words, communicated to the latter the scheme he had hit upon, but which will best, to the reader, show itself in the performance. Jack, to be sure, held up his hands, and gave a sort of groan, to which Claude carefully responded—

"You think I am mad, Jack?"

"No—no, Claude, not mad; but of all the daring and desperate things that ever you did, or I have, from popular rumour, heard of your doing, this transcends them."

"Will you aid me, Jack?—that is the question."

"No, Claude, that is not the question, for you know well it is beyond all question. Only tell me what you would have me to do, and I will do it, even if it were to ride back and meet those who are upon our track, and ask them the time of night. I am with you upon this enterprise, and I will live or die with you in it."

"Then, Jack, we will do things that all we have done shall, in comparison, sound tame and commonplace. Come on. Ah! here we are. Is that a man at the door?"

"Yes—yes."

"Do you think they will recognise you?"

"Certainly not. They think we with the dead. Besides, I have altered myself very much, as you yourself admit; so, in the name of all that's desperate, come on."

"Good," said Claude; and trotting up to the door of the inn, he said—

"Hilloa! Ostler! ostler!"

"Here you are," said a surly voice; "what now? Can't you see a fellow when he's standing at the door, in consekense o' hearing the osses' feet?"

"Very good, amiable creature," said Claude. "Have you anybody in the house?"

"Yes."

"Well, who is it? and here's a crown for you."

"O! that alters the matter; when I see a gemman is a gemman, it's quite another affair altogether. There's nobody in the parlour but Jakes the lawyer."

"Well, take them two horses into the stable."

"The yard, to cool, you mean?"

"No—the stable at once; so do as you are told, and recollect, you have not got the crown yet, although you will have it. Come now, Joe, look sharp."

"Well, that's odd," muttered the ostler; "how comed he to know as my name was Joe, I wonder; for Joe it is, and no sort o' mistake. Howsomedever, a crown is a crown."

With this wise apothegm, the ostler took the two foaming horses by the bridles and led them through a gate into the inn-yard, and thence to the stable. Claude and Jack followed him closely, and entered the stable with him. They waited until he had lit a little piece of candle end, and stuck it to the wall, and then Claude, stepping close up to him, laid hold of him by the collar with one hand, and clapped the muzzle of a pistol against his head with the other, saying as he did so—

"If you speak one word, except in answer to me, or make the least alarm, I'll blow your brains out as soon as I would take a mad dog by the tail and smash him."

The ostler's mouth opened to an extraordinary width, and he glared at Claude like a man possessed.

"Now, Jack," added Claude, "quick!"

Jack, with great dexterity, dragged the ostler to one of the racks, and so tied him up by the halter round his neck, that any very violent exertion would infallibly hang him; then with a piece of strong twine that he had about him, Jack had the fellow's hands securely tied behind him.

"Now, my friend," said Claude, as he laid the five-shilling piece upon the ground, "I promised you a crown, and a crown you shall have; but one of us intend to keep guard in the yard, and if you make any noise, you will be a dead man."

"Oh, sir!"

"Silence!"

"Yes, yes, yes, sir; oh, no, no, don't; I am silent—oh dear, yes!"

Claude and Jack closed the stable door, and then at once went into the house. To the right hand of the passage was the bar, with all its bright array of glasses, and pots, and jugs, and into which there was an entrance by a little half door, and, immediately opposite, was the door of the parlour, in which Claude had been informed that Mr. Jakes the lawyer (whoever that individual might be) was solacing himself. There was a good light burning in the bar, and in it sat the pious landlord of the Weavers' Arms, and his wife, while a young lass, his niece, was receiving a severe lecture upon the impropriety of wearing her hair in curls.

"It only encourages the filthy men," said Mrs. Clink, "and that's what you do it for."

"Indeed, aunt!"

"How dare you," said Click—"how dare you contradict your aunt? 'Honour your parents, that thy days may be long in the land,' and as you are an orphan, that text may be very well altered to 'honour your uncle and aunt.' Remember that we keep you from the workhouse."

"No, uncle."

"What?"

"I say no, uncle, because that is not the fact. I act here as your servant, and the only great difference between me and the other servants is, that I get no wages, and am expected to be more thankful seemingly upon that account than my conscience will let me."

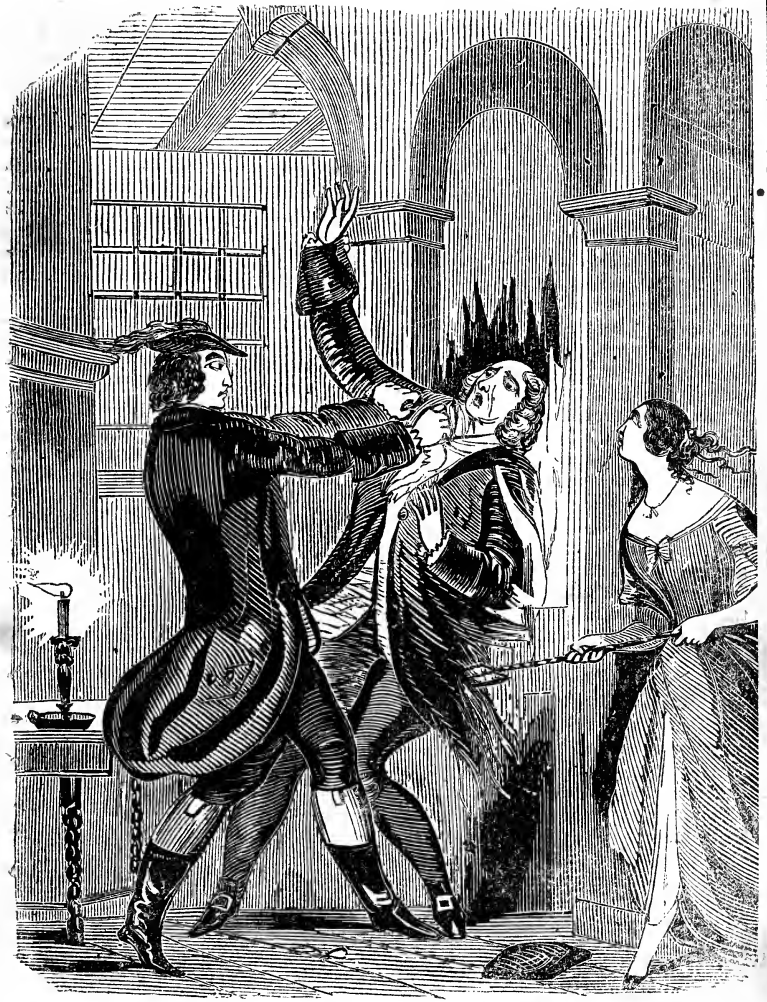
Mr. and Mrs. Click held up their hands, with a kind of holy horror, as though they could have said—"There's gratitude for you. That's what you get for feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked!" and at that moment Claude and Jack entered the house. The last few words of this controversy were not lost upon Claude. He gathered hope from them, that the niece might not feel so very much hurt, if he were to the uttermost to carry out his plan of operations. Walking right on, until he came to the little half door that led into the bar,

Claude opened it with all the coolness in the world, and to the utter astonishment of the landlord, stood in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Weavers' Arms.

"Have you a cupboard?" said Claude.

"A cupboard?" gasped the landlord.

"A cupboard?" said Mrs. Clink.



MAKES IN AN AWKWARD "FIX" BETWEEN CLAUDE AND MARY ANN.

The eyes of both of them wandered to a door in the wall, and Claude at once stepping to it, flung it open, and saw a tolerably-sized pantry.

"Good!" he said; and as he spoke he drew from his breast-pocket a pistol. "Now, Mr. Clink, I will trouble you for those linen sleeves you have on and for that apron, after which you will do me the honour of getting into that cupboard;

and you, madam," turning to Mrs. Clink, "along with him, or I swear by all that's sacred I will blow your brains out and make you famous as the Clinks who were murdered by Claude Duval, in all time to come."

"Claude—Duval!" gasped the landlord.

"The Lord look down upon us!" said the landlady.

Jack, however, gave neither of them much time for reflection. He stripped the linen sleeves from the landlord, and took his apron likewise, and then thrust him into the cupboard, with a shock that nearly sent all the breath out of his body.

"Now, madam, follow your spouse," said Claude, "and if I hear so much as a cough or a sneeze, or even a breath too hardly drawn, and calculated to excite attention, I will send the contents of a pair of double-barrelled pistols through the panel of this door. There's a thousand pounds reward for me alive or dead, and you may both earn it if you like, by sacrificing your lives for it, and it will make a nice little fortune for your pretty niece here."

Bang went the door of the cupboard, and Jack locked it, while Claude, hastily divesting himself of his coat, hat, and cravat, put on the landlord's sleeves and apron. Jack made the same preparations, only turning up his shirt sleeves; so that, as they both stood there, no one would have supposed that they were anything else than belonging to the place. All this while the niece had sat in silent amazement, and Claude now turning to her, said,—"My dear, you know who I am, and what a sum of blood-money you would get by betraying me. Every guinea would look red with gore. I use no threats to you, but I make one promise.

"Nay," continued Claude, with that soft and handsome smile, which at times would light up his features as though a ray of sunshine had come across them. "Nay, be not alarmed. Nothing can be further from my purpose, than to cause you a moment's pain. The promise I make you is, that if you can have the heart to betray me, you may do so with perfect personal safety, as neither my friend nor I would raise an arm against you. Now, Jack, be busy. Remember, you are Sam the waiter, and a bit of a fool as most Sams are, and I am the landlord of the Weavers' Arms, and we have heard a couple of fellows ride by here at a breakneck pace, some quarter of an hour ago."

"Agreed. All's right," said Jack. "Listen!"

Claude did so, and distinctly heard several horsemen arrive at the door of the inn. One of them crid out—

"Come on. What are you lagging behind for? If he is here, we ought, as many of us as possible, to be in at the death. Come on."

"My nag has gone lame," said another. "Don't dismount any more of you, Jefferson and I will go in and see if he is here, or has been past. Confound the fellow, what a dance he leads us; but we must have him. Who on earth can it be he has with him?"

"Ah, that's a puzzler," said another.

Jack had now, with a towel in one hand and a glass in the other, gone out to the passage; and as he met the two officers, he said—

"Want your horses seen to, gentlemen?"

"No—no. What house is this? We are from London."

"Weavers' Arms, gentlemen, at your service. Master's in the bar. Want bed, gentlemen?"

"No—no. Oh, are you the landlord?"

"I ought to go for to be," said Claude, who had lit a pipe, and was smoking it with all the deliberation in the world. "Is anything amiss, sir?"

"Nothing particular. Have two horsemen passed your door lately, landlord?"

"Two fellers going like mad—one a long 'un with a slouched hat, on a dark bay?"

"Yes—yes."

"Lord bless you, yes. Why, they are five miles off by now, if they keep up their pace."

"Confound them!"

"What, do you want 'em? Lord love you, if I'd only now have known that, I could have hailed them from my door, and told 'em to wait a bit till you came up. What a pity, wasn't it now, really?"

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE ROAD AGAIN.

The officer turned to his companions, as he said—

"Why, this fellow is a born fool. I tell you what, master landlord, one of them men on horseback was Claude Duval, and there's a clear £1000 offered for him alive or dead; so you see a nice chance has gone by you."

"A thousand pounds?"

"Ah, yes. Neither more nor less"

"Why I shall be a made man—when I catches him. Well, if ever I sees him behind this here bar, I'll know now what to go for to say to him. A thousand pounds? Oh, my eye!"

"Stupid, is there any one in your house?"

"Only mad Mr Jakes," said the landlord's niece. "He's a gentleman whose wits are not all right, poor man, but quite harmless, and we let him sit in the parlour of an evening. He knows nobody, poor silly creature, and sometimes he miscalls both me and my uncle, and thinks himself all sorts of things, sometimes the captain of a ship, and sometimes a king, and at times a lawyer."

"What, Kate," said Claude, taking at once the judicious hint thus thrown out to him by the landlord's niece, "is poor silly Mr. Jakes in the parlour?"

"Yes, uncle. Didn't you see him come in?"

"Not I, faith, my gal; but howsomdever—"

At this moment the parlour door was opened, and the face of a middle-aged red-whiskered man appeared at it with a large tumbler with a spoon in it, and a slice of lemon at the bottom of it, in his hand.

"Mr. Clink," he said, "just fill this again if you please, and make it a little sweeter than the last. Eh?—Lord bless me—why—why—eh? What's all this?"

"Is that the mad fellow?" said one of the officers. "He seems to be getting worse rather. What an odd look he has got, to be sure. Why he looks like a man who was never so much astonished in all his life. Come—come, Jakes. Lie down, sir!"

"What!" said the attorney, "am I mad?"

"Not a doubt of it. Lie down, sir. Come—come! Upon my word, landlord, you ought not to permit a man in such a state of mind to have mixed liquors. What, now, if he were to go off quite furious all of a sudden?"

"Not allow me to have mixed liquors?" cried the attorney, as he advanced to the bar, and looked at Claude with an air of astonishment. "Who are you, I should like to know, and where is Clink?"

"I never seed you so bad as you is to-night, Mr, Jakes," said Claude; "I shan't let you have any more brandy and water. Go home, do. Go home, now, and you shall be a captain of a ship. That pleases him generally," added Claude in a whisper to the officers.

"Oh, does it? It's always best to humour these mad fellows, I think. Go home, Captain Jakes, go home, do, there's a brave fellow. You are a captain, you know—poor fellow—go home."

Jakes stood with the tumbler in his hand, and his mouth wide open with astonishment. He shook his head, and passed his hand over his eyes. It was

quite clear that Jakes was getting extremely doubtful whether he was awake or asleep. At length, with a stamp of the foot, he cried—

"What the deuce is the meaning of all this? Are you all drunk, or do you want to drive a man out of his senses? I am an attorney."

"There, gentlemen, I thought as how he'd come to that."

"Where's Mr. Clink? and who the devil are you?"

"There he goes—there he goes! Do you hear him, Kate?"

"Kate? Why, she's no Kate. She's the landlord's niece, and her name is Mary Ann. Good God! what, in the name of all that's abominable, is this horrid mystification about? Am I mad? or have you all taken leave of your senses? or is this some detestable stupid joke to bewilder a man by swearing him out of his own identity, and his judgment of others? Speak, some of you, for, upon my life, it's enough to make the most peaceable man in the world violent to be treated in this way like a fool."

"Well," said the principal officer, "we must be off again. We can't stop here any longer. Claude Duval may by this time have fallen into the hands of the next party on the watch for him; but it don't matter, as we have all agreed to share the reward among us. We shall trot on gently the next five minutes."

"But won't you try to catch him?" said Jack.

"Oh, we must have him. We are tracking him regularly down the road. Oh, thank you."

The niece feeling that if Claude was asked to draw any liquor he might, by his not knowing exactly which tap to appeal to, and a certain awkwardness in such an office, betray himself, had filled two nice little glasses with brandy, and placed them before the officers, who tossed them off in a moment, and one tendered a shilling in payment.

"Oh, no—no," said Claude. "I stand that."

"You are very liberal," he added, "and you may depend we shall give your house a profitable visit on the first opportunity; so good-night to you. We must be off now, for business is business, you know."

"Oh, of course. Good night, gentlemen."

"But stop a bit," cried Mr. Jakes, "stop, I say, I'm sure there's something going on. I'm an attorney, and can see a thing or two. Stop, I say, if you are officers. Don't be made fools of, for I begin to suspect——"

"Ah, poor devil!" said the principal officer, as he mounted his horse. "What a thing it is for a man to lose his wits in such a way. He begins to suspect, does he? Ha! ha! Good-night landlord. You will see us again some day."

The officer was not illiberal, for he threw a sixpence to Jack, who held his horse by the bridle for him to mount, and in another moment they were off at a good round trot, that took them soon a mile from the Weavers' Arms.

"Triumph!" cried Jack.

"Hush!" said Claude. "Hush, Jack! Don't hilloa until we are fairly out of the wood."

"But we are."

"I hope so—I hope so. My dear Kate, or Mary Ann, or whatever your name may be, I beg to return you the grateful thanks of one who never forgets a kindness. You have saved two lives to-night."

"Two lives?" said the young girl.

"Yes, for my friend and I had made up our minds to perish, both of us, in fighting for our liberty, rather than yield to those who are hunting us for our blood's value. You have saved us. And now, sir, a word with you."

Claude dashed out of the bar, and caught Mr. Jakes by the arm, and then added—

"You will please to come into the bar and sit down, sir, while I give you a few words of advice."

"But who—who—where?——"

"Ask no questions, but mark me well. I and my friend are going to leave this place. Be assured we shall hear if anything of a malicious character occurs after

our departure. I feel a conviction that I shall not fall into the hands of my enemies, and I will, when this man-hunt is over, begin to think of who I have to thank, and of what I have to revenge. Do not presume to stir from where you are, as you value your life for the next half hour."

"I—I—won't. But who are you ?"

"Claude Duval!"

"Good God ! you don't say so; and the one thousand is——"

"Not for you, Mr. Jakes.—Jack, can you get the horses from the stable, for we must be off again as quickly as we can. There is no rest for us yet. Perhaps there never will be upon this side of the grave; but still if such be the case, I will take good care to keep others equally restless."

Mr. Jakes sat upon the chair Claude had pointed out to him, glaring about him like a tiger at bay. He was probably thinking how the whole affair would tell in the London papers, and what a subject of ridicule he would be, at the bare recital of how he had been taken in. He was a man in vigorous enough health and by no means weak. What he wanted in true and genuine courage, he made up in a kind of passionate ferocity, and now as he looked at Claude alone in the bar, he thought what a capital thing it would be to earn the one thousand pounds all to himself. These thoughts each moment gathered strength, If he had been in possession of fire-arme he would most undoubtedly have shot Claude, and then run his chance of flying from the house, to escape the vengeance of Jack. But he was unarmed, and yet by a vigorous, effort, he thought surely something could be done. Claude's back was towards him, and it struck Mr. Jakes that if he were to spring upon him, and bring him to the ground, he might succeed in killing him. Regardless, then, of the consequences of possible failure, and seeing nothing in his imagination but the dazzling heap of gold that made up a thousand pounds, Mr. Jakes suddenly sprang upon Claude with a savage sort of yell, and clutched him by the elbows, twining his legs around him, and hoping to overcome him before Jack could arrive from the stable with the horses. Now, Claude was, to tell the honest truth, rather astonished and taken at unawares by this proceeding, which argued an amount of courage or folly, it was hard to say which, that he, Claude, would not have given any lawyer in the world credit for. Under those circumstances, then, for the moment, we must say Claude was astonished, but he very soon surprised Mr. Jakes, although at the time he could not make out the meaning of a sudden howl of bodily anguish which the lawyer uttered. The fact was, that Mary Ann, in her indignation at Jakes, caught up a toasting-fork, and inflicted with its three prongs so severe a wound on the hinder portion of Jakes's legal economy, that he very nearly relaxed his hold of Claude. But what toasting-fork, or any fork, except the trident of the gentleman below, will induce a lawyer to let go a chance of such a sum as one thousand pounds? No! He held on like a martyr. Claude, however, soon put an end to the joke.

"Will you get down, Mr. Jakes?" he said.

"No—no—I apprehend you. You are my prisoner, and the reward is mine You had better yield."

"Very well, we shall see."

Claude walked forward two steps, and then suddenly retreated with so frightful a rush, that Mr. Jakes came against the cupboard-door—Claude did not mean that, though—with a force that not only half killed him, but burst open the panel, smashing it to splinters. Again did Claude charge backwards, and then bang went Mr. Jakes into the cupboard, to the serious damage of Mr. Clink and the pious Mrs. Clink.

"Murder! Oh, gracious Providence, murder!—my back's broke!" gasped Jakes.

"Serve you right," said Mary Ann.

"So it does," said Claude, as he found himself free from the encumbrance of the lawyer's weight; and upon leaving, saw that he was fairly wedged into the smashed woodwork of the door of the cupboard in which were the sanctified Clinks.

The whole affair now, although really serious for the parties concerned, partook much more of the ludicrous than the grave. Mr. Jakes looked something like a clown in a pantomime, who sticks fast in some small aperture through which the harlequin has darted with ease and agility. However, the cupboard being originally certainly not larger than would accommodate Mr. Clink and his wife, those two highly proper personages were now by the intrusions of the broken panel, and a large portion of Jakes's anatomy, almost crushed to death, and roared aloud for mercy, not having the least idea either of what was going on, or by what horrible contrivance Claude Duval was half murdering them. We cannot help recording that all this furnished much more amusement than pain to Mary Ann. Jack soon made his way back with the horses, and was quite astonished to hear a terrible outcry in the inn.

"Claude, Claude," he said, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing," said Claude; "are the horses ready?"

"Quite. I can't come in, for I am holding them, as they are rather restive from being alarmed at a tussle between me and the ostler. I just got to the stable in time, for he had managed to get loose."

"Farewell," said Claude, as he kissed Mary Ann, "perhaps you will hear of me again some day. I shall not forget you."

"Ah," said the girl, "if you would reform and take up some other and better kind of life, what a happy reflection it would be to me that I had saved you from those who would gladly have taken your life—not that they loved virtue, but because there was a price upon your head."

"True, my dear," said Claude, "that was it; and as to my reformation, I say 'amen' to the wish, if they will let me do it—but they won't. Farewell!"

"Farewell!—Heaven help you, as you wish to be a better man than you have been!"

Claude waved his hand, and reaching the door, he sprang upon the back of his horse, which Jack held, and then, performing the same office for Jack, the latter mounted.

"Farewell," said Claude, "to the Weavers' Arms."

We should have remarked that they had both restored their costume to its original state, Claude carrying out Jack's coat to him—so that once again, when they took to the road, no one could have thought them the same persons who, a short time before, had stood behind the bar of the Weavers' Arms, looking so like the ordinary inhabitants of the place.

"This is an escape, indeed," said Jack.

"And a rare adventure."

"Most rare. Of all your exploits, Claude, I must confess, with the exception of your visit to the Governor of Newgate, I consider this the most daring."

"Do you, Jack?"

"In faith, Claude, I do; and henceforth I shall have such faith in the power of your——"

"Impudence?"

"No, no—not exactly that."

"What then, Jack?"

"Cool determination."

"Well, perhaps it may be called such. I will reach Southampton, and embark in the ship that awaits to convey me to another land, if I can—but I don't think they will let me. Push on, Jack—something strikes me that we shall have more wonderful adventures than any we have yet seen before we get fifty miles upon this most strange journey of ours."

CHAPTER LXXXV.

A SON OF THE CHURCH.

Jack was silent after these few words of Claude's, and they continued on the road at an easy pace; for, in truth, the work the horses had already done was something very considerable, while the rest they had had at the Weavers' Arms was scarcely worth the mentioning. Now, in relating those events at the inn, we have been under the necessity of taking up considerable space, while in point of fact, with such rapidity did everything happen, that certainly twenty minutes did not elapse from the period that Claude Duval had his foot in the stirrup to dismount, to the time when he again placed it there to mount and ride away.—There was a hazy mistiness now in the air, which showed that it was loaded with aqueous particles, by the manner in which it fell upon their clothes, their faces, and the trappings of their horses. In fact, for the next half hour or more, our travellers passed through as heavy a dew as Claude or Jack had ever in their lives experienced, and their knowledge of night in the country was by no means of a limited character.

"Where are we?" said Claude; "I am getting now, I think, beyond my latitude altogether, Jack. But you, perhaps, know the road."

"I do," said Jack, "for, to tell the truth, I have taken some pains to study it. It strikes me, Claude, that we are somewhere near a junction of roads, of which we may take our choice, as both lead to the same point, while each makes what may be considered to be a detour."

"And where do they lead, Jack?"

"Why, the road to our left will reach Farnborough, through a little place called Frimley, while that to the right goes to Blackwater, and so on to Basingstoke.

"Which shall we take?"

"The latter, I think, Claude. I dare say our enemies are upon both. But do you really think of keeping the high-road?"

"Why, look you, Jack, I'm fairly of opinion that the high-road, although beset with foes, is the safest. If we were to go among the meadows, and so try to blunder on towards our place of destination, the odds are that we should be seen and hunted like foxes, for we should always, you know, be upon some man's land, while the high-road is free to all; and, besides, there are, along with a thousand dangers, a thousand resources and means of escaping from those dangers. I know, Jack, it looks like an act of temerity to keep the high-road; but it is only in looks, for, upon my word, I think it the safest."

"You have convinced me, Claude, and I feel easier than I did; but when I remember that you have got those praying for you who love you, I tremble for your safety."

"Don't mention them, Jack. You may chance to unman me, perhaps, when I want all my powers about me. But what strange light is that yonder?"

"Why, Claude, I thought you were sufficiently a night-bird to know that. It is the east."

"By heavens! and the first streak of day-dawn, too. How the hours fly, Jack."

"They do, indeed."

"It is cold and beautiful," said Claude.

They both paused to look at the strange sickly tinting of the eastern sky as the first faint streaks of sun-light appeared, and after a few moments Jack said—

"I know that people differ about sunrise—some call it beautiful, but I have no such opinion. I differ with them *in toto*. To my mind, no thing can be more truly cold—more truly chilling and comfortless, than sunrise—or perhaps I ought not to say sunrise, for the words 'early dawn' describe what I mean better. The

colours in the sky are leaden and wretched—the air is keen and biting, and the whole affair about which poets and painters war—who, probably, have never once in their lives got out of their warm beds to view it—is about as gloomy as I can well imagine."

"Really, Jack."

"Yes, really, Claude. I grant you, that when a real ray of light, instead of the frosty-looking reflected beam, falls upon the world, there is the beauty."

"Then what do you say to sunset?"

"Ah! that is quite another affair. Always beautiful it is, and sometimes sublime."

"I am of your opinion, Jack, to a hair. Push on."

"With all my heart."

The horses had taken a few mouthfuls of fine sweet grass while this short digression concerning sunrise took place, and they now went on at a brisk canter at though they were quite fresh, and so another mile was traversed, which brought them to the place where the road divided to the right and to the left.

"And we are to take the right?" said Claude.

"Stand!" cried a voice, and a horseman dashed from the cover of a tree into the very middle of the road. "Stand! you can't pass here until we know more of you."

"And, pray," said Claude, "who may 'we' be?"

"You will soon see that. There's my authority."

As he spoke, the man produced a small constable's staff, with the well-known little brass crown at the top of it; and gave a knowing sort of nod, as though he would add, "I hope and suppose you are quite satisfied now?"

"Dear me!" said Claude, in a jeering tone, which the constable took very ill; for, rising in his stirrups, he called aloud—

"Wrotham! Wrotham! Bring them on. Here's a very suspicious character on horseback here—two suspicious characters, I may say, on horseback. Come on!"

"It's a lie!" said Claude, as he spurred up to the man. "There's only one suspicious character here, and he is not on horseback at all."

As he spoke, Claude struck the astounded officer such a blow in the face with the butt-end of a heavily mounted pistol, that he fell from his horse, although he was not rendered insensible.

"Now, Jack," added Claude, "be off and away again. The man-hunt goes on bravely, and we may all yet be in at the death. On—on, Jack! That's brave. Why, our horses seem flying instead of galloping."

Down the right-hand road they almost flew like lightning, and had got a gooe half mile before the party of six men which was stationed at that junction o roads had got up to their fallen comrade, from the manner in which they wer hidden, and from him had learnt which road the audacious fugitives had taken The pursuit was indeed commenced with determination and vigour; but, as they say at sea, "A stern chase is a long chase." Now, Claude and Jack, all down the road, had gathered confirmation of what they had heard previously—namely, that at intervals there were parties of officers stationed to capture him, Claude; and from this knowledge it followed that if he and Jack continued merely to fly from one party, they must inevitably fall into the hands of another. The only chance they had of preservation was in baffling party after party, so as to puzzle them whether they were on the road or not.

"Stop!" cried Jack, suddenly.

"Good God!" cried Claude, "are you mad, Jack?"

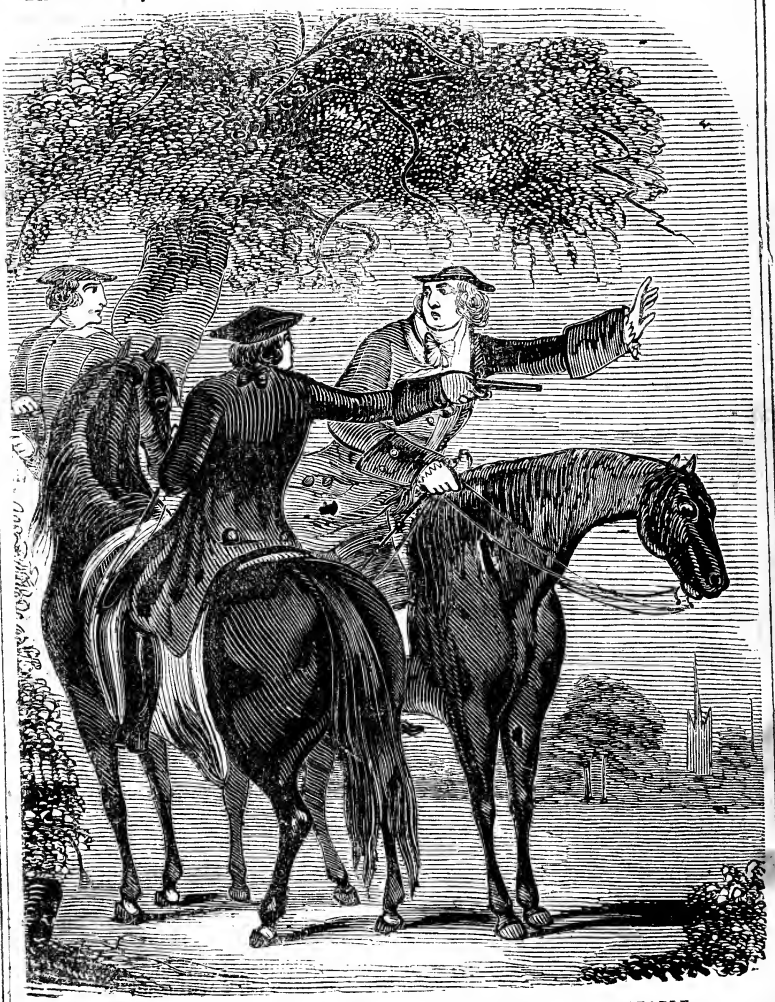
"Not at all; this is a turn of the road, and we are out of sight. Do as I do, Claude, and trust to my knowledge of the localities. Quick—quick! there is not a moment now to spare. Follow—follow on, Claude, if you love me as yourself."

Jack sprang from his horse, and forcing his way with the animal through a hedge on the left-hand side of the road, gained a field. Claude followed him

with difficulty, for he made his horse jump the hedge, but Jack urged him to dismount, and lead the animal, merely saying—

"On—on, and follow me, Claude. It is our only chance just now. This way—this way. Make for yon little cluster of trees. On—on—on."

The field they were in was very miry; but Claude got on after Jack and his



JACK AND CLAUDE ARE SLIGHTLY OBSTRUCTED BY A CONSTABLE.

horse as fast as he could; and in about three minutes they reached the shelter of the trees, when Jack stopped and said—

"Listen! listen! Ah! there they go!"

They heard a rush of horses' feet, and the officers had passed the spot through which our adventurers had found their way into the fields. Claude drew a long breath, as he said—

"Jack, I admit that, for once, the high-road was not the safest place. Shall we go back? I suppose that will be the best way—will it not?"

"No, Claude; we shall come upon a pretty little lane presently, that will lead into the Frimley-road; and now that this one leading direct to Blackwater is too hot to hold us, we had much better pursue the one to Farnborough."

"Good! Lead on. In an adventure of this kind, of what immense service a knowledge of the localities is, to be sure."

"It is half the battle, Claude."

They both mounted again now, for as the party in pursuit of them had passed on, they had no longer any fear of their heads being seen above the top of the hedge; and, moreover, although the day was breaking, it was not yet sufficiently light for any one to see many yards with any degree of certainty. The cluster of trees, too, was of good service, for, as Jack mentioned to Claude, they would be between them and the men who had galloped down the Blackwater-road for the next mile or two.

"Then we breathe again," said Claude.

"Yes—yes, for a brief space. Oh! Claude, does it not seem to you as if something was protecting us upon this journey, notwithstanding all the serious dangers we encounter?"

"Don't be superstitious, Jack."

"Well—well, I know you don't feel with me upon such subjects exactly; but here's the lane, just by yon thatched farm-house. I hope we shall meet no one to interrupt us, for our nearest way is across yon ploughed field. Humph! they are milking early. Do you see?"

A buxom lass was engaged in a little close, milking the cows; and for a few moments she did not see the two horsemen looking at her through a blackthorn hedge. When she did so, however, she gave a start of alarm, and dropping a curtsey, she then said—

"A fair morning, gentlemen. Shall I shout to measter?"

"No—no."

"He's afore. I'll shout to him, shall I?"

"No—no, I say," cried Claude. "All we want of you is a draugh of milk. Can you allow us so much, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, sir, you are welcome enough. Only wait a moment while I strain you some. You'll find measter round the barn."

"But we don't want your master, I tell you. All we want is the milk."

The girl laughed, and soon brought them a quart in a wooden pannikin, having strained it through a piece of linen as pure as snow; and both Claude and Jack thought they had never tasted anything so deliciously refreshing in all their lives.

"After all," said Jack, "there is nothing like a pure country life for me."

"Pho! pho!" said Claude. "You would get sick to death of it in a week. My dear, whose house is that upon the hill?"

"Oh, that's Parson Lamb's, that is."

"Very well: now, will you have half-a-crown or a kiss for the milk?"

"Lor, sir!"

"Come—come, Claude," said Jack. "Remember! This is no time for trifling."

"True—true," replied Duval, with a sudden seriousness, as he threw the milk-maid the piece of money. "Some other day, my girl, I will come for the kiss. Is this the lane to—where is the place, Jack?"

"Farnborough—it's all right—round by those stacks, I think, will take us to it."

"Yes," said the girl; "you must keep Giles's close on your right hand, and don't fall into the pond."

"No—no; we won't. Good-morning."

Off they both went; and having cleared the hay stacks, they saw a low stile which led into the lane; but before they reached it, a short, sturdy-looking man, in

mud boots, met them, and said in a voice of authority that proclaimed him the girl's "measter—"

"Who be you upon my land?"

"The man in the moon," said Claude, "taking a morning ride with the devil. How do you get on, old gaffer?"

Before the rather slow thinking wits of the farmer could thoroughly make out what was said to him, or at all devise anything in the shape of a suitable reply, both Claude and Jack had jumped the little low stile, and were going at a good trot down the lane, which was indeed in rather an awful state of mud. If the farmer had any suspicion—which, to be sure, it was not at all likely he could have—regarding the two mounted men who treated him so cavalierly, he might have seriously compromised the safety of Jack and Claude by following them down the lane, seeing that before they emerged from it into the road they were compelled to resort to an experiment for their better security, which with a witness would have lost all its chance of success. What that experiment was particularly, and what was the danger that provoked it, will be seen very shortly; suffice to say, that for about half a mile nothing in the shape of danger showed itself, while the thick mud completely deadened the sound of their horses' hoofs. Jack, however, was wisely enough determined not to emerge from the lane without a better warrant against the presence of enemies near at hand than this silence bespoke, and he said to Claude—

"Now, hold my horse by the bridle, and I will climb the bank, which is here very high, and take a good look all round me."

"Good," said Claude; "but don't show your head, Jack, one inch higher than is absolutely necessary."

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

DESPERATION.

Jack successfully scrambled up the high bank, upon the top of which grew a thick-set hedge, and took a long and anxious look around him. By degrees, however, he fixed his eyes more particularly in the direction of the high-road which lay at the end of the lane than anywhere else, and after an attentive observation of about five minutes, he came down.

"Well?" said Claude.

"Danger!"

"Ay, I thought as much. Nothing but danger, Jack."

"Never mind, Claude. All may be well at last. We will hope so."

"I don't mind, Jack; danger is no companion to me, and I can say with the hair-brained soldier in the play—

> ——'From this nettle danger
> I pluck the flower safety.'

So now tell me, Jack, in what the danger consists—where it is—and what you think it is in our power to do to avoid it, so as to turn its sharp edge upon those who prepared it for us?"

"I saw to the end of the lane, and there stands a cottage, presenting nothing at all remarkable, except that in the garden there are five horses ready saddled, and at the garden gate, partly hidden by some large laurels, a mounted man, who looks as like an officer as any person ever I saw in my life, and my conclusion is that we are close on the post of one of the little parties waiting for us, and that the mounted man acts as a kind of sentinel, while the others take their breakfast inside the cottage, from whence, as you may easily fancy, they would all issue in a moment, armed to the teeth, upon the slightest alarm from him."

"No doubt."

"Well, Claude, that is the gloomy side of the picture; the reverse is, that by scrambling over the bank, and then through an orchard and a small meadow, we shall gain the high road, about a quarter of a mile on the London side of the end of the lane; but we must disguise ourselves well, for which you know we have convenience in our saddle vallises. What say you?"

"Humph! We have not yet tried our resources in that way."

"No, and I feel inclined to do so, for on we must get. It is not as if back again or forward was all the same to us, you know, Claude."

"It is not, indeed. Come, Jack, what can we most readily do in the way of disguise, think you?"

"Turn your coat, which, luckily, is made for the purpose; change your cravat, and assume as serious and old an air as you can, while I make up as a groom, which you know I can do with great rapidity and ease."

"Very well—here goes."

They both dismounted, and Claude turned his coat inside out, when from a bright beaver it was changed to a silver kind of gray. He put on a white cambric cravat, with lace ends, and by adjusting his hat more at the back of his head than he usually wore it, so completely altered the contour of his face, that few would have known him at a hasty and superficial glance. He, moreover, took a book from his vallise and held it half open in his hand, as though he had been jogging on and reading. Neither was Jack at all behind hand in making an alteration in his appearance. He put on a livery coat that he took from his vallise, and placed around his hat a gold band, by which means he effectually altered his appearance, and looked like some very respectable, quiet groom, in a good family.

"Excellent," said Claude.

"I repeat the words as regards you," said Jack; "you disguise yourself always with great taste; but now, for Heaven's sake, let us get through the orchard meadow as quickly as it is possible so to do. Come on, Claude, it is best to help and walk our horses by the bridles over this precipitous bank."

This was the most difficult part of the affair, for the earth of the bank was soft, and saturated with moisture, so that the horses, with all the willingness in the world to mount it, could get no fast hold. However, perseverance conquers obstacles, and after some trial the whole party—horses and men—got into the orchard. Luckily no one was there, so, mounting and trotting on, Jack and Claude were through it in two minutes, and out in the small meadow on the other side, that shielded it from the high road.

"Safe and sound," said Duval, "so far. Now, Jack, behave yourself like a decent and devout serving man, if you please, or else I shall have to discharge you, you know."

"All right, master," said Jack, with a smile, "I don't want to lose my place, for if you don't know when you have a good man, I know when I have a good master; so make yourself comfortable and trot. Oh, no—hold, Claude."

"What is it?"

"Look up the rosd. Who the devil is that?"

Claude did look, and there, within a hundred yards of them, coming leisurely along, as though from Frimley, which the reader will recollect was nearer London than our two adventurers now were, he saw a portly personage upon a tall, well-fed horse, which came on at a walk, and with quite a stately air. The rider was dressed in black, and there was no such thing as mistaking the clerical cut of his habiliments and hat; a parson he was, to all intents and purposes, and a well-fed and most pompous-looking one he was too. There was no bare and hungry curate kind of look about him—oh, dear, no.

"Who, in the name of all that's troublesome, is that, I wonder?" said Claude.

"Parson Lamb, you may depend, that the milk-maid spoke of. She said that house upon the hill, you recollect, was his."

"She did, indeed, and it surely is more likely to be him than any one else, Jack.

This may be an absolute piece of good fortune. That fellow is well fed, and I'll warrant, clings to life like many a better man. Suppose I force him to vouch for our respectability, if it should be questioned as we pass the officers at this next post?"

"Nobody but you could do it, Claude, or think of doing it."

"Oh, pho! You do me too much honour. It was just what you would yourself have done, Jack, in your past days, when I first knew you, and you held Hampstead Heath against all enemies. Ah, Jack, do you recollect the waggon into which you sprang, horse and man?"

"Claude—Claude, do not speak to me of the past, I pray you."

"Forgive me, Jack, I would not pain you, as well you know, for the world, but these old recollections are endearing to me. Now for the parson. Just trot gently after me, and as close as your notions of a groom's propriety will let you."

"I will."

On they both went directly in the path of the approaching clergyman, who bent upon Claude an insolent look of inquiry as he came up to him, as though the whole parish was his, and it was a crime for any one he did not know to be upon the high road even. So Claude returned the look of the arrogant priest, and he was not far wrong in his estimate of the character of the Reverend John Lamb, who was rector of Frimley, and lived in the great white house, no doubt, to show his humility like a light and beacon to all men whatever. A few moments, and the highwayman and the parson met face to face.

"Sir," said Claude, "is your name Lamb?"

The reverend gentleman knit his brows, and looked as though to ask him his name upon the highway was an insult.

"Well, sir," he said, "and what then?"

"Oh, I perceive," said Claude, as with admirable dexterity he brought his horse close to the side of the reverend personage, "I perceive at once, by the manner of your answer, that you are a follower in the footsteps of Him who loved the meek and the humble. Now, sir, I intend to make a vacancy in the rectorship of Frimley if you in the smallest matter dispute my orders. You see this pistol? It is loaded with a couple of slugs, and I swear by all that to you ought to hold sacred, that I will lodge them in your brains if you attempt to escape."

The countenance of the priest turned of ashy paleness, and his nose, usually so rubicund, looked blue, as he stammered—

"I—I—what—what, do you wish to rob me? Are you a high—way—man?"

"Exactly. But I don't want to rob you; I have other fish to fry just now, my reverend friend. You see my groom there? Well, he is as good a shot as I am, so beware that the evil spirit don't tempt you to do anything foolish in the way of attempted flight; for so sure as you do, before your horse can make two bounds, down you will come."

The reverend sinner shook in his stirrups, and Claude continued in the same provoking cool tone of voice—

"Now, sir, I think you understand me, and I think I am not wrong in assuming that you prefer your personal safety to any other earthly consideration. It is upon that supposition that I act, and now proceed at once to tell you what you have to do. Please, in the first instance, to walk your horse a little slower."

The clergyman complied.

"Don't be shaking so, as if your last hour were come," added Claude; "you are safe enough if you will be prudent enough to ensure your own safety. There are some gentlemen at the corner of the lane a little further on, who might, possibly, not knowing me, ask me who I am. Now, I dare say you are well known, so I will trouble you to ride with me, and state, if any questions are asked, that I am an old friend of yours, by name, the Rev. John Brown."

The parson gave a groan, as he gasped out—

"I am a magistrate for the county, and—and—you—are—if I mistake not—the notorious Claude Duval. Why, I—I was going to speak to the very men you mention. What can I do?"

"I tell you what I would do," added Claude—"if I were in your place, I would prefer death to dishonour, and rather be shot at once, than connive at an affair which will cover you with disgrace."

"No—no. Oh, dear, no. I—I can't think of dying upon any consideration. I have a pretty property—a very pretty property, indeed. It's a most uncomfortable situation. Dear me—the Rev. John Brown are you to be?"

"Yes, and that other highwayman behind you, who is a most deperate fellow, is my groom—you understand? You can vouch for us both; and now mark me, in your folly, you may fancy that as you come up to the six police-officers you may accomplish something towards your own extrication from this dilemma and my capture, but I warn you, that before I make the ghost of an effort to save myself, I will make a ghost of you."

Another groan from the reverend gentleman followed this speech, which cut off all hope for him, and on they went, Claude having the little book in one hand, while the other was what, in Ireland, they call "convanient" to a pistol-stock. This little conversation, so deeply interesting to both parties, had been sufficiently long to bring them both nearly to the end of the lane, and there, sure enough, was the mounted police-officer, keeping a capital look-out. He espied the two gentlemen in a moment, and gave some sort of signal, for two more of the officers immediately made their appearance at the door of the cottage.

"Who is it?" cried one.

"Oh, it's Mr. Lamb," said another.

"Ask them if they have caught me," said Claude, in a low tone.

"Have you captured Claude Duval?" stammered the parson. "A—hem."

"No, sir," said an officer, stepping close up to them, and looking rather curiously at Claude.

"No, sir, but we hope and expect he will come this way; and we keep such a good watch that no one passes whom we don't know."

"My friend," said Claude, "do you know me? for I really do not know you. Perhaps my old friend, Lamb, will tell you who I am."

"Yes, yes. This is the Rev. John Brown, an old acquaintance of mine, and this is his groom, as you perceive. A—hem!"

As he said this, the parson-magistrate gave a groan, and the officers looked from one to the other of them, rather puzzled; upon which Claude, glancing at the book, and giving a slight nod at the officer, said—

"Well, Lamb, as you were saying, you think this rather latitudinarian in its theology than otherwise. I will read you the next passage."

"Yes—yes; do, friend Brown."

They passed on, and Claude added, in a whisper—

"You must ride a mile or so with me, for that fellow has his suspicions, although he is so puzzled that he don't know what shape to put them in. Don't look back, sir; remember, I am desperate as well as a cool and determined man."

"So I find—so I find. Gracious! how will this adventure of mine tell in the papers. I shall have to give up the commission of the peace."

"A good job, too; you will have more time to look after the commission of the gospel, with which you pretend to be charged."

By this time Jack had got up to the spot where the officer was still standing, and that individual took a long look at him, with a very peculiar expression upon his face, as though he suspected something, but, as yet, had not very well defined to his own mind what it was.

"So that's your master," he said, "is it?"

"Very fine, indeed," said Jack; "but we shall have rain shortly, I think."

"Confound you, are you deaf?"

"Thank you all the same, but I can't stop to take anything; my master, you see, is like a good many people—he's all very well when he has his own way; but when he don't, why, I'd rather not be in his way, I can tell you. However, it's very civil of you, and when we meet again I won't forget it."

"The idiot is as deaf as a post," said the officer turning away.

"None so deaf as those who won't hear," muttered Jack to himself, as he slowly trotted after Claude and the parson.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE SHERIFF.

Jack was well aware that something was amiss, and although he carried things off with a high hand, he shook for Claude's safety the while. Not one selfish thought of his own life crossed his mind—it was Claude, and Claude only, that he thought of and trembled for. Each moment, however, added to the chances of safety, and Jack felt much relieved not to hear the clatter of horses' feet behind him. When he was quite near to Claude and the reverend gentleman, he spoke, saying—

"All's right; but a quick pace is a good thing when danger is behind."

"Thanks, Jack," said Claude, "I am mindful of all things. Now, sir, what were you going to say just now in such a hurry? Pray speak out."

"I was only going to remark," said the clergyman, "that, with perfect safety to yourself, you might now let me go home; I have falsified my conscience by saying that you are a friend of mine, and you ought not to expect any more from me. I promise, for my own sake, to keep the transaction a profound secret."

"I think you would," said Claude; "but you must excuse me for preferring your company for another mile. I do not think that even your voucher for me quite answered all the purposes. Yon officer has sharper eyes and a clearer head, I fancy, than most of his craft."

The parson bit his lips, but said no more, and the slight pause that ensued was about to be broken by a remark from Sixteen-string Jack, when tramp, tramp—clatter, clatter—upon the road behind them came horses' feet. Claude Duval glanced behind him and saw the officer who had seemed to be rather suspicious, rapidly approaching, with one of his mounted companions.

"Keep as close as will not look too close, Jack," said Claude; "but do not betray any alarm for your life's sake. Caution will do everything now."

"Not quite everything, young man," said the parson.

"Courage, then," said Claude, "and a remorseless determination upon the first show of real danger to shoot you through the head will do what remains."

"But," replied the parson, turning of a whitish purple colour. "But—it—it is hardly fair to take my life, if I don't betray you."

"I shall take it," said Claude, "for the negative crime of not saving me. I think you can do so if you like, and if you don't you are a dead man as sure as you are now a living one."

Duval had no real intention of murdering the reverend pluralist, for such he was, but he thought that a world of safety might be in the fact of persuading him that he was in hands so absolutely careless of human life as to sacrifice him from mere spite at being captured, even should it not be at all by his instrumentality. By the time that their little argumentative dialogue was over, the two officers had ridden up, and he who had spoken before, cried—

"We beg pardon, gentlemen, but as the road is far from safe, we thought you would have no objection to our escort for a mile or two."

"Is there anything to fear?" said Claude, in an indifferent tone to the parson.

"Not—not that I—I know of," stammered that personage in reply.

"Then," said Claude to the officers, "we would rather ride alone."

"Really, gentlemen," said the officer, "you don't know, permit me to say, what the danger is exactly. We are well aware that the notorious Claude Duval is upon this road; one of his freaks is to reach the port of Southampton, which he has sworn to do in spite of all the officers of police, and all the power of the town and country constabulary. He is not far from here, we know, and therefore is it that we consider the road particularly unsafe at present."

"If you wish them to attend us," said Claude to the reverend gentlemen, "let them do so."

"Very well."

"At the next inn we come to," added Claude, as if continuing the conversation he had been holding, "I will get out of my vallise the manuscript notes on Exodus I have mentioned to you. My horse, too, will not be at all sorry to have half an hour's rest. Is there a halting place near at hand?"

"If you please, sir," said Jack, respectfully touching his hat, "there is an inn a little further on, called the 'Old George.'"

"Oh, very well, Robert, that will do. We will dismount there; and as for you, gentlemen, who are so kind to escort us, I hope you will not refuse a little refreshment, at the expense of myself and my old friend here."

"Yes, yes. Oh, we ought to do something liberal," said the parson, while his colour went and came like that of some young girl who feels that somebody is about to say something uncommonly decisive in the matrimonial line. Had a hundred lives depended upon it, the rector could not play, with an easy air, now, the part that Claude had cast him in.

Duval rode very close to him and said—

"Hark you, reverend sir. I left my purse at home; oblige me with yours. I really mean to treat these fellows who are so kind as to thrust their company upon us, whether we like it or not. Come, sir, quick, and do it with the best grace you can."

"Surely you will not now rob me, after I have done you such an essential service?"

"Indeed I will, though. I should lay it all to my conscience if I were to be in company with one of your cloth on the highway, and not make him contribute to my ways and means. Oh, yes, sister Anne is married, and I think as happy as folks can expect to be in this world. Say 'Is she really?'"

"Is she really?" said the parson mechanically.

These latter words of Claude's were sufficiently loud for the officers to hear them, and they heard the reply likewise; so that he even who was most suspicious that something was amiss, began to think that he was mistaken, and giving himself a world of trouble about nothing at all; and yet a something had taken place that had put him upon the scent. He had noticed that Claude wore a wig, and that the but-end of a small pistol was at times quite visible somewhere about the breast of his apparel. Now both these circumstances were compatible enough with the fact of his being the old friend of the rector; but when they came to be combined with a something in the rector's manner that was anything but easy and comfortable, they had their due weight, and perhaps a little more than their due weight, in the mind of that sharp-looking, ferret-eyed officer of the London police. Both Claude and Jack were perfectly satisfied in their own minds that something had gone amiss, but what it was they could not for the lives of them make out, although the thoughts of both were busy upon the subject. However, there was nothing to be done but to be guided by circumstances, and to adopt the best course that might present itself at the moment to them. The parson took a tolerably well-filled purse, and handed it to Claude, who put it in his pocket in a moment, saying—

"Is this all you have with you?"

"Yes, except a bank-note in my pocket-book, which does not belong to me."

"Very well; I will not interfere with it, then, to even ask you its amount. You shall not say that even I treated you ungenerously. Oh, yes, of course. We have always expected you at the hall, although we knew your time to be pretty well



CLAUDE DUVAL INTRODUCES HIMSELF TO THE SHERIFF OF HANTS.

occupied. But where there is a will you know, old friend, there is a way.—Say I shall certainly be there soon."

"I shall certainly be there soon," half groaned the parson.

"What do you think of that?" whispered one of the officers to the other, as they rode a little out of Jack's hearing. "It is surely all right, ain't it?"

"I'm bothered. It sounds right, but it don't look right. This stoppage, however, Bill, that is to be at the Old George, will settle it. We will all dismount, and then they don't get on those thorough-bred horses again, I can tell you, until I am quite satisfied. If it should be Claude Duval and the unknown fellow he has with him as a companion, we are made men."

"Yes—but how about the rector?"

"Mum! I have an idea about that. I was not born yesterday; and, as I told you only an hour ago, Claude Duval has as many shifts, and doubles, and tricks, as all the foxes in the world. But don't let you and I be whispering together. Keep up to them. There's the sign of the Old George only half a mile ahead."

"You are generous in your way," said the parson; "and yet you talk of killing me?"

"Assuredly I do: and will do it, too. What are you fidgetting about in your pocket so far? Any tricks, eh? You stand upon a mine! Beware!"

"No—no—nothing—it is nothing.—I—I—only felt for my pencil-case, that's all: and I find it is here. I commonly keep it in my waistcoat, and, missing it there, I wondered where it was; but I find it here, so all's right. I hope you will leave it with me."

As the parson drew his hand from his pocket with a gold pencil-case in his grasp, a small, crumpled-up piece of paper fell to the ground. Claude saw it, and he cried—

"Robert, pick up that little memorandum that my friend has dropped, if you please."

Jack saw that the piece of paper was of importance by Claude's manner, and he had flung himself from his horse to grasp it before either of the officers could make the attempt. He only narrowly succeeeded, and handed it to Claude with a touch of his hat, and then mounted quickly again, and fell back in his old place, which was about fifteen paces behind Duval. Claude glanced at the paper, and the parson, quivering in every limb, murmured—

"For God's sake have mercy upon me! You would have done the same under my circumstances. Spare me for the sake of my children!"

Claude gave but one glance at the paper, and saw written upon it in strange, scrawling characters, such as a man might form in his pocket, terribly cramped up, the one word—

"Help!"

Claude looked him sternly in the face.

"Mercy!—Mercy!" gasped the rector. "I have children."

"Hush!"

"Yes—yes. I—I am quite still; I will say or do what you like. Only spare me."

"You have named your children," said Duval, "and you have by so doing saved yourself for this time. When you look upon your little ones again, remember that to them and their gentle influence you owe your life. I will not kill you, if you do not force me so to do, by tampering with me too far; but once more I say to you, Sir Priest, beware, for I am a man of sudden passions and sudden impulses. Society is in arms against me, and I alone fight a community—I am hunted. Beware, then, that I turn not upon one of the dogs, and use my fangs."

"I am sorry I did what I did."

"'Tis past; now keep better faith with me, and with yourself, or there will belong to this fair piece of road a tale of blood, that will be told when you and I are both crumbled into dust."

During this little dialogue, so fearfully intended to the rector, the officers had not left Jack quite alone.

"Why, Robert," said one, "you were as deaf as a post just now; but you heard your master, fast enough, when he told you to pick up the little piece of paper. What was on it, now?"

"A text from scripture," said Jack.

"Oh, you can read, can you?—And pray what was the text?"

"'The wise man heedeth that which concerneth him and his; but the fool meddleth with all things, and perchance scorcheth his fingers.'"

"You call that a text from the scriptures, do you? Come, come, Master Robert, you are not what you seem exactly; would a hundred pounds appear an acceptable sum to you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, tell us who your master really is."

"Who my master really is?"

"Yes. Come, come, don't be shamming stupid, man. It won't do. You had better make hay while the sun shines; and a £100 is not to be picked up every day upon the king's highway."

"It don't require a Solomon," replied Jack, "to know that. But if you are particularly anxious to know who my master is, all that I can say is, that he is a friend of the rector's."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, gentlemen, I really can't tell you anything else, I'm sure. He's a very good master to me, and gives two suits of livery in the year, and never asks any questions."

"Really! But you have not told us why you pretended to be deaf?"

"I didn't pretend. I am deaf at times. There comes a singing in my ears all of a sudden, and then for a little time I'm deaf till it goes off. The doctors call it by some hard name that I can't recollect, and could not pronounce if I did."

"You don't say so, Robert!"

"Yes, I do.—Are you deaf?"

"No, not exactly. But here's the Old George, and your master has promised to stand treat, so we will all dismount and go in. You must not think anything of what we have said, Robert. We were only joking, you know."

"I'm very sorry to hear that."

"Sorry, are you? What makes you sorry to hear it? I thought you would be quite the contrary, as things are."

"I don't know what you mean," said Jack, "by 'as things are;' all I know is that you talked amazingly big of £100, and that it don't seem now to be at all forthcoming."

"Perhaps it will be, though, and a few hundreds more at the back of it, for somebody, before long," replied the officer, with an exceedingly knowing look.

Claude, upon whom Jack kept his eye, gave a slight movement of his head, to signify that he would say a word to him, and Jack was by Claude's side before the officers were aware of what he intended to do.

"Don't dismount," said Claude.

Jack nodded. By this time the whole party was at the door of the Old George, which was one of those old-fashioned country inns with a large porch entwining evergreens with clematis and woodbine.

"Stir an inch at your peril," whispered Claude to the parson. He nodded to the officers—"now, gentlemen, name for yourselves what you would like to have."

He dismounted as he spoke, and so did the two officers. Jack had never considered Claude in so much peril before.

"Nice nags," said Claude, as, with the bridle of his own horse over his arm, he made a step or two towards the officers' horses.

They might have seized him then, but they had agreed together that it would be far safer and better to do so in the house.

"Very nice nags," added Claude; "I wonder if they can run well when they are put to it?"

He had a thick whalebone horsewhip in his hand, and, with the rapidity of lightning, he gave to each of the officers' horses such a cut with it, that, plunging forward with smarts of agony, the two creatures tore along the road as though they were mad. Before any one could speak or move, Claude was mounted again.

"Good day, gentlemen," said Claude; "you can take what you like to drink at the Old George, and score it down to Claude Duval. Come on, Jack."

"Look at the parson," said Jack.

Snap! went a little pocket-pistol that the reverend gentleman held in no very agreeable juxtaposition with Claude's head.

"Why, it has missed fire, old friend," said Duval. "Ah! you should alway be sure of your priming before you chance your life upon such a cast. Take it, as you will have it."

Bang! went Claude's largest pistol, with a horrible report, right in the rector's face, who, with a shriek, fell from his horse.

"They'll have fleet steeds that follow," shouted Claude. "Hurrah for the road again!"

The two dismounted officers looked bewildered, and it was not until Jack and Duval were sweeping off like the wind that they were recovered sufficiently to send three or four unavailing pistol shots after them, which spread their death-dealing contents harmlessly in the muddy road.

"Look ahead," said Jack. "There's a good-looking carriage about half a mile on."

"I see it, Jack," said Duval.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

WINCHFIELD HALL.

THE carriage was going at a good pace, but by no means so fast as Claude and Jack on horseback; yet, as the sailors say, "a stern chase is a long chase," and it would evidently take a considerable period of time to obliterate the distance between them. As they neared it, they saw that it was a very handsome vehicle indeed, and was driven by a coachman, with a powdered wig and three-cornered hat, while a footman of portly dimensions was behind.

"Somebody of consequence in his own eyes," said Claude, "if in no one else's."

"Not a doubt of it," replied Jack. "I wonder how those officers feel now, Claude? I suppose their horses have taken to the fields?"

"Most probably, Jack. It was a narrow escape, but you see what impudence may do."

"Yes, there is only one thing I regret."

"And pray, Jack, what may that be. You look uncommonly serious about it, old fellow."

"I am serious, too, Claude: I am vexed at the death of that clergyman, who said he had a family of children, you know. I know he provoked you; but still I regret it."

"Ah! ah! ah!"

"Don't laugh at it, Claude, don't laugh."

"Why, my dear fellow, I can't help it. If he be dead, it is no fault of mine. You know my large holster pistol has two barrels—well, one had a ball in it, and the other only a heavy charge of powder, with a piece of brown paper well rammed down. It was the latter that I fired in the parson's face, although he amply deserved the other. No, Jack, I never take a life if I can possibly help it; and as for folks having a shot at me, it is no more than what I can fairly expect in my line of life. No doubt the rector will find himself confused for an hour, and reminded, by the marks of gunpowder upon his face, of this day's adventure as long as he lives; but unless he dies of the fright, he is as much alive now as we are."

"You don't know what a relief that is to me, Claude."

"Poh! You ought to have known me better; I like a joke, but I don't like a murder. No, Jack, they may say what they like of me, and hunt me as they will, but they cannot call me blood-thirsty."

"Indeed, they cannot, Claude. But we are nearing the carriage."

"Yes, Jack, and a thought strikes me that we are now in more danger than we have been in yet. We shall soon have these officers and their companions upon

our heels, and no doubt we are not any great distance from another lot of them. Now, if we can get past the next police post, we shall have baffled our pursuers, I think, and shall be able to go on again, at all events, with nothing but the danger that lies before us."

"How is it to be done, Claude? What a series of desperate shifts and adventures this journey is."

"Yes, Jack. Well, I have been thinking that a respectable carriage would carry us on nicely—don't you think so? Such a one as that now travelling so comfortably up yon hill before us."

"Yes; but, Claude——"

"We have not the pleasure of possessing it, you would say, Jack."

"We certainly have not."

"That is not an obstacle, you know, Jack, for we, in our practice, have restored the primitive age, when people followed the good old plan—

'They may keep, who have the power,
And they may take who can.'

So, upon such a principle, you see, the carriage before us becomes a sort of floating property—and we may say with Shakespeare—

'——'Twas mine—'tis his,
And may be slave to thousands.'

You see, I have lots at hand, Jack, to suit me upon occasions; so let us come on a little briskly, for it will be well to come up with the vehicle upon the brow of the hill, from which I fancy we shall get a good prospect of the surrounding country, and see if there be any danger approaching. You don't flinch, Jack, I hope, from this adventure?"

"Oh, no, Claude. Your doings upon this occasion far transcend any of your former exploits; but if you were to propose the most outrageous plan of operations in the world, I would stick to you. I have said that I would live and die with you, and I will keep my word, Claude."

"I know you will, Jack. Spur on, and we will soon see what sort of force we have to contend with in the carriage ahead of us. Yon footman who keeps looking round seems to be uneasy already."

"He does, indeed; and now he has turned round completely to stare at us, and is fancying, no doubt, his attitude very fine, as he holds on with those straps under his arms, and the cords dangling down on each side of him."

"Perhaps, Jack, we shall pull down his conceit a bit. I will ride on first, but take care to be sufficiently close to me, in case there should be anybody in that carriage of a belligerent character, for we must conquer."

"Assuredly, Claude."

Duval was now sufficiently near to the carriage to be able, by putting his horse to speed, to ride up to it; and he did so just as the horses gained the brink of the hill; and, according to the rules of good driving, they ought to have had a moment's pause to recover the strain of the ascent. Claude rode direct to the carriage door, and looked in. There were two persons inside—an elderly woman, dressed out in all the tawdry colours of the rainbow, in a vain attempt to look youthful and engaging, was one; and the other was a man of middle age, with a sour, morose-looking aspect. His face was full and bloated, and his brows were knit; while his little protruding gray eyes betokened both sensuality and ferocity. As Claude stopped the view and the light from the carriage-window, this amiable-looking personage gave a savage sort of growl, and cried—

"What's that? Drive on, Peter—drive on. Drive on, I say!"

"Stop, Peter," said Claude, "stop!"

The coachman looked astonished; but he raised his whip, and in another moment would have brought it down upon the horses' backs, when Claude, coolly pointing a pistol at his head, said—

"Move on another inch and I'll blow your brains out!"

Peter dropped his whip, and Claude, turning to the carriage window again, said—

"Who are you, sir?"

"The sheriff of Hants, sir," cried the male occupant of the carriage. "Who are you?"

"Claude Duval, the highwayman."

"The devil!"

"Not exactly. You seem alarmed, sir. Why you have not half the courage of this young lady by your side, whose beauty and bright eyes, I suppose, render carriage lamps quite unnecessary to this vehicle."

"He's a remarkably polite young man, at any rate," said the lady.

"Polite! Bah!" cried the sheriff. "I suppose you want to rob me, eh? Do you know what you are about? You will find that it is no joke to rob the sheriff."

"I never thought it was," said Claude. "You are an unsociable brute. Pray, where are you going?"

"To Winchfield Hall, close to Basingstoke," said the lady. "I hope, Mr. Highwayman, as you are a gentleman, that you will behave as such. Here's my purse, and I hope you will spare my rings."

"Madam, I hope I shall take nothing from you but your good opinion. It is a pity that the sheriff, who, I suppose, is your father, is such a surly old brute. Are you going through Basingstoke, or are you about to stop on this side of the town?"

"Through it," said the lady, who had not had so many compliments paid to her for a long time. "The sheriff is my husband, sir. Come, Sir Harry, give the gentleman your purse, and have done with it. If we are to be robbed, we had better be robbed by one who knows how to behave himself, and likewise knows female——"

"Loveliness," added Claude, "when he sees it. Do you know, madam, what this carriage reminds me of—or rather, I should say, its occupants?"

"No, sir—really—what?"

"Beauty and the beast!"

"Bah!" cried the sheriff. "Two much of this. There's my purse. I don't feel inclined to risk myself or my life for a few paltry guineas. Take them, and I only hope you and I may meet again, my friend, at the quarter sessions. That's all."

"Bah!" said Claude. "Ha! ha! ha! You are an amiable brute; you are indeed. Here, Jack! Jack!"

"I'm busy," said Jack.

"What about?"

"Why Job, he can't keep his eye off my pistol-barrel; and they are open so wide, and his mouth too, that I don't think he will shut either again."

"Dispose of him, Jack."

"Oh!—murder—no! Dem my whiskers, no!" cried a voice. "Dear, good, kind, handsome-looking gents, only say what you wish me to do, and I will do it at once, dem me, and no sort of mistake!"

"Remain where you are, then," said Jack, "and wait further orders."

"Job—Job," cried the sheriff.

"Dem it, yes, Sir Harry, I'm here."

"Knock these fellows down."

"Yes, Sir Harry, I would in a minute, but somehow, I don't think they'll let me. Perhaps, Sir Harry, they would not mind your doing it, as you are a man of consequence, you know, but, dem it, I positively decline. Oh, dear me, I could not do it on any account."

"Job is prudent," said Claude; "Jack, take care of my horse, and ride on as close behind the carriage as you can. Perhaps it will be as well if you make a little change in costume, and see to the horses' legs and heads, Jack."

"Yes, I will be ready in a moment."

This order to see to the horses' legs and heads requires some small ex-

planation, which will be best given by watching Jack's proceedings. Rapidly unstrapping the vallise, he took from it another coat, with which he disguised himself. Then, with a piece of chalk, which he likewise had, he gave the horses a white foot each, as well as a good change of colour upon the face, and then with some change in the trappings, rapidly effected, made the whole turn-out look as different as possible, seeing that it was really the same, from what it had been. Strange and contradictory as it may seem, these partial disguises were more likely to succeed with close and minute observers, like officers of police, than anybody else. They, no doubt, had taken such notes of Claude's and Jack's horses, that any deviation from this would induce in their minds a doubt which never presents itself to a mere casual observer, to whom a horse is just a horse, and who does not look to see if he has a white foot or a black one, or a spot upon his face or not. When Jack, too, had another wig on, and with a piece of burnt cork, which he had carefully wrapped up in a piece of paper, had blackened his eyebrows and removed his false whiskers, he looked quite a different man. Job looked upon all the proceedings, rapidly executed as they were, like man in a dream, and when they were finished, and Jack was mounted, he beckoned to him, and said—

"Don't be afraid of me; I have given him a month's notice a week ago, and as the place don't suit me at all, you may do what you like."

"All's right," said Jack, "you will get a twenty pound note if you keep to that."

"A twenty pound note? Shall I? Won't I keep to it above a bit, that's all. Only put me on my oath, and, dem it, I'll swear anything you like; I've often had an idea of being a highwayman myself, it is so uncommonly romantic."

"Hey!"

Claude, with all the coolness in the world, now opened the door of the sheriff's carriage and got in. The moment he did so, he let down one of the front glasses, and touched the coachman with the muzzle of a pistol. When that personage glanced round, and saw it, he turned as white as a sheet.

"Peter," said Claude, "remember that if you attempt to play any tricks, or dispute orders, or in any way attempt to bring danger upon me, you are a dead man."

"I won't—I won't," groaned Peter.

"Now drive on," said Claude, "and recollect that your life is in your own keeping. And now, Mr. Sheriff, you and I must understand each other. Madam, I hope I don't incommode you? How came you to throw yourself away upon such a brute—and an ugly brute, too, as this?"

"D——tion!" growled the sheriff.

"Fie, sir!" said Claude, "recollect that you are in the presence of a lady, and endeavour to behave yourself like a gentleman, for once in the way. I have only to say to you, that if you do not answer any questions that may be asked of you in the manner to keep me safe—what manner that is, I need not dictate to you—I will not be taken alive, nor shall you be in at the death, for I will assuredly send a couple of bullet into your skull."

The sheriff hesitated.

"Drive on, Peter," said Claude.

Peter put the cattle in motion, and off went the whole party, Jack bringing up the rear with the two horses. They went on at a slashing pace, notwithstanding a shower of rain that came on and a rushing wind that gave promise of a gusty day. The sheriff sat in an extreme corner of his carriage, glaring at Claude as though he would gladly have eaten him with the smallest quantity of salt by way of a relish; and the sheriff's made-up old lady put on a girlish manner, and looked at him from behind a fan, which she hoped only exhibited what she considered the most fashionable part of her face. Claude had fairly turned the good lady's head by his flattery, and she really considered that the most agreeable circumstance that had happened for a long while, was this meeting with the handsome and gallant highwayman, who announced himself to be no other than the celebrated and widely-famed Claude Duval.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

A WEDDING.

Truly a more complete *cortege* could not well be imagined than the sheriff's now was. To be sure, it would have had a better appearance if Jack had gone on in front, as a sort of outrider; but still the whole affair did very well. And if the sheriff, with a laudable wish to preserve his life, did what Claude required of him, all would still go on well.

"I have often heard of you, Mr. Duval," said the sheriff's lady.

"Madam, I am the more highly honoured."

"Oh, don't mention that. I have always heard that you were quite a lady's man."

"Well, madam, I plead guilty, certainly, to a sort of devoted feeling for the sex, particularly when it is a gratification to me to say, as in the present instance, that gallantry is sanctioned, and, indeed, rendered absolutely agreeable by beauty."

"Oh, sir!"

"How can you, Sarah," cried the sheriff, "be such a fool as to believe the hoaxing of that puppy? There's no fool like an old one."

"Sir," said Claude, "you must be a lunatic."

"And a brute upon two legs," said the lady. "I'm often inclined to faint right away, do you know, Mr. Duval, from the ill-usage of this monster in human form; and it's quite well known that they made him a sheriff because he was decidedly the ugliest man in all the county."

"The devil, madam!"

"Yes, as ugly as the devil," said Claude. "I understand that perfectly. Oh, my dear madam, fate ought to have dealt more kindly by you, than to attach you to any such a baboon."

"A what?" cried the sheriff. "I won't stand this any longer—I can't stand it, I—Oh! murder! Spare my life!"

"I tell you what, sir," said Claude, "you may say just what you like, so long as you say it in a quiet, respectable sort of a way; but if you begin any confounded row, I will make a vacancy in your office as sure as you are now a living man."

The sheriff shrunk back again into the corner of the carriage, from where, with his little pig-like eyes, he glared at Claude as though he had been some ogre.

"Coming!" said Jack, suddenly, in a clear voice.

Claude understood him, and turning to the sheriff again, he said—

"It is your duty, and will redound much to your fame after you are dead, if you say to the officers of police, who are now rapidly approaching, here is Claude Duval—seize him. But, it will be much more satisfactory to you to live with the comforts and the dignities you have about you, than to die for the commendations of the whole country; therefore, you will say that no horsemen have passed this way, and that the groom and the two horses behind belong to you, if you should be asked any questions; while I am your cousin Walker."

"My cousin?"

"Yes, Walker."

"May I be——"

"Very good."

Click went Claude's pistol, and the lady whispered—

"If you do shoot him, put him out of his pain quickly."

"No, no," said the sheriff, "I am not tired of my life just yet. All I ask of you is, never to relate the story, and I will save you if I can. A man is bound to preserve his own life if he were sheriff of all the counties in England, and I won't commit what may be called suicide—I'll do it."

"You are wise," said Claude, as he threw himself back in the carriage; but then a thought struck him, and, leaning forward, he touched the coachman, saying—"Peter, remember!"

"Oh, good gracious! Yes, I'm all over of a cold perspiration, and shall never forget to-night as long as I live, I know."

"Very good."

"Halloa! whose carriage?" cried a loud voice, "whose carriage is this?"

There was a great scampering and scuffling of horses' feet, so that it was



THE SNUG RETREAT.

quite evident to Claude that there were at least five or six horsemen upon the spot.

"The sheriff's," said John.

"Sheriff! Sheriff of what?"

"Of Hants."

"I suppose you come from London, sir, I think there's no sheriff in

the world but those you see in the gilt coaches on Lord Mayor's day. Eh spooney?"

"We must speak to the sheriff of Hants, then. Coachman, pull up."

"Pull up," whispered Claude.

The coachman stopped, and the officers surrounded the carriage; little did they dream that once again their prey was in their grasp. The principal—and he was one of those whose horses had been started off by Claude, at the door of the Old George Inn—advanced, and, touching his hat, leant down to the carriage door, saying—

"Beg pardon, sir, but we are police-officers from London, upon the track of the notorious Claude Duval. He is upon this road somewhere, with a companion. They are mounted well upon dark bay horses, and have played us one of the most slippery tricks we ever had played us in our lives."

"Indeed!" said the sheriff.

"Well, my good man, go on," said the sheriff's lady, "we ain't highwaymen, are we, cousin Walker?"

"No, Sarah," said Claude, "certainly not."

"Sarah be——ahem! what a cough I have got," said the sheriff. "Ahem—ahem!"

"You can give us no news, sir?" said the officer. "Have no mounted men passed your carriage, sir?"

"None, of course; I hope you may catch him."

"Oh dear, yes," said the lady, who was willing to play her part well, that Claude was in perfect fear that she would over-play it; "oh dear, yes, of course we wish that, don't we, cousin Walker?"

"Yes, Sarah," said Claude.

"We must apologise, sir, for stopping your carriage," said the officer, "but we have a very onerous duty to perform. I and one of our party have lost our horses, and these we have are only hired upon the spur of the moment. If they have not been seen by you or your servants, sir, it's of little use our pursuing this road, more particularly as, upon the outskirts of Basingstoke, there are six of our people on the look-out. Perhaps, sir, if you see anything of the fellows, you will be so good as to give advice to our little party of it."

"Yes—yes."

"Oh, dear me, certainly," said the sheriff's lady, "of course we will, and Jenkins, our man, who is behind with a spare horse, shall lay hold of him if he meets him, shan't he, cousin Walker?"

"Ah! madam," said the officer, "it would require a good many Jenkinses to catch Claude Duval."

"I think it would," said Claude. "Don't you, Sarah?"

"Yes, cousin Walker."

The sheriff gave another groan, and the officer touching his hat very respectfully, withdrew from the carriage-door to hold a consultation with his companions. The coachman, in obedience to the order conveyed in a whisper from Claude, was about to drive on, when the officer rode up again to the window, and said—

"Sir, will you permit one of our men to ride along with your carriage and servant to our next post, as the party there may as well be in full knowledge of what has already taken place?"

"Oh, certainly," said the sheriff, with an air of satisfaction, and then he added, sarcastically—"Don't you think that will be quite a good thing—cousin Walker?"

"Quite, sir," said Claude. "Drive on, Peter."

The cavalcade again proceeded, and, with Jack, who little relished such a companion, rode a mounted officer, who began in a garrulous sort of a way to tell him all the particulars of how Claude had, as he termed it, "dished" them at the door of the Old George.

"You don't say so?" said Jack.

"Yes, and it has made us all so savage that I do think the first of us that comes

across him, will not make the least attempt to take him, but will blow out his brains without a single moment's hesitation about it. This rain is not so pleasant, though, is it? I wish I had brought a top-coat with me. I shall get wet through."

"Very likely," said Jack.

They now trotted on after the carriage for some time in silence, for the officer could not but see that his companion was rather taciturn than otherwise. The fact is, that Jack was deep in thought as to how he could get rid of the fellow, in case anything suspicious should take place. He was armed, but he hoped a necessity for using his arms would not occur, and he breathed more freely as the distance between this single officer, who accompanied the carriage, and his five companions—for there had been six of them—momentarily increased. A result, however, of the rapidly falling rain was slowly, but surely, taking place, which did not at all occur to Jack until he was very disagreeably reminded of it by the officer suddenly remarking, with a puzzled and dolorous air—for he was not exactly a conjurer, that man, who had been selected to accompany the sheriff's carriage—

"What on earth is that odd white stuff all about your horse's feet? There's some on his face, too!"

"White stuff?" said Jack, who now immediately comprehended that it was the chalk with which he had disguised the horses, running off in the rain. "White stuff? What do you mean by white stuff?"

"I should like to know what you mean by it? It can't be kicked up on the road, or else it would be upon my horse's feet as well. How do you account for it?"

"I don't see," said Jack, "that I am obliged to account for it at all."

"But it's very extraordinary."

"Very. How do you account for it, eh? I don't profess to know anything about it myself. Do you know?—if you do, I should like above all things to know what it is. Go on."

The officer looked Jack in the face, and Jack looked at the officer for some few moments in silence, and then the latter said—

"Do you know, old chap, it looks to me as if something had been done to those horses' feet and heads to disguise them."

"Really?"

"Yes; and it is sufficiently suspicious in these times to make a man——"

"Look after himself!" said Jack, suddenly clapping a pistol to the breast of the officer. "Stir one step, and you are a dead man!"

"The devil!"

"Or Claude Duval—which would you rather have at your elbow?" said Jack.

"B—woo!" cried John, the footman. "My eye, here's a *romance* for you! Blaze away, gents. Blaze away, and don't mind me. Go it. Lord bless you both, I won't interfere. Oh, dear!—oh dear! what a dodge that was about the chalk, to be sure. If it hadn't been for the rain, now? Well—well."

"You are Claude Duval, then," said the officer, as his very lips turned of an ashy whiteness, "and my very life is not worth a moment's purchase. You killed the rector."

"A lie!" said Jack. "There was no ball in the pistol."

"I know you are Duval now," said the officer. "Fire away—Good-bye to my little ones."

Jack saw a tear flash in the man's eye, and he said to him—

"Don't be a fool.—If you can't take me, you can take care of yourself. I don't want your life.—Why should I?—You talked of shooting Claude Duval the moment you saw him; but why should you be so blood-thirsty? God knows what a child of your own—for you talk as if you were a father—may come to. Fancy the gentlest, and the one you love best, hunted like a wild beast from place to place."

"You—you won't kill me?"

"Not if I can help it. Your are armed?"

"Yes."

"Give me your arms, then, and you will see your little ones again, as far as I am concerned; and when you think of me, don't fancy that because a man is hunted by his fellows, that he must of necessity be as bad as to deserve such treatment."

The officer's hands shook so as he handed Jack a pair of pistols, that he nearly dropped them.

"Now," said Jack, who still wished to keep up the delusion in the man's mind that he was Claude Duval, and had in some audacious and mysterious way attached himself to the sheriff's *cortege*. "You must do your duty, or seem to do it. You look as if you thought I behaved generously to you. I only ask you in return for a little forbearance. Let us jog on as before, and you have nothing to report to your comrades when you reach them, but what you knew a quarter of an hour ago."

"And you will trust me?"

"Yes, if you promise. I have always gained more by trusting people than suspecting them."

"Listen, then," said the officer; "may I never look in the eyes of my wife and children again, in this world or in the next, if I betray you! Are you satisfied?"

"Most abundantly."

"You will not repent it, then. So now come on, and you will find that you have made a friend where you had not the least possible chance of expecting one."

"Come on," said Jack with a smile; "is not this better than my leaving you a bleeding corpse upon the highway? I trust you with all my heart, and shall be loth, indeed, to suspect you. Let us trot on. The carriage has got further ahead than I wish it."

He and the officer spurred onwards, and soon came close up to the carriage again.

"Well," said Jack to himself, "this is one of the most incredible of my adventures. It may be nothing to Claude to convert an enemy into a friend, but I must confess that I never before succeeded in such a thing."

If Duval, snugly esconced as he was in the carriage, had had the least idea of what was going on in its rear, he would probably have felt any way but at his ease, notwithstanding the affair turned out so well; but so it is—our greatest dangers, probably, always pass by us without our being aware of them, while we start and turn pale at a thousand petty chances, which, taken in their aggregate, would not make up the sum of one great risk which in its coming and in its going utterly eludes our observation. The situation of what we may call the sheriff's party was now rather curious. There was Peter the coachman in a state of mortal trepidation, expecting each moment that from some sudden whim or suspicion upon the part of the highwayman, he might be shot. Then there was the sheriff, so angry that purple lines and cavities were all over his face, and he absolutely snorted with suppressed ire. There was his lady all smiles, and simperings, and little sweetnesses, looking at Claude with "Oh, you good-looking wretch!" sort of expression; and then there was Claude, seemingly careless, but in reality most acutely observant of everything that passed. Nor did John the footman and Jack and the officer form a less anxious triumvirate than that which occupied the interior of the sheriff's showy and most luxuriously appointed travelling carriage.

CHAPTER XC.

THE BENIGHTED TRAVELLERS.

THE town of Basingstoke was now about two miles and a half only from the carriage, and the day was getting pretty well advanced, for the adventures of Claude Duval and his friend Sixteen-string Jack had been sufficiently numerous since the dawn of morning to occupy a tolerably considerable portion of time.

They had never intended to push on both day and night. There was one consideration which put such a made of proceeding completely out of the question†, and that was, that their horses were but flesh and blood, and required res.

Where to get them that rest, was a point upon which Claude Duval earnestly reflected, and he would have been glad to have had five minutes' conversation with Jack upon that subject, for he felt quite sure, that after, by the assistance of the sheriff, passing the next party of officers, his best plan would be to lay by if possible until night, by which time the cattle would be refreshed, and, besides, night was the time when the most audacious schemes could be put in practice, and when disguises passed muster, which in the eye of daylight would have looked anything but the thing. To attempt putting up at any inn at Basingstoke would be by far too hazardous a proceeding, and yet where else to go it was a puzzler. Jack, however, knew more of the country through which they were passing than Claude, and hence the latter earnestly wished to speak to him. There was time enough for that, however, after they had passed the next party of officers, which was a very great point to be gained, inasmuch as when it was accomplished it would leave a world of danger behind them.

"Mr. Duval," said the lady of the sheriff, "is it true that you stopped the carriage of the Bishop of Exeter, and made his lady get out to dance a minuet with you? I have heard it reported."

"It is true, madam, as regards the fact of my dancing the minuet with the bishop's lady, but she might have declined honouring me so far, if she had pleased. I used no compulsion."

"Is she handsome?"

"Until to-day, madam, I thought her the most engaging person I had seen."

The slight bow which accompanied this delicate and well-timed compliment sufficiently pointed it, and the sheriff's lady could hardly conceal her gratification. Alas! many a long and dreary year had passed away since any one had spoken to her in such tones. No wonder that they came across her ears with all the fascination of early recollections—she had been handsome, and a coquette, too, in her time. Youth and age!—oh! how changeful are thy destinies! Time was when she—but no matter, we are glad that Claude Duval broke through the cobwebs of years, and let her once more hear the soft language of youth.

"There's two men a-coming," suddenly said Peter.

"Mounted?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, if they ask you to stop, do so, and then utter one word, and you know the consequences."

The tramp of horses' feet came plainly on their ears, and then there was the dark shadow of a man and horse outside the carriage window; and then a voice said—

"Gentlemen, have you come far down the Winchfield road?"

"I can tell you," said the officer who rode with Jack, suddenly riding forward.

"Oh, is that you, Griffiths?" said one.

"Yes; where's the rest of your party?"

"About a quarter of a mile on; but as we saw this carriage coming, we trotted on to meet it. Is it not the sheriff's?"

"Yes; and he is in it himself. You had better speak to him, and he will tell you the state of the road. He might be offended, you know, if you were to take a report only from me, while he is here."

"Likely enough."

The officer stooped to the window of the carriage, and touched his hat, as he said—

"Sir, we are on the look out for Claude Duval. Perhaps you will be so kind as to inform us if any suspicious-looking characters have been upon the road? We are sure to have him, but we don't know when exactly. He has a companion with him."

"I know nothing about it," said the sheriff, gruffly. "Ask your fellow officer

there, who has followed my carriage for the last five miles. He can give you the report of the road, I believe, better than I."

"Thank you, sir. I regret having troubled you upon the subject."

"Oh, it's no trouble."

"And not the slightest consequence," said the lady. "Peter, you can go on."

"Go on," said Claude.

With rather anxious eyes, and with apprehension that he would not for the world have let him see possessed him, Jack watched the proceedings of the officer, named Griffiths. He cannot be said to have actually suspected him of treachery but still Jack had seen enough of human nature to expect almost anything, however black and abominable it might be. He well knew that man, made in the image of his creator, and destined to immortality, was capable of any amount of wickedness, villany, and ferocity that the most dissuasive imagination could conceive; so it would not greatly have astonished him, if Griffiths had not actually turned upon him, and tried to capture or to shoot him, even after what had passed between them. The officer, however, was not among the worst species of humanity. Jack had, in consideration of his children, spared his life. A recollection of those children kept the officer bound, and he kept his word with the man whom he considered was worth a thousand pounds to anybody at any moment. This was real virtue. Before he rode off with his companions, he approached Jack, and held out his hand, saying—

"Good-by. I hope we shall never meet again."

"Don't say that," said Jack; "I hope we shall, and that, when we do, I may be able to do you a kindness. Good-by, to you. Remember me sometimes, along with the old proverb, that the devil's not quite so black as he is painted."

"I never thought he was; but there's one thing that puzzles me yet."

"What is it?"

"How came you to induce the sheriff to say that all was right, and to own you as belonging to him, when he knows that such is not the case? And you were not sufficiently near him to prevent all dangerous mischances. One word to those two friends of mine, from him, would have settled the matter, and they would have stood between him and any danger from your resentment."

"I have a friend in the carriage," said Jack.

"Ah, indeed! Cousin Walker, I'll be bound."

"The same."

"If I did not suspect it, may I—well, well, I see it all—I see it all."

"Not quite all," thought Jack, "for you don't see that I am not Claude Duval, and it is just as well that you should not see that part of the business."

The officer shook hands with him again, and then joining his companions, they went on towards Basingstoke again, at a much quicker pace than the carriage proceeded at. The first houses of the town were now distinctly visible, and Claude began to bethink himself of when it would be best to leave the sheriff and his lady. After some consideration, he said to the sheriff—

"I will trouble you, sir, to accompany me through Basingstoke, until we are quite clear of the houses, and then I will leave you, trusting to your discretion to say nothing of this adventure, provided you will not promise silence. If you do promise it, I shall trust to your honour."

"Of course he'll promise it," said the lady. "Ah, promise it—Sir Harry, promise."

"I may as well," replied the sheriff, "and I do. There is my money."

"No, sir," said Claude, "you have afforded me, whether willingly or not, the shelter of your carriage, and I will not rob you in return for it."

"Do you mean that?"

"I never say, by any accident, in such matters, what I do not mean."

"Very well. Perhaps this may not be the worst action of your life, or the least likely to do you some good at another time; and—I—I. But no matter. I have said too much already."

"And you will take nothing from us?" said the lady.

"Nothing, I hope," said Claude, "but your pity."

"Yes, you must oblige me by accepting of this ring, which I give you in the presence of my husband. He knows it as well by sight as I do, and I hope that if you get into any serious difficulty, and it is nothing connected with the taking of life, you will not scruple to send it to either the sheriff or myself; and I am sure he will do what he can, consistent with his high station and his duties, for you. Sir Harry is no every-day man, Mr. Duval."

"I can see that," said Duval, with a slight glance at the lady.

The sheriff's vanity was tickled, and he gave a growling assent to what his lady, whom he really thought much of, had said, so that Claude Duval really seemed likely to part with that most ominous functionary to gentlemen of his complexion—a sheriff—upon the best of all possible terms, considering all things.

"I do not know your right name, sir," said Claude.

"Sir Harry Ross," replied the lady, for the sheriff.

It was at this moment that the carriage drove past the six police-officers and Griffiths, who had a little station just upon the commencement of the High-street, Basingstoke. The danger, in its worst aspect, was now passed. It was quite clear that the sheriff did not intend to break his word, and that was a consolation to Claude. It was equally clear that Griffiths did not intend to break his word, and that was a consolation to Jack, so that they were both well enough pleased as things went. On went the carriage at a good pace, although the horses were getting fatigued, and the long straggling town of Basingstoke was soon left behind, and once again between hedgerows the carriage took its course.

"I am now, I presume," said Claude, "taking you out of your way?"

"Yes," said the sheriff; "we turn off at a cross-road some quarter of a mile or so now behind us."

"Very well. Stop, Peter. Now, sir, and you, madam, I and my friend will bid you good day."

The carriage stopped, and then Claude opened the door himself, and dismounted. Jack rode up to him, and whispered—

"Have you a twenty-pound note about you?"

"I think so.—Yes.—No. Here are two ten-pound notes, they will do, I suppose, as well?"

"Certainly."

Jack went to the back of the coach again, and gave the notes to John, saying—

"You have done Claude Duval a service, and he sends you these. Don't hesitate about taking them."

"I didn't expect it," said John.

"Never mind; take it, that's all, and keep your counsel. Mind what you say when we are gone. It's very easy for you to ascribe the whole of your conduct in the affair to my pistol being close to your head. You understand me?"

"Oh yes, yes."

Claude now mounted his horse, which Jack had been leading, and then, taking off his hat, he said, in a low voice—

"Sir Harry, and you, madam, I thank you, and wish you all the happiness in the world. This ring will not leave my finger until it is taken from a dead man."

The sheriff sat far back in the carriage and said not a word. He was terribly ashamed of the whole transaction, but his lady kissed her shrivelled fingers and looked over her fan languishingly. Peter turned his horses' heads again towards Basingstoke, and in a few moments Claude Duval and Sixteen-string Jack were alone on the high-road. The sun was high in the heavens, and the birds were singing merrily upon the bushes that grew around in abundance. Claude and Jack set spurs to their horses, and galloped a good mile before they drew reins again, and then it was to look about for a resting place.

"Behold!" said Jack; "good entertainment for man and beast, Claude—there's the sign."

Glancing out from amid a cluster of trees was an old-fashioned inn. It was the very picture of repose and quietness, and just such a place as, upon a summer's

day, would have induced any lover of the quiet picturesque to turn aside from his path, merely for the purpose of sitting for a brief space beneath the soft shadow of the gigantic trees that had grown for many a long year within the sound of lusty yeoman, cheering their hearts with the good things of the old inn.

"This will do," said Claude. "There is an air of repose about the place which seems to invite us to rest for a time in it; and we will, if the police will be graciously inclined for a time to allow us to do so. What say you to the old house, Jack; do you think with me about it?"

"I think we are safe, now," said Jack, "for a time. They won't think of stirring from their posts now until they get something like positive information to go upon. What a famous old inn this is, to be sure. Did you ever see such ivy, Claude?"

"Seldom, Jack—very seldom indeed. I think with you, that if the sheriff keeps his word, and your new friend Griffiths keeps his, we may comfortably enough remain here until night arrives again to show us our way, and put other folks out of the way."

"Dismount, then, Claude. We will chance it, shall we?"

Claude said "yes" with a heartiness of manner that quite assured Jack he felt quite clear about the propriety of the proceeding; and so firm a reliance had Jack upon Claude's judgment, that he could be scarcely said to think for himself when Duval was present. They both rode up to the porch of the picturesque inn, and there dismounted. A rosy-cheeked damsel peeped at them from over a red blind, and an ostler, with such an abundance of fat upon him, that all his clothes seemed upon the full stretch, took charge of their horses.

"Put them up," said Claude. "We shall not want them for some hours."

"All's right, sir."

"Spare nothing on them. The best food you can get is not too good. Where's the stable?"

"Round the corner," said the ostler, in the true Hampshire dialect, which will persist in cramming in an *a* where an *o* ought to be.

"Very well. I always like to see my nag comfortable before I look to myself."

"And I too," said Jack.

They both followed the ostler, for it was a common measure of precaution with both Jack and Claude, always to know where the stable was, so that in case of any sudden emergency, they could themselves find their horses and prepare them for the road without being indebted to any one else, who might do reluctantly what might be essential to the safety of their lives in a case of sudden and serious danger from their enemies.

CHAPTER XCI.

MIDNIGHT ALARMS.

HAVING then seen the two horses properly attended to, and accommodated with a good feed each, and an abundance of litter—which a tired horse, or indeed any horse enjoys as much as his food—they entered the house themselves. It will be remembered that now, for many hours, they had had only the draught of milk which they owed to the kindness of the girl at the farm; so that it may be well supposed that they were both ready enough to set-to well upon whatever provision the good folks of the inn could afford them. Cervantes, in his world-wide celebrated romance of "Don Quixote," gives on amusing account of the grandiloquent prowess in the way of good fare of Spanish innkeepers, as contrasted with what they really at length place before the famished traveller; but such is rarely the case in English inns. It was not the case at the one to which good fortune had conducted Claude and Jack. The innkeeper was a jovial-looking soul, and his wife and their buxom daughter looked as though gaunt famine, or even short commons,

were quite unknown in that locality. They were the very personifications of ruddy health, and they had such a profusion of smiles ready at hand that it seemed as though they must be upon the broad grin even in their sleep, in order to be so perfectly practised at it.

"Can we have anything to eat?" said Jack.



CLAUDE AND JACK AROUSED FROM A SIESTA AT THE 'VINE TREE.'

"And to drink?" said Claude.

The innkeeper looked at Claude intently, and then seeming to be satisfied with the scrutiny, he said—

"If you ain't too proud to sit down with me, you can have a snack wi' us. What say ye? we shan't eat thee."

Claude was rather in a difficulty as to Jack, whom he wished, of course, to dine

with him, although he was in the costume of a servant. He got out of the difficulty, however, by saying frankly—

"If you have no objection to let this faithful fellow of mine sit down with us I shall feel the greatest pleasure. He has known me from my childhood, and although my servant, I cannot help looking upon him more in the light of an old and attached friend."

"Come now," said the innkeeper, with a nod of his head and a twinkle of his little merry-looking eyes, "I like you all the better for that. You couldn't have found a shorter cut to my heart than the one you have took, young gentleman. I don't wonder at your having about you an old and faithful servant, not I. You are a good master. Which one of your stuck-up young jackanapes, wife, that we have come here in the red coats and silver-topped whips, in the hunting season, would make such a manly speech as this young gentleman has made?"

"Not one of 'em, Simon," said the wife.

"I'll be bound," said the daughter, "to die an old maid if they could."

"That you never can do," said Claude, "until all the men die except one, and he is blind."

"Go along with you."

"Bustle—bustle, wife," said Simon. "Get our snack of dinner ready, and let's have lots of home made and lots of home-brewed in case of other things falling short. That's right—now for it. Ah, that's the sort of thing, Hannah, for the 'Vine-tree.'"

"Is that your sign?" asked Claude.

"Yes, and it has been, they tell me, the sign of the old house for a hundred years or more, and I only hope it may be the sign of it for a hundred more. I don't think the old oak rafters will give way, and there's some good lumps of stone to hold 'em up; and as for the thatch, why if that goes, it can be put to rights again. Ha! ha! ha!—ough! ha!—ough! ha!"

"Now, father," said the girl, "there you go, choking yourself again."

"No—no—ah! oh! It was only a sort of joke I made about the thatch, that was all. That was all, wasn't it, sir?"

"Yes," said Claude, although for the life of him he could not exactly see where the joke was, but it would have been an ungenerous thing of him to have said so.

The wife and daughter bustled about, and in the course of ten minutes the "snack" appeared upon the table in the shape of as superb a haunch of mutton as any one could wish to see. Then there was a piece of bacon that looked like a mountain; and then there was a chump—we can find no more fitting term—a chump of veal roasted, that sent up such a savoury steam, mingling with that from the haunch and the saline exhalations from the bacon as was enough to astonish anybody. Then the heaps of vegetables, fresh from the garden, were astounding, and the home-brewed ale stood invitingly in foaming tankards.

"Now for it," said the landlord; "set to work like Britons. Betsy, I know you is *rether* delicate to day, so I won't serve you with much at a time."

He only placed a pound of veal and half a pound of fat bacon in the delicate Betsy's plate, and then Claude and Jack were served at their own request from the haunch of mutton, which was such a picture. They forgot police—rewards for apprehension—jails—gibbets, and the whole catalogue of evils that were usually present to their imagination, and gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the hour with a zest that was truly remarkable in men situated as those two were. What a rich treat—what food for the feelings it would have been for Cicely and for May, and even for Markham Brereton, to have seen Claude Duval and his friend thus far upon their journey, and enjoying themselves in such a fashion at the old inn, as though they had nothing in the world to do but eat and drink, and laugh, and make merry.

"Eat away—eat away!" cried the landlord; and when he saw that Claude and Jack would not consent to stuff themselves to repletion, he found out with a rueful face that the dinner was not at all to their liking.

"But," said Claude, "I assure you it is, and we are already stuffed as though

for a wager, while we are almost afloat with the ale. We are nearly ill already by eating too much of such tempting cheer as this before us."

"Ah, now, if I could but think that, I should be contented. But, howsoever, as you say you can't take any more, why you can't, and there's an end of that, I suppose. You won't go on just yet, I hope. The day looks gloomy-like, and towards sun-down there will be rain, I take it. Don't you hear how the south-west wind is blustering about?"

"Yes, we don't intend to go yet. The fact is, we have been all last night in the saddle, and when we got to your door we were hungry and sleepy; but we are not hungry now."

"Ah, I take it you are sleepy, though?"

"You are right."

"Very well. There's a good sofa in the next room, and an easy chair that would do for an archbishop. It ain't cold, but when a man's asleep, he is apt to get chilly. Betsy, set light to the faggots. There's lots on the dogs."

"Yes, father."

The delicate damsel who had eaten as much as a famished grenadier, and washed it all down with a quart of ale, lit the fire in the next room, and there was soon a cheerful blaze roaring up the ample chimney, as the dry logs fumed and blustered, and crackled, before the presence of the mightiest agent of destruction the world ever knew. Claude pointed to the sofa.

"Sleep, Jack," he said; "I know you want it. Sleep in security while I keep watch over you. You will feel a different creature after a couple of hours' nap. There, I have drawn it nearer the blaze, so that your feet will be warm. Don't lose any time, now."

Jack shook his head.

"No, Claude," he said. "It is my business to watch while you sleep, if a watch must needs be kept at all. You lie down and rest yourself. I can see your eyes are heavy."

"Well, Jack, I tell you what it is. We will chance it, and both go to sleep. You take the sofa, and I'll take the chair, which, of the two, I think I shall like best. I will just put the door into a state of security, and then, I daresay, we may sleep as soundly here as if we were far away, or in Newgate."

"Newgate?"

"Yes, Jack. It is in Newgate that a highwayman enjoys sounder repose than anywhere else; for when he is there he ceases to start from his slumber with the dream of an officer's clutch upon his throat, and the words, 'You are wanted!' in his ears."

"That's philosophy," said Jack, as he stretched himself upon the sofa—"that's philosophy; but it comes in an ugly shape, don't you think, Claude? Sufficient for the day, however, is the evil thereof; so now a good repose to you. I was going to say 'good night,' and 'good day' sounds odd."

Claude shut his eyes, and pretended to sleep. Jack watched him for a few moments, and then, feeling satisfied, resigned himself to a deep slumber; and when Duval made sure that such was the case, he opened his own eyes and roused himself up a little, with the resolution of really keeping watch over the repose of his devoted companion.

"It won't do for two such men as we are," he muttered, "both to go to sleep at once, there are too many hounds upon the scent after such game as we are. No, I will watch you, Jack. At my age I can do without repose better than you can."

Once or twice Claude got up and walked stealthily to the door, to listen if any sounds at all in the way indicative of danger could be heard, but all was still. The serenity of the inn was undisturbed by anything that could by any possibility be construed into a token of any more perils to those two, who had already gone through so much.

"This rest," said Claude, as he again seated himself in full gaze of the fire, "is a real mercy to me and Jack; without it we could not have hoped to get

on much further, but with it we shall now be able to endure even a greater amount of fatigue than we have already gone through; and now I do begin to hope."

He was silent for a time, during which his thoughts were busy, and as he looked at the blazing logs on the hearth, he began to fancy strange shapes of men and houses, and old buildings, and tall ships in the glowing embers. More than once he had suddenly to arouse himself, saying—

"Holloa, Claude! Claude! Is this keeping good watch and ward over your slumbering friend?"

Upon such occasions, too, he would, for a few moments, listen most intently, and then, hearing nothing but the mournful cadences of the south-west wind, he would once more settle himself before the fire, and weave strong fancies out of the burning logs. Sometimes a magnificent cathedral would rise up in all its majesty of gothic tracery before his eyes, and then it would melt away as if before the touch of some enchanted wand, leaving nothing but the squalid appearance of some ruined hovel. Claude's head slowly sunk, and his arms hung listlessly by his side. The warmth of the fire, and his own previous fatigue, together with the hearty meal he had taken, were not too much for his resolution, but they were too much for his senses. In the course of another quarter of an hour Claude Duval was as fast asleep as Jack.

* * * * * *

Rap! rap! rap!—Tap! tap! tap!—"Sir, sir.—Gentlemen! Hi! what's your name? I say, open the door!"

"What's that?" said Claude, springing to his feet, and feeling astonished to find himself in darkness; "who's that!—what has happened?"

"It's only me," said the landlord from outside the door—"it's only me. Lord bless you, nobody wanted to run away with you here, I'm sure. You need not have locked yourself in so particularly."

Claude flung the door open, and Jack sprang from the couch. The landlord stood upon the threshold with a light in his hand.

"Well, how are you?"

"Oh, all right," said Claude, "all right. Why, it's getting dark. I—I must have slept longer than I thought. It seems as if I had only just nodded off."

"Does it? You have slept six hours; it's nine now, or close on it, and you both of you laid yourselves down at three."

"Is it possible?"

"Perhaps not, but it's uncommonly true. Howsomever, I shouldn't have waked you both up now, only I thought you were the very fellows to like good company, and there's six of the mounted police down stairs, who are on the look-out for Claude Duval, the noted highwayman. They are merry fellows, and have no end of droll stories to tell; so, says I, that will amuse my friends up-stairs, so I came up, that's all. Howsomever, I'm sorry enough if I have waked you up and broke your sleep. I always feels what my missus calls extra stupid if I'm woke up all of a sudden like."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Claude. "And so they are quite merry fellows, are they?"

"Oh, yes, full of their fun."

"You don't say so?"

"Oh, yes. What do you think they have done now? Can you guess?"

"I really can't."

"Well, they have took up two horses, do you know, and——"

"Our horses?"

"Yes, to be sure they have, and placed 'em in quite another part of the yard, and when I asked what they did that for, they only winked at each other, and said—'It's only our funny way, landlord, that's all;' but what they meant by it I'm sure I can't tell, no more can my wife, and she knows a thing or two, nor my Betsy, who, delicate as she is, is no fool."

Claude now staggered, and sank back in the ensy chair, for almost the first

time in his life rather at a nonplus. Rousing himself, however, in a few moments, he exclaimed—

"Only six!"

"Hush!" said Jack. "Hush!"

"What is it? What is it?" said Claude.

There was a sound of voices from below. The landlord suddenly closed the door of the room, and placing the candle upon the table, he at once altered the whole expression of his face, as he said—

"Claude Duval, I know you. What will you give me for getting you safe out of here and on horseback on the road again? I am not exactly what I seem to be. I know you!"

CHAPTER XCII.

THE ESCAPE.

Both Jack and Claude were utterly confounded at this speech. They looked at each other, and they looked at the landlord; but for a few moments neither of them spoke. At length the landlord advanced towards Claude with a laugh upon his face, and said—

"It's all right. Don't put yourself out of the way. I was only joking when I asked you what you would give to be mounted and upon the road again. You shall be there, and all I ask from you is a cordial good-night."

"Will you indeed thus befriend us?" said Claude.

"Ay, will I. Do you think I want any of their beggarly reward for giving up a poor fellow to be hung? Do you think I want, for the sake of fifty or sixty pounds, which would be about my share of the affair, to be pointed out as the man who sat down to dinner with a fellow, and then told him to sleep in safety, and after that handed him over to the officers, who were snorting after the scent of his blood-money? No—no—I'd rather see every timber of the old house rock again."

"How did you know me?" said Claude.

"That's rather a long story, and there's no time now to tell it. I knew you as soon as I came to speak to you, and what you said about having your friend here to dinner confirmed me in it. But now we have no time for chattering. You must get away somehow, and it must be done in a manner that shan't look as if I had any hand in it."

"Just manage it, then," said Claude, "in any way you please. If you know much of me, you know that I never forgot a benefit conferred upon me, although I have both forgotten and forgiven many an injury."

"I know it. Now, those chaps down stairs take me for a hard-drinking gormandising noodle, and so they have been playing off their jokes upon me, and I must confess I should like to play them a trick in return. They have ordered beds, pretending they would stay here all night; but, of course, as soon as they can grab you, they will be off. Now, I want you to come down."

"They will shoot me," said Claude.

"No. In the first place, they are not quite sure of their man, and in the second, I have overheard their determination to take you alive. They think you will have the audacity, trusting to your disguise, and finding that you can get away, to sit down among them, and then they will seize an opportunity of springing upon you."

"I understand. Six men to one is certainly long odds in a struggle."

"Rather than it should come to that—when you've got down stairs—sit down near the door, and order a bottle of port. I will be close, bringing it, and your friend here can come out of the room to hasten me. He will then bring it in, in a decanter. Pass this to them to drink, and leave the rest of the fun to me."

"But——"

"Now don't say a word. Trust me."

"With all my heart," said Claude. "Come along, Jack; it's all right.—Remember what you said to John, the sheriff's footman. 'There's a thousand times more good got out of people by trusting them than there is by suspecting them.'"

"There is," said Jack. "You taught me the maxim, and I have stuck to it many a time with the best results, and am quite willing to do so now. I know my post very well, and I think, Mr. Landlord, I can tolerably guess what yours will be in this little affair."

"Very likely. I'll just run down, and say you are both coming."

He left the room, and then Jack, looking earnestly at Claude, said—

"This is indeed fine. Do you think this man means honestly by us, Claude?"

"Yes."

"Oh! yes—you are always trustful of people, and I very seldom am. Let us, however, be prepared for the very worst that can happen. Look to your pistols, Claude. I don't feel quite convinced yet that two determined men, fighting for their lives, are not a match for half-a-dozen fighting merely to divide among them a thousand pounds."

"That's right, Jack. My bull-dogs are in good order, any ready to bark and bite at a moment's notice."

"And mine too," said Jack. "Remember, Claude, we must treat everybody to real bullets this time."

"Trust me for that, and if there should be such a thing as treachery, which I really do not look for, Master Serious will not laugh through the savory steam of such another dinner as we have had to-day. He may depend upon that."

The landlord had left the light in the room, and Claude now took it in his hand, and preceded Jack down the stairs. They heard a sound of voices, and in a moment they met the landlord, who said, in broad Hampshire dialect—

"*Thie's ye* room."

He pointed to a door, and then, giving a nod of intelligence, pointed to a decanter of wine upon a shelf in the bar. Claude felt more and more assured, and opening the door, he entered the parlour of the inn, in which there were the six officers. It was evident that they thought a too close proximity to Claude might be dangerous, for one side of the table was quite deserted—the side next the door, which Claude left ajar. They pretended to be smoking and drinking with great ease and composure; but Claude could see that several of them shook again, as they believed they were about to make, through some peril, without doubt the most important capture they had ever made in their lives. No doubt, although there were six of them, they considered that probably some serious injuries to one or two of them might be one result of the enterprise. They had made up their minds to a particular course, and it was this. If Claude Duval came and sat down with them, they looked upon that as pretty good evidence that he thought himself unknown, and in that case, at some peculiarly favourable moment, a rush might be made upon him. If, however, he should show in any way that he thought his disguise was penetrated, they intended to shoot him at once, for well they could guess that he would otherwise lose no time in concocting some daring mode of action, which, although against such odds it might not succeed, no doubt would involve the death of more than one of them in its consequences. No wonder that each trembled a little at the idea that he might be the victim, while his companions might reap the reward.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Claude. "Dear me, is that rain?"

Against a window that looked into the garden, there came such a clattering, dashing, shower of rain, that it was almost enough to drown any one's voice.

"Yes, sir," said one, rather nervously, "it is rain—a very rough night, indeed, sir."

"That's unpleasant," said Claude, "for I purpose being on the road soon."

"Towards London?" said one, giving a sly kick to his nearest companion.

"No," said Claude, "quite the other way. My friend and I are commercial travellers."

"In what line, sir?"

"Decidedly the hardware way," said Claude, drily.

"Oh—ah—yes—a-hem! dear me, how the rain does clatter, to be sure. Will you take a glass with us, sir, and your friend, too? We shall be particularly flattered and pleased by your company."

"Thank you," said Claude, as with all the coolness in the world he emptied the glass of brandy and water that was before him, and then rang the bell. The landlord made his appearance with an empty-headed sort of grin.—"Roughish out of doors, gents. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fill that again," said Claude, pushing the brandy and water glass towards him, "and let us have a bottle of your best port, if it is decent."

"Uncommon good, sir."

"Very well. Be quick about it—glasses for all, mind. These gentlemen will, I am sure, do me the favour of taking a glass with me. We travellers can afford a bottle of wine; and we alwas put it down to the expenses of the road."

"No doubt somebody pays for it," said one of the officers.

"And handsomely, too," said Claude. "Are you going on far, gentlemen?"

"Oh, no; not another inch. All our business down here we now consider to be nearly transacted; and when it is quite so we get to London again as quick as horseflesh will enable us to do"

"Many a man," said Claude, gravely, "thinks his business comfortably settled, when in reality it is only his own fate that is fixed, and that by a summary process—in the midst of life, gentlemen, we are in death."

The officers looked uncomfortable, and several of them shuffled uneasily upon their seats; but Claude did not give them long time to think, for suddenly he cried—

"Where, in the name of all that's abominable, is that grinning ass of a landlord with the brandy and water? Just run out, Bob, and tell him we can wait for the wine; but the gentleman whose brandy and water I took is without anything before him."

"Yes," said Jack, "I'll rub him up a little."

This was done so well that the officers had not the slightest suspicion that anything was going on beyond what was usual, and they made no opposition to Jack leaving the room to get the brandy and water. In fact, they were all considerably puzzled to know who Jack was, for not one of them recognised him through his disguise. And even if they had thought there was a strong resemblance to a man whom they knew had been hanged, they would hardly have been so absurd as to fancy it was him. In a few moments Jack returned with a decanter of wine in one hand and a glass of brandy and water in the other, saying as he came into the room—

"I have got them both. He was just coming. I never saw such a fool in my life. He is laughing now ready to choke himself, and nobody knows what at. Oh, here he is with the glasses."

"Ah, gentlemen," said the landlord, "I went down into the cellar for the wine, do you know, and the light was nearly put out by a cobweb, and there I think I made the finest joke that ever I heard in all my life. Would you believe it?"

"Really!" said Claude.

"Yes, sir. 'Hilloa!' said I, 'that's a cobweb!' but now, here comes the joke—'But,' says I, 'it ain't a cobweb.' What do you think of that? Ha! ha! ha! Oh, dear! it makes the tears come into my eyes, that it does."

"And it's enough to make them come into anybody else's," said Claude, "to be forced to listen to it. Now, gentlemen, you will take a glass with me, and we will drink 'Better luck next time.'"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the officers. "Very good. 'Better luck next time.' Particularly good." They each drank a glass of the drugged wine but one, and across his mind it seemed as if a shadow of suspicion had come that all was not quite

right, although he could not to himself exactly define what it was he suspected. He refused the wine though.

"As you please," said Claude. "I'll take a cigar, landlord."

"Yes, sir."

The rain came down in torrents, dashing and rattling against the window-panes as though they must inevitably be driven in. The south-west wind, too, to which the landlord had already drawn the attention of Claude and Jack, was blustering and roaring among the trees at such a furious rate, that it seemed a miracle the old house could keep its roof on.

"A very boisterous night, indeed," said Claude. "A regular brawling wind. Well, these south-westers are generally more noisy than mischievous, I believe."

"You have forgotten your wine," said the officer who had refused to drink.

"How do you mean?" said Claude, whose great object now was to gain time.

"I mean that you don't drink any of your own wine, although you talked so much about it."

"Well?"

Claude fixed a calm, penetrating gaze upon this man, and the landlord coming in with the cigar he had ordered, handed it to Claude, who, with his eyes still fixed on the officer, took up the candle and lit the cigar, adding, when he had done so—

"Well, as you were saying. Go on."

"I was saying that you carefully avoided drinking the wine yourself, although all my party partook of it. That is what I was saying."

"Well?"

"Hold—hold," cried one of the officers, suddenly rising from his chair, and then as suddenly sinking down into it again. "I—I—don't feel—exactly as I ought to feel—my head swims—and—and——"

"Swim after it, then," said Claude. "I don't know that you can possibly do better."

"Help! help! I am ill," said another.

A third fell from his chair to the floor with a deep groan, and lay in a state of complete insensibility, while the two others were evidently too powerfully affected by the drug that had been administered to them in the wine to move or speak one word, if they had wished to do so ever so much. All this was very rapid, and the officer who had refused the wine looked quite astonished for a few moments. He recovered, though, more rapidly than any one would have thought, and presenting a pistol at Claude's head, he cried—

"Stir an inch, and you are a dead man!"

"A foot, instead of an inch," said Claude, "if it will answer your purpose. Fire away—I am used to it."

Snap! went the pistol.

"Try again," said Claude, "try again. You are a brave man, and ought to have another chance for your life."

"My life?"

"Yes, to be sure. Why did you fire at me unless you happened to be weary of it? You ought to know me better. It is my turn now, so I advise you to look out, for my pistols are not in the habit of missing fire." The officer was a brave man; but it requires something more than a mere brave man to look carelessly upon the approach of death, especially when neither the feelings nor the passions are at all interested in the object in the pursuit of which death has been encountered. For a moment only he stood firm. Then he dashed towards the window, and made a frantic effort to escape; and Claude, who had certainly not intended to take his life, followed him closely.

"Allow me to assist you."

Duval then gave one of those evidences of marvellous strength which no one would have expected from his appearance. He lifted the officer some four feet from the ground, and dashed him with tremendous bodily force through the casement, demolishing framework and glass alike in his headlong progress into the stable-yard at the back of the inn.

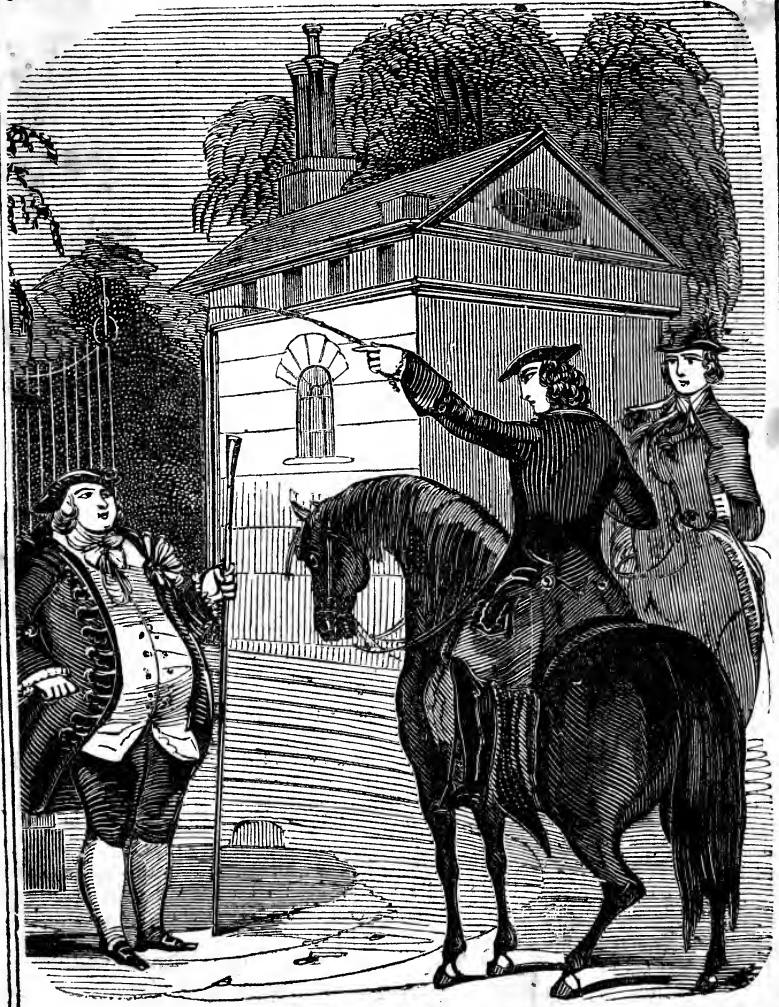
CHAPTER XCIII.

THE ROAD AGAIN.

"Bravo!" cried Jack.

"Hurrah!" shouted the landlord.

"Hush!" said Claude—"hush! Rem mber, landlord, that you are supposed to do all you can to nab me, and that you are quite astounded at what has taken place in your inn, and cannot make it out in any way to your satisfaction."



CLAUDE INTERROGATES LORD COCKERSTON'S PORTER.

"All's right—all's right!"

"I hope the depth from this window to the yard is not great?"

"Oh, dear, no—only about twenty-two feet."

"The devil! Then I am afraid I have killed that man, but I could not help it. These things will happen. And now, landlord, what sort of a dose have you given these men lying here so still?"

"Nothing to hurt; you be off now, and leave all the rest to me. It's a lucky escape. They thought they had you as safe and sure as they had the eyes in their own heads; but they have learned now to know by their own experience that there is many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip."

"Yes, but how much are we indebted to you?" said Claude. "I have met with many hair-breadth escapes, but seldom one in which there was so much real danger as in this."

"Don't mention that."

"Oh, yes, but I will," said Claude. "These are the things that ought to be mentioned. One may be well inclined to say nothing about injuries, but benefits may well be spoken of. I, for one, will take good care not to forget what I owe to you."

"Come, come, be off. That is the best thing you can do. Your horses are already saddled, and you have nothing to do but to mount them, and ride away as fast as you can, for these fellows will be getting up in a little while. There is one thing that puzzles me still, and that is as to who your companion is; but if it is a secret keep it, mind, and forget that I asked anything about it."

"It is a secret," said Claude, "and it is not mine."

"That's enough."

"And odd as it may sound of me to say so," remarked Jack, "it is not altogether mine, for a disclosure of it would affect others as well as myself."

"Then," said the landlord, "let me be one man to advise you to keep it to yourself; and now be off with you at once. You are for London, I suppose?"

"No—no."

"Indeed! There is not much game to be started in the country."

"We are bound for Southampton, although my own private opinion is, that we shall not reach there."

"And yet you'll try it?"

"Yes, I have promised one that I would try it, and fairly try it, too, with whom I would not willingly break faith. What a boisterous night it seems, Jack!"

"Yes, the north-wester seems to be at its height. It does roar, indeed, at a terrible rate."

"Oh, it's not much," cried the landlord. "The trees make half; and more than half the bustle. This way—this way for the horses. Now, my girl, brew a couple of glasses of brandy and water fit for a prince, and then these gentlemen will be off.

'For they are lads who love the moon—
Who love the moon—who love the moon.
And they— —'

Confound it, I've forgot all the old ditties now, and there was a time when I had them all at my fingers' ends, as pat as may be. Well, well, we all get older; but whether we get wiser or not is quite another affair, ain't it, Mr. Duval?"

"Yes; but don't call me Mr. I am Claude to my friends."

"And the devil himself to your enemies. Ha! ha! ha!"

Claude and Jack had followed the landlord to the yard of the inn, and there sure enough they found the horses all ready for the road, and no doubt much refreshed by the rest they had had. Our two adventurers were mounted in a moment.

"Farewell," said the landlord; "no—God bless me!—stop!"

"What for?"

"The brandy and water, and here's my little wench with it, smoking hot. Ah, she knows how to mix a glass fit for an emperor, when she likes. That's the stuff."

Claude would rather at that juncture have been excused from drinking; but he had received so much kindness from the landlord that he would not offend him by refusing his proffered hospitality, and he drained his glass. Jack did the same, and then waving their hands, off they went.

"You know the way?" said Claude.

"Perfectly."

They galloped on for some few minutes in silence. The thoughts of both were busy with recollections of the past and anticipations of the future, and we may take advantage of that silence to cast a glance upon the scene around them, and the aspect of the weather. They were in an exceedingly picturesque portion of Hampshire, and their road was shaded on each side by gigantic trees that even at mid-day would have cast a peaceful shadow upon the path. Among these trees the wind made so tremendous a din that it would have been a difficult task just at that part of the road to have carried on a conversation at all, for even the sound of the horses' feet was obliterated to the hearing of both Claude and Jack. Added to the discomfit of the blustering wind, and it was blustering enough to be uncomfortable, was a drizzling, sleety kind of rain that seemed as if it were twisted hither and thither into so many contrary eddies of wind as to come from every point of the compass at once. Sometimes for a few moments it would come perseveringly in their faces, and then without their having in the least changed their course, it would dash into their necks behind with a most abominable perseverance, insinuating itself beneath their clothing in the most artful manner.

"Jack?" said Claude.

"Yes—yes."

"What do you think of this?"

"Why, my private opinion," said Jack, "is, that it is about as uncomfortable a state of things as any one would wish to have anything to do with."

"I agree with you. But I suppose we must endure it. Hilloa! what's this?"

A travelling carriage, the noise of which had been quite drowned by the wind, now dashed suddenly past them, lighting up for a brief space with its lamp the trees, and the road glistening with moisture, and then leaving everything in apparently tenfold darkness.

"Humph!" said Claude. "Quick work. Where is that going, I wonder?"

"I can hardly guess," said Jack, "unless right on to Winchester, which is now the only place of any consequence remaining before us, and that is not very eminent."

As Jack spoke, the travelling carriage astonished them both by suddenly disappearing, with all the effect as though it had been swallowed up in the ground, although neither Jack nor Claude were superstitious enough to think such a thing for a moment. They scarcely knew to what circumstance to attribute the disappearance of the carriage, but they at length concluded that its abrupt departure from the high-road must have been caused by its turning to the right.

"A cross-road," said Claude, "I suppose, to somewhere."

"It must be so," said Jack. "Push on."

At about a couple of hundred yards further on they soon saw by what means the carriage had disappeared, for there were the open gates of some park, and a pretty little lodge at each side of them, upon the threshold of which stood a man in rich livery.

"Whose house is this?" said Claude to the man.

"Lord Cockerton's country seat, sir," replied the footman. "It's the birth-day of Lady Louisa, so there's ever such a grand party, and a dance in what they call the Templars' Hall, and a grand supper, and all that sort of thing. Why, there's three hundred expected they say."

"Enough to be merry. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Jack had fallen back in his position of groom to Claude, which accounted for the respect with which the footman treated him. Jack and Claude rode on for about a quarter of a mile, during which it was clearly visible to them both that upon their right hand was an oaken park-paling, enclosing, no doubt, the grounds of the mansion in which so glorious a feast and dance were going on.

"Jack," said Claude, "this rain is decidedly not the thing for us. In the vallise there are plenty of gentlemanly appointments. Suppose we invite ourselves to this grand party?"

"It's too hazardous, Claude."

"Not a whit. We will find some mode of entrance to the grounds, and then our only care will be to find shelter for our horses, and dress ourselves and go to the house. I don't anticipate any difficulty in the matter. If we cannot find a dry shelter for the horses, of course I shall give up the idea, for it won't do to tamper with them by leaving them in such a drizzling rain as this for some time."

"No, Claude, certainly; and as for difficulties, I never yet knew you found any in the way of the most desperate enterprises you ever planned. Come on, if it must be so, only I won't dress otherwise than as your servant, in which character, which will give me no trouble, I shall be better able to hear if there is any danger gathering around you, than as though I went with you."

"That's as you please, Jack; but I would rather you enjoyed the entertainment with me."

"I could not support the character well."

"As well as I."

"No—no. You, who came off with such flying colours from a grand ball at St. James's Palace, may well feel confidence in your resources, but all that sort of thing is to me an effort."

"As you please, Jack—as you please. Just hold my horse, and I will dismount, and walk slowly along this park-paling looking for a door, for there are always some to be found in such fences at intervals."

Claude dismounted, and that he was right in his conjecture about finding a door was sufficiently manifested by his discovering one before he had gone thirty feet. It was fast locked, but to such men as Claude and Jack a locked door was no very serious obstacle. From a pocket devoted to the care of a few tools and implements of the "profession," Claude took a picklock, and by the feel only he succeeded in a few moments in turning rather a ponderous lock. The door immediately gave way.

"Quick! quick!" said Jack.

"What for?"

"Didn't you hear? There are horsemen upon the road, and by the sound, I should say no small number. We can hear them now that we are free of the trees. Hark! hark!"

"Ah! Come in, Jack—come in, Jack. This door is, indeed, most opportunely open."

Jack and the two horses were now inside the park gates in a moment, and Claude closed the door again. The palings were not sufficiently high to come over the horses' heads, but against the dark foliage behind them it was not at all probable they would be seen by any horsemen galloping past. The danger turned out, however, to be greater than Claude and Jack had either of them expected, for the horsemen did not gallop past. The sound of rapidly approaching horsemen increased each moment in clearness, and at length when Claude and Jack thought they were about to sweep past, and the danger would in another moment be over, a loud voice cried—

"Halt!"

With a clanking and a jingling of accoutrements that Claude was quite sure did not belong to the police, the horsemen paused, and the voice that had cried "halt," said—

"Well, sir; it don't seem that the parties you seek are upon this road. Do you think there is any urgent necessity for my men going at speed?"

"You will remember, sir," said another voice, "that I have not called upon you as a magistrate to press this duty, but rather, as you were going upon the road with your troop to Winchester barracks, requested as a favour that you would accompany me and the police down the road."

"Oh, yes—yes," said the first speaker, who was a cavalry officer. "That's all right. Of course, we are very happy upon an exigency to lend any practicable assistance to the civil power; but you find, that after a hard trot of five miles, we come not upon the fugitives, or hear any news of them."

"And yet Sir Harry's information was very positive upon the subject, although other avocations made it impossible for him to accompany us."

"Oh! ah! Who did you say he was?"

"The sheriff of the county, Sir Harry Ross, who declares that he saw Claude Duval upon the road, and that, to the best of his belief, he is making his way towards Winchester."

"Very well," said the officer. "It just comes to this:—These highwaymen are in all probability much better mounted for speed than we are, and might keep us on the race for miles. Our cattle are not so much adapted for speed, and for dragoons to go hunting is rather an out-of-the-way thing."

"I am obliged to you, sir, for what you have done."

"Oh, don't mention it. A sharp trot now and then is no harm, and if your party like to keep the pace of my party, well and good. We can go on together until I reach my destination; and if anything should occur on the road, in which my men can lend you a helping hand, they shall."

"I am much indebted to you, sir. We are more lightly mounted, of course, than your dragoons, and will ride on. I wish you good evening, sir."

"Good evening."

The magistrate, who had a party of mounted police with him, again set off at a good round trot, and then, after a few oaths between themselves, the officers of the dragoons—who, although they put a civil face upon the transaction, wished the police at the devil, and cared not one straw whether they caught a highwayman or not—ordered their troop to advance again. Silence was soon as profound as before upon that spot.

"An escape," whispered Jack.

"Rather," said Claude. "I must confess it would not exactly have suited us to have fallen in with some twenty-five dragoons. That would have been long odds against us, Jack."

"Too long, indeed."

"Well. That danger, like many others, has passed away, and like others, I forget it. Now, Jack, let us see if we can find shelter for our horses, and then hurrah for the ball!"

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE BALL.

JACK, to tell the truth, did not half like this desperate plan of Claude's, to intrude himself into the mansion, when the festivities upon such a grand scale were in progress; but he knew quite enough of Duval to feel assured that no persuasions would induce him to it give up. If Jack had chosen to ask, as a personal favour, that Claude would give up the notion, there is no doubt but that the latter would have done so instantly; but that was what Jack did not like to do, for then, if within the next few hours any serious danger occurred, he would have the unhappy reflection, that but for him they might have been safe at the mansion of a noble lord. Besides, had not the plan at its very outset saved them from the dragoons? To be sure it had, for if they had not been just in time through the little door in the park-palings, there would in all probability, upon that night, have been an end to the career of Claude Duval.

"Jack," said Claude. "Just look over there, and tell me what you see."

"A roof of something among some trees," said Jack.

"Let's make to it."

"Why, it's most likely part of the house."

"Never mind, Jack. I don't think anything too good for our cattle. A spare room with a window opening upon the park would be just the thing, and the

horses don't want any feeding now, after the good cheer that no doubt they have had at the inn."

"They are, in fact, too full, Claude."

"So I thought. Now lead yours, Jack, and I will lead mine. It's just as well to let those dragoons get a start of us, for however much it might amuse them to overtake us, it would not be near so entertaining for us to overtake them."

"Quite the reverse."

Leading their horses, now, they slowly made their way over the wet grass of the park towards a clump of trees, from amid which they could just dimly see, against the night sky, the roof of some sort of building. What it was, they had not the most distant idea. It was certainly too close at hand to be any portion of the mansion itself. They did not, as they advanced, for some time exchange a word with each other; for they could not tell who might be close at hand, and the horses' feet, as they were quietly walked, made no sound upon the soft wet turf. After proceeding in this way for a much greater distance than they thought the trees were off them, they reached their confines, and then they paused to listen; but not the least sound came upon their ears. All was still as the grave.

"Remain here for a few moments with the horses," whispered Claude, "while I creep forward and thoroughly reconnoitre the place."

Jack did so, and Claude, stooping low, and walking on with the utmost caution, crept through the trees until he came to the building, which he then saw at once was a summer-house, and he might well, as he did, conjecture that in such weather and at such an hour it was deserted. In fact, so clear did he feel upon the subject, that he was upon the very point of returning to Jack, when a faint gleam of light from a little painted window came across his path. Claude paused in a moment.

"Who on earth can that be?" he said to himself; and the idea for a moment came across his mind that perhaps, after all, it would be safer and better to return and give up the adventure; but this, with Claude Duval, was only a momentary thought. His daring courage, and his real liking for anything in the shape of romantic adventure, triumphed over every other feeling, and, instead of retreating, he advanced towards the little painted window from which the gleam of light proceeded. It was a strange colour this gleam of light, for it passed through a tinted pane of glass, and when Claude reached the window he found that he could see nothing through it. He could, however, hear the murmuring sound of voices. After a few moments of vain endeavour to find a peephole, he took from his finger a ring in which there was a small diamond, and by its aid succeeded, without giving the least alarm to the persons in the little pavilion or summer-house, in cutting out a small pane of glass from the stained window through which the gleam of light came. In a moment he commanded a clear view of the interior of the place. It was one of those tasteful little buildings, with painted walls and showy drapery, which in the summer season afford such a pleasing and cool retreat from the glare of the sun during a stroll through such a park as that in which it was situated. But Claude's attention was only cursorily bestowed upon the summer-house; it was the occupants of it that rivetted his gaze. A young girl of singular beauty, and whose dress and air showed that she was one of those highly cultivated beings only to be found in the most wealthy classes, and then not often, was standing by the side of a young man, whose left arm was round her waist, while with his right hand he held her left, and at times covered it with kisses. A loose cloak—it looked like a gentleman's—was thrown over the girl, and the young man was attired in full evening costume. The light they had was a little bit of wax candle, in a small silver taper-stand, and it seemed as though they had stolen away from the festive scene at the mansion to enjoy love's soft converse alone in that summer-house, when, upon such a night, they were not likely to be observed, however much they might be missed. The maiden was weeping bitterly, and he who held her affections in bondage was striving to console her, as the voice of the loved one can only console.

"My darling," he said, "you quite unman me by these tears. Ah, my Lavinia, let me implore you to look more hopefully upon the future."

"Alas, Charles, how can I?" she sobbed.

"Can you ask? Do we not love each other, my own true-hearted love? Why should not the future be full of hope to us, and full of joy?"

"But—but ——"

"But what? Surely since forbidding me to address you as a suitor, your imperious mother has not superadded any further tyranny? Your heart seems to-night to be full of affliction."

"It is—it is."

"Who, then, should share it but myself? Have you at length, my own girl, a secret from me?"

"No—no. Oh, no, Charles, I will tell you all, however repugnant to my feelings it may be, but I have so accustomed myself to look upon you, and to think of you as a second self, that I am unhappy if you do not know all that passes in which your poor Lavinia is interested. Listen to me, Charles.—My mother—"

"Ah, yes, your mother! All the unhappiness that you and I endure is caused by her."

"It is, indeed."

The young girl wept more bitterly than before, and it was probably highly necessary to her recovery from such an accession of grief, that Charles should bestow upon her so many kisses as he did. At all events, they seemed to have the desired effect, for in a few moments she was able to proceed.

"My mother, then, Charles, has set her mind upon my marriage with Sir James Raffles."

"Yes—yes."

"And it was only to-night that I really ascertained the unworthy inducement which she had to sell her child."

"Sell?"

"Yes, Charles, that is now the proper word. By mere accident, I overheard the bargain between them. She was to persecute me with a marriage with him upon condition that he was to pay her twelve thousand pounds down, to relieve her from what she calls her difficulties, and likewise give one thousand pounds per annum unknown to any one, to enable her to indulge in play and other extravagances to which she is attached."

"Oh, shame—shame! have you no blush?"

"My soul revolted, Charles, against this horrible compact."

"As well it may."

"My father allows my mother a queenly income, for he is rich and weak, and what she can so much want money for, that she would sell her child to procure it, is beyond my imagination to conceive."

"My darling," said the young lover, and his voice trembled with passion as he spoke, "your mother—is—is—your mother; therefore, natural delicacy will forbid me saying to her what natural feelings would prompt; but as for Sir James Raffles, he, as a man, shall answer to me for this insult; and now, Lavinia, I again urge you to place a barrier between your mother's tyranny and yourself, which she cannot cross.—That barrier must be a husband. Fly with me, and we will go at once to my aunt's in London, where you will receive the welcome of a mother in reality, and a few days will join us to part no more."

"Oh, if I dared."

"Dared? Ah, Lavinia. Do you love me?"

"Do not ask me, Charles. Oh, let me not think—I—I—believe, I shall go mad."

"No, my darling, You will, on the contrary, fly with me. I have loved you since you were a mere child, and surely you may trust me now."

"I know I can trust you, Charles. You, in all the world, are my only friend. God will bless you."

"God has blessed me dear one, with your love."

"I shall be missed. Oh, Charles, this interview has already lasted too long. I must leave now."

"Stop, Lavinia. It is now a quarter past ten. By twelve o'clock I will be upon this spot, waiting for you, and outside the park-wall I will have a carriage prepared for your reception. In a few hours you will be in the arms of my aunt."

"Ought I—dare I?"

"You ought. If your mother, in urging upon you this hateful union with Sir James, had been conscientiously seeking your happiness in life, however she might been been mistaken, you might hesitate to leave her, but when you know she only seeks to make you the victim of her own gross selfishness, the case is indeed most widely different."

"I heard it from her own lips, Charles."

"That was conclusive."

"And horrible."

"It was horrible, indeed, for a child, and that child a young girl, to hear such words come from one so near to her as a mother. I do not wonder at your tears, my darling."

"I felt, Charles, that from that moment I had no mother."

"You will fly with me?"

"I will—I will."

"Ah, my Lavinia, you will never repent this step but in years of happiness, and then you will look back to it as the one taken in the right direction, which rescued you from an intolerable persecution, and united you to one who will cherish you as the dearest gift that God in his goodness can give him."

There was some more kissing.

"D—n it," muttered Claude, "I hate that when I am not a party concerned."

"Do not accompany me to the house," said Lavinia; "we might be seen by some one."

"I will only watch you from here, love. Remember—be hear as near to twelve as you can."

"I will, Charles, I will."

The lover carefully folded the cloak around the beautiful girl, for beautiful she really was, and then he watched her small sylph-like form as it went towards the mansion.

"May Heaven forget and desert me in my hour of utmost need, and when all the hopes and wishes of this world have faded away, if, willingly, I ever give cause to my Lavinia to shed one tear of sorrow!"

"Humph!" said Claude, "I hope they will get off all right—perhaps it may fall in my way to lend them a helping hand. We shall see. At all events, Jack and I must be off, I suppose, at twelve; two of our horses are to find refuge here. I must examine the place—Hilloa!"

The young man named Charles suddenly extinguished the little piece of wax candle, and then Claude could hear him rapidly and lightly go towards the mansion. Duval had always with him plenty of means of procuring a light, and making his way now into the summer-house he ignited a match, but he could not find the wax candle. He glanced around him by the light of three or four little matches which he lit in succession, and he saw a door leading to another room; he passed at once through it, and found it led out to the open air again, and as there was no furniture in this other room, and it could be got at without passing through that in which the meeting of the lovers had taken place, Claude decided upon it as best adapted for his and Jack's horses. Having settled all that in his own mind he made his way back to Jack, and briefly informed him of all that he had overheard, adding—

"It would give me much satisfaction to assist these young people, for I am convinced of the truth and sincerity of the lover from what he said when he fancied no one was at hand to hear his thoughts uttered aloud."

"There can be no doubt of it, I think, Claude; we do as much good as we go along as people accuse us of doing harm. Don't you think so?"

"Why, I confess to a little of the knight-errant feeling about me, Jack. But I think it rather arises from a passionate indignation against the oppressor, than from any very great sympathy with the oppressed."



THE SECRETS OF CHARLES HERBERT AND LAVINIA OVERHEARD BY CLAUDE.

"Never mind, Claude, what it arises from, so that it takes a right direction."

"Your philosophy is, in my opinion, quite correct, so now let us go on, and win."

They had not to lead the horses above twenty feet to the door of the room in the pavilion where Claude purposed leaving them, and they were soon both housed. The animals, no doubt, were a little surprised to find that they were upon a Turkey

carpet instead of a bundle of straw, but beyond that, they seemed to relish pretty well their accommodation, and, at all events, to be anything but sorry at escaping the rain.

"They will soon be down, I'll be bound," said Jack.

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, yes. A horse, if he is in health, will, like a man, make himself comfortable where and when he can; it is only when he is ill that he gets particular, and would prefer clean straw to a featherbed."

"You still persevere, Jack, in your resolution not to dress for the ball?"

"I do. As a matter both of policy and convenience, I prefer being as I am."

"Very well. Now light a piece of taper, and come into the other room with my vallise. I must be a little particular in my toilette upon this occasion."

Jack found, among the miscellaneous collection of odds and ends in his pockets, a piece of wax taper, which he lit, and by its aid, Claude plainly attired himself for the ball, avoiding all outward and extraneous flourishes; so that he, while looking in all respects a gentleman, was by no means attired in a manner to attract more than a common passing share of ordinary observation.

CHAPTER XCV.

AN ELOPEMENT.

The ball-room at Winchfield Hall was, indeed, a gorgeous apartment. Imagine a room of a hundred feet in length, and seventy in width, the roof of which was of a corresponding height, while from twelve large windows there hung crimson satin draperies, adorned with a profusion of gold fringe and bullion tassels—imagine mirrors set in the most costly and elaborate frames upon the walls, at only about four feet distance from each other, while the intervals are filled up by gilt columns, upon which are vases overflowing with flowers—imagine a ceiling covered with fretwork in gold over an azure ground, from which depended three chandeliers of the most magnificent cut glass—imagine, then, a thousand and one little articles of furniture in the shape of gorgeous seats and ottomans, and you may have some idea of the ball-room at Winchfield Hall upon this memorable occasion. There opened from it a multitude of pretty little apartments, hidden by silken hangings, all of which were devoted to the purposes of holding refreshments, and some of those apartments had French windows that led to a lawn. It was by one of these that Lavinia had, for a brief space, escaped to meet her lover in the little pavilion—it was by one of these that a tall distinguished-looking man entered some half hour afterwards. That man was Claude Duval. The din and crash of music came upon Claude's ear, and a suffocating sense of being in an atmosphere full of perfumes came across him. He paused a moment to look at himself in a long mirror that was in the little room.

He then advanced to the table in the centre of the room, which was profusely laid out with refreshments, and filling for himself a goblet of wine that held not far short of half a pint, he drank it off, saying as he did so—

"To my own success."

Then with that air of great confidence which a close observer like Claude Duval had seen was one of the distinguishing marks of good breeding, he strolled gently towards the ball-room, where, among three hundred gents he thought that surely he should be sufficiently secure from observation. A gentleman was advancing from the ball-room to the refreshment-room as he, Claude, was so gently walking on, and they both slightly bowed like two well-bred strangers as they passed each other.

"That will do," said Claude, "that will do," and he passed on.

In another moment he was in the full blaze of the grand saloon, and then he found that the moment of his entrance was rather inopportune as regarded escaping observation, for some rather fatiguing dance had just finished, and most of the company were seated, while a very few only lounged about, and the band, which was stationed judiciously out of sight somewhere, played an exquisite air from "Acis." Claude, without betraying the slightest confusion, made his way gently to a seat, while several whispered remarks of—"Do you know who that is?" passed from mouth to mouth. There was not much room upon the seat, but a puffy, bloated-looking man, with an awfully sinister-looking squint, handed a lady to it, and with a profound bow, seated her.

"As your ladyship was remarking," he said, "such an air as that is a recompense for the fatigue of these new quadrilles, which have slightly incommoded your ladyship."

"Yes, Sir James, yes."

"Ah—hem!—ah! Your ladyship, I think, remarked——"

"That I had not seen Lavinia for half-an-hour. Ah, there she is. Pray, Sir James, go to her and secure her hand for the next dance, before any one else less unexceptionable than yourself should forestall you. Do not take any excuse. Use my name."

"Yes—yes; a-hem! Yes, my lady—I—will."

Sir James Raffles, for it was he, hurried off, leaving her ladyship, the mercenary mother of Lavinia, by the side of Claude Duval, who did not wait long before he said—

"It must be a great gratification to you, madam, to see so many eyes doing homage to your daughter's beauty and accomplishments."

"Sir?"

Claude, with all the coolness in the world, repeated his remark verbatim, and then her ladyship saw that whoever was the handsome stranger by her side, he was not to be put down. She gave something between a toss and a bridle of her head, as she said—

"I presume I have the pleasure of talking to the Earl of Harkeret?"

"I wish you had," thought Claude. "No," he replied, "no, your ladyship is mistaken. But among so many guests, it is not be wondered at if there are some whose names escape your ladyship's recollection. I am unhappily among he number."

"Would it be inpertinent for me now, sir, to request that you would inform me to whom I have the honour of speaking?"

"Not at all. But keep it secret—but I am——"

Now, Claude up to this moment had really not quite made up his mind to say who he was, but in the buzz of conversation that met his ears when he entered the ball-room, he had heard the name of Sir Kenelon Microme—an odd name, and one that, from its oddness, fixed itself in his memory. Accordingly, without a moment's thought, he mechanically concluded his sentence, by repeating the name of—

"Sir Kenelon Microme."

"Sir?" said her ladyship, giving a slight start.

"Yes," added Claude, gravely, and putting on a peculiarly mysterious look, "I am he!"

"Really, sir, you—you, perhaps think it a good jest, to assume the name of a distinguished ancestor of this family before the name was changed to what it is now, but permit me to say, that I, in my dull capacity, cannot see the jest."

"Nor I, madam."

"Then why, sir—why, I say——"

"I—am—he!"

Her ladyship's colour changed in spite of her courage, and she half rose from her seat.

"Sit!" said Claude.

Down she sat again, and then summoning all her courage to her aid, she said—

"Sir, this is rather too absurd. Now that you have had your jest, permit it to end."

"Have you no portrait of me?"

"Yes—no—what am I saying? How very ridiculous. You are taking advantage of an accidental likeness you certainly bear to the portrait of Sir Kenelon in the long gallery."

"That's lucky," thought Claude. "I am accidentally like the portrait, or her ladyship's own imagination has found out the semblance. "No, madam, I am taking no advantage. It was necessary that I should pay you a visit."

"Necessary?"

"Yes. Look at my fairest descendant."

He glanced towards Lavinia, and the conscious-stricken mother shuddered, but her ladyship was what is called a strong-minded woman, and consequently she made an effort to rally from the shock that Claude had given to her.

"Hark you, sir!" she said. "If you have anything to say, or any communication to make concerning my daughter, the Lady Lavinia, perhaps you will have no objection to say it in the presence of my son, the major, and his lordship?"

"None in the least," said Claude.

"You—you have no objection?"

"None whatever. I can tell them, then, of the pecuniary agreement between you and Sir James Raffles—who, by-the-by, if you were to succeed in forcing Lavinia into a union with him, would pay you a moiety of the first £1200, but not one penny piece of the annuity."

"God Almighty!" ejaculated her ladyship.

"Hush, woman! Hush!" said Claude. "How dare you use that name? The mother who would sell her child to a worse than Egyptian bondage for the means of gratifying her evil passions and depraved taste, has nothing to do with God Almighty. Repeat not that name again. There is danger in its sound to you and such as you."

The woman trembled like an aspen leaf. Then with a shriek she fainted. The whole saloon was in confusion in a moment. The music left off at a grand crash, and the guests one and all flocked round her ladyship, eagerly inquiring of Claude what was the matter with her, as though he by sitting next to her must necessarily know all about it.

"Only the heat of the room," said Claude, "I suppose."

"Heat of the room—oh, stuff!" said a lanky thin young man. "Mother is used to all this sort of thing in many London seasons. It can't be that."

"Humph!" though Claude, "the major, I suppose; I shall get introduced to the whole family by degrees. What a booby he looks. Well, well, I have given the old woman a fright, and of one thing I am quite sure, that is, that she will not mention it to any one."

This was indeed a safe proposition. Some of the guests suggested one thing and some another, for the recovery of the lady, but she herself cut the matter short by suddenly opening her eyes and exclaiming—

"Where is he?—where is he?"

"Who?—who?" cried everybody,

Her eyes fell upon Claude, and she shuddered, and turned away her head, as she muttered in a faint voice—

"Take me away from him—take me away from him."

"Oh, is it the sight of this—"person, the lanky major was about to say, but a glance at Claude's face induced him to think it was safer to say "gentleman that occasions your inconvenience? I have not the honour of knowing who he is."

"Your mother has that honour. Madam, will you be so good as to tell

your son that I am here by your command, for, in fact, you summoned me as a very old friend of the family."

"Yes, yes," gasped the terrified lady of the mansion; "yes, that is so. My dear, don't touch him, and don't speak to him."

Claude gave a significant smile, and then glided away among the guests. He looked at his watch and saw that it was nearly half-past eleven. Her ladyship, when relieved from the embarrassment of Claude's immediate presence, recovered herself sufficiently to feel heartily vexed that she had made a scene, but the long booby-major remained by her, and was so persevering in his inquiries, that she said, at length, to him, in a cautious under tone—

"You are a fool, and always were one; don't trouble me with your impertinent questions."

At this moment the band struck up a lively waltz, and Claude upon glancing around him, saw Sir James Raffles busily persuading the Lady Lavinia to dance with him. Gliding near to them, Claude heard him say—

"I have it in command from her ladyship, to request from her that you would dance with me."

"I am engaged," said the Lady Lavinia, in a tone of distress.

"Humph! May I be permitted to ask to whom?"

"To me," said Claude, stepping forward. "That and any other question I shall be very happy to answer you, sir."

"Oh!"

"Yes, yes, to you; engaged to you," said the Lady Livinia, who felt exceedingly grateful to the strange gentleman, as she called Claude to herself, for coming in so promptly to rescue her from the hateful persecutions of Sir James Raffiles.

They took their places in the dance, and as it would be some few minutes before they would be required to move off, Claude said—

"I much fear that the knight was rude to you."

"Oh, no—no; no more than his nature, and certain licence accorded to him by—by——"

"Your mother—warrants one to expect, you would say."

Lady Lavinia looked at him curiously.

"Fear nothing," said Claude; "I am a friend—not a lover in disguise, as many professing friends in your case might likely be—I am one who wishes you all the happiness with Charles that this world can afford you."

"Ah! you know Charles Herbert; you are a friend of his?"

"I get information by degrees," thought Claude, "that is the name of the lover."

Then, he replied, "I am a friend of his, although he knows it not, and knows me not. But see, we are waited for."

It was their turn to dance, but as they neither of them took, at that time, any interest in the fascinating amusement, they soon got through their part of the performance, and were again free to talk the matter over, which they had commenced so interestingly.

"You say you are a friend of Mr. Herbert's, but that he does not know you?" remarked Lavinia. "Have you any special reasons for secrecy?"

"None very special."

"Then tell me who you are, sir—I know you not."

"My name is Microme."

"Microme? That is a familiar enough name in this house; the family name was once the same, and our great ancestor, Sir Kenelon Microme, was the founder of the fortunes of the house."

"Ay!"

The mysterious and marked manner in which Claude prenounced this "ay," had an effect upon the Lady Lavinia, and wonderfully aroused her curiosity, as well as in some manner alarming her fears. Her face assumed an expression of great anxiety, and she said—

"Sir, you will pardon me if some sad experience has made me suspicious? I know I have enemies in this house, and that those enemies are prompted by one whose feelings ought to rally around me for my protection, and for the assurance of my happiness. Oh! there is Mr. Herbert."

Claude glanced in the direction to which the eyes of the Lady Lavinia's were directed, and there, sure enough, he saw the young man whom he had before seen in the summer-house, gazing upon them both with a look of fixed and intense curiosity.

"Will you take me to a seat?" said the Lady Lavinia.

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"I do—I do!"

They could easily leave a dance in which forty couple were engaged, and Claude conducted her to the nearest seat, and had scarcely seated her, when a door, not very far off, opened, and a servant announced Sir Henry and Lady Ross.

"The sheriff of the county," said some one at hand.

"The devil!" muttered Claude, "that is an old acquaintance, whose company just now I could very well have dispensed with."

CHAPTER XCVI.

MYSTIFICATION.

Yes, it was the sheriff in whose carriage Claude Duval had escaped from the officers who had been so hotly in pursuit of him. The sheriff, who upon his honour had promised to keep the whole affair secret, and who had since given information that had set the dragroons upon his heels. The fat, puffy, irascible sheriff who, since the adventure of the carriage, would almost have walked five miles to see Claude hanged. It was lucky that this official personage did not turn his eyes in the direction where Claude was with the Lady Lavinia, or an uncomfortable recognition might have taken place. As it was, he and Lady Ross advanced to where the lady of the house was sitting, who graciously rose to receive them.

"Ah, my dear Lady Ross, you are late!"

"Yes, but when I tell you——"

"Another time will do for that," said the sheriff.

"Remain here," whispered Claude to Lady Lavinia; "I wish to say something important to you, and will return to say it in a few minutes."

She slightly inclined her head in indication of assent. Nothing but a bold stroke, now, thought Claude, can save me from the recognition of the sheriff, and that bold stroke must come off at once. He made his way behind the chair of the lady of the house, and whispered to her—

"Introduce me to Sir Henry Ross, the sheriff of the county. I was sheriff."

"Gracious heaven, you here again."

"Ay, and again—and again."

"But what shall I call you? I dare not mention your real name, if you really are—but, no—no, this is either all a dream or I am going mad."

"It is neither, madam. Call me by what name you will, so that you introduce me to the sheriff as an old friend of your family, who has for a long time been, to your knowledge, here in the family mansion."

"Yes—yes, you, no doubt, have—and yet this must be some juggle, my reason revolts at what my imagination prompts me to believe."

"As you please. Woe—woe—woe upon this house if my commands are not obeyed now. Against the parent shall the hand of the child be lifted. The good name and the honour of those whom you love shall pass away like a vapour."

"Oh, mercy—mercy!"

"Will you obey me?"

"I will—I will. Only tell me that which you would have me to do. I fear you, and yet each moment I feel much inclined to defy you; but you have my secret, and therefore you are dangerous."

"I am dangerous. Introduce me."

"Yes—yes. Sir Henry—Sir Henry Ross! Will you allow me to have the pleasure of introducing you to an old friend of mine—indeed, a very old friend of the family?"

"I shall appreciate the honour, my lady."

Claude advanced and bowed; the sheriff did the same, although he much wondered that the lady did not mention the name of the old friend of the family. Lady Ross likewise executed a half bow, and then they both looked at the introduced.

"God bless me!" cried the sheriff.

The sheriff's lady uttered a faint lady-like scream.

The lady of the mansion looked perfectly bewildered, and the idea that she saw everybody else going mad began to make great inroads upon her credulity. She looked at Claude, and then at the sheriff, and then at Lady Ross, and then at Claude again, like a person in a dream, which, while it has locked up their perceptions, has not deprived them of motion. She passed her hand over her eyes, and then said—

"What is the meaning of all this?"

"Ay," said Claude. "What is the meaning of all this?"

"Why—hem!" said the sheriff, "the gentleman's face is so remarkably like the face of—I suppose another person that I—and I perceive Lady Ross is in the same mind—should under any other circumstances than the present have unhesitatingly said he was—"

"What do you mean, Sir Henry?" cried Lady Ross. "I never saw the gentleman in all my life, or anything like him."

"Why, my lady, you screamed."

"And enough to make a saint scream it is, when such an elephant as you are treads on one's toes."

"Sir," said Claude, "I certainly do not know you, and this lady will tell you that I am an old friend of her family, and reside permanently in this mansion, although I seldom make my appearance to visitors. To-night it is family matters of much consequence that call me. Is it twelve yet?"

"He is quite right," gasped the lady, "he is quite true."

"Then I have to apologise," said the sheriff—adding to himself, "I am by no means satisfied yet, and I'll keep a sharp look-out, for if this be not Claude Duval or his shadow, I am not sheriff of Hants, but somebody else's nameless old friend."

Claude deemed pretty well what was passing in the mind of the sheriff, and he resolved to take his measures accordingly. Walking away to the seat occupied by the Lady Lavinia, he found that the young lover, Charles Herbert, was near the back of her chair, from whence, without being seen by her mother, he could with tolerable ease converse with her. When Claude came up, Mr. Herbert looked rather suspiciously at him, but Claude at once spoke, saying—

"Mr. Herbert, I know your secret. Go, as you intended, to your aunt's in London, with this lady, and you will find that an unknown friend as so far acted upon Lady Lavinia's mother's mind that but little, if any, difficulty will stand in the way of a complete and immediate reconciliation with the family."

"Who are you, sir?" said Herbert; "you profess friendship to me, and, by what you have said just now, you have at all events convinced me that you have the power of being an enemy. Pardon me if I am, in my too overwhelming anxiety concerning the success of to-night's proceedings, perhaps too mistrustful."

"Rely upon me—all will be well."

"Do you decline, then, mentioning who you are?"

"My name is Microme, as I have taken occasion to inform this young lady. For

further information concerning me, I refer you to some confidential moment with your noble mother-in-law that will be. She knows me, and, what is better, she fears me."

"Allow me to tell you," said Charles Herbert, in a low tone, "that Sir Henry Ross, the sheriff of Hants, has just now glided up near you, and is listening to you."

"I thank you. This is for him." Slightly raising his voice, Claude then added, "I shall be in the little pavilion in the park at half-past twelve. Is he there still, sir?"

"No, he has tripped away."

"Good. If you can complete your preparations, be off at twelve, while the coast is clear, and when you find the lady's mother in a strangely altered mood, remember me."

Claude instantly left them, and again made his way to the lady of the house, to whom he said—"Madam, I may not often show myself to the light, either of day or of night; but while I am here I have made a determination to confide to you some important family revelations. Do you desire to hear them?"

"Oh, yes—yes. But this place is not——"

"Exactly suited for such a confidential communion, you would say, and you are right. You know the pavilion in the park?"

"Oh, yes—yes."

"Meet me there at a quarter past twelve."

"Alone?"

"No, I would rather you brought your son with you—much rather, as what I have to say will concern both of you greatly, and tend much to his fortune and your future peace, while I shall avoid the utterance of one word in his presence which you would wish to remain unsaid."

"I—I thank you. You force me to believe you are what you say you are, by the simplicity of your pretensions; henceforward the barrier that I had erected in my mind against all superstition is broken down, and I dare doubt nothing."

A fit of trembling came over her, which she had some trouble in repressing, and Claude saw Sir James Raffles coming towards them. He advanced to meet him, and when sufficiently near, he said—

"May I have a word with you, sir?"

"Certainly—certainly."

"Then, Sir James, if you have any desire to know who it is that the Lady Lavinia loves, you will secrete yourself in the pavilion in the park at ten minutes past twelve, not sooner or later."

"Indeed! Confusion! Damn——"

"Hush! hush! I may not hear such words, Sir James. In my time they were not used."

"Your time! why you are younger than I, andwhat do you call your time?"

"1604."

Claude was close to one of the curtains that hid a refreshment room from the great saloon, as he mentioned this date, and he dashed past it, and out by the window, rapidly closing it again behind him, before Sir James had recovered from his astonishment at hearing a young-looking man say his time was some two hundred years ago nearly. Rallying his faculties, then, he entered the refreshment room, but he found it completely vacant. Claude had succeeded in effecting a tolerably good ghost-like escape from the saloon of Winchfield Hall. The cool night air was particularly pleasant to him after the confined atmosphere of the ball-room, and Claude stood still for a few moments to inhale it with pleasure. The rain had quite ceased, and now and then the moon was peeping out from amid masses of rugged-looking clouds that floated over the pure silvery disc.

"This is a change for the better, indeed," said Claude. "I wonder where Jack is?"

"Here!" said a voice, and Jack came from a dark corner. "I am here, Claude."

"And how, in the name of good fortune, came you here?"

"Why, I thought as this was the window you went in at, it was the most likely one for you to come out at."

"Upon my word, Jack, I did not know, when I came out of it, that it was the same by which I had effected an entrance."



A BUSY SCENE AT THE SUMMER HOUSE.

"It is; but that is of minor import, and I have news for you, Claude. The sheriff is here. Thank the fates you have avoided him, as your presence here sufficiently testifies."

"Never trust to appearances, Jack; I have not avoided him."

"You have not?"

"No, Jack. You know what I always do when I am in doubt about the

extent of any danger;—I go and look at it, so I got the good and rather credulous lady of the house to introduce me to him as an old family friend, and the thing passed off, at all events, quite as well as could be expected. But I must tell you all that at some other opportunity. At present, all we really have to do is to be off."

"Any swag?"

"Why, Jack, I thought a little cash might be useful, so I certainly, amid the mazes of the dance, accidently possessed myself of a couple of pocket-books. But come on to the pavilion; I would fain be off as soon as possible."

They both walked rapidly across the park towards the summer-house, and just as they reached it they saw a slight female figure dart to the few steps that led to its principal apartment.

"Are we discovered?"

"No. That is a friend who will not betray us from inclination, even if she were able, which she is not, from information to do so. Just get out the horses, and I will join you in a moment."

Claude advanced to the door of the pavilion. He was met by Charles Herbert, who said—

"Hold, whoever you are! Stir another step, and you are a dead man!"

"It is I," said Claude, in the peculiar soft melancholy tone in which he had carried on all his conversation while in the grand saloon of Winchfield Hall—"it is I. Leave at once, or your enemies will be upon your track. Are you all prepared?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Then fly; I will remain here and stop all pursuit, if it should commence before you are fairly off. Go! go!"

"How can I thank you?"

"By carrying away at once my fair young descendant from an abode of selfishness and vice. Take her away while you can do so, and then in the hours of your happiness remember me."

"I shall not forget you."

Charles Herbert darted into the summer-house, and in a few minutes returned with the Lady Lavinia, around whom he had wrapped an ample cloak. She saw Claude, and uttered the words—"God bless you!" he bowed, and then they hurried on, and were soon lost to view. Claude took his way back to Jack, whom he found with both the horses ready for the road, and impatiently awaiting him, much wondering who the parties were with whom he heard him talking.

"Jack," said Claude, "take the horses down to the wall. I will be with you in a quarter of an hour; but there is some sport to come off here that I would not miss for a trifle, I can assure you."

"I will fasten the horses securely up," said Jack, "and come back to you."

"Very well—do. I shall be glad of your company, Jack, and will wait for you upon this spot."

Jack hurried off with the horses; but as he took the very same route that the fugitives took, they, hearing the sound of horses' feet, thought, to be sure, that they were pursued, and rushed into the carriage like two maniacs, ordering the post-boy to drive as though the very devil were at his heels, while Jack made, until he reached the wall, the most superhuman exertions to reach them, in order to assure them that there was no danger. Thus, not unfrequently in this world do people fly about from friend to foe, fancying they are accomplishing wonders, when such is far from being the fact. Jack soon got back to Claude again.

"Are they off?" said Duval.

"Yes, and in such an infernal hurry that I am incled to believe they took me for an enemy."

"Not a doubt of it. It's perhaps as well that they should go fast for the first few miles; and as they will soon find that they are not pursued, they will relax their speed."

"Now, Claude, what are we to do?"

"Hush! hush! They come."

"Who—who?"

"Some people who, if I mistake not, will, in the darkness, afford us some sport by their mutual mistakes and misapprehensions. Come close to this window, in which I have made an opening, we can both see through, and if there is not some good fun shortly, Jack, I shall think my name is not Claude Duval."

CHAPTER XCVII.

FAMILY TROUBLES.

We see that, in the midst of all his troubles and anxieties, the old spirit of fun and mischief that was so prominent in his youth, stuck to Claude Duval, and he would not have missed the scene that was about to ensue in the summer-house upon any account. The first person who arrived upon the scene of action was Sir James Raffles, and he came tripping along with amazing caution, muffled in an opera cloak. Gently he tried the door of the pavilion, and finding it yield to his hand, he entered the little building.

"Nobody here?" he muttered. "This is capital; I am a little too soon for them, and so I have a good opportunity of hiding. I ought from being here often to know the place, and if I do not greatly mistake their dimensions, the draperies at one of the windows are quite ample enough to conceal me."

In the semi-darkness of the place it was not an easy thing to find the hiding-place that Sir James sought, but after a few minutes' tumbling about he did so, and Jack and Claude heard him say—

"All's right."

Scarcely had the words passed his lips, when voices were heard upon the steps and Claude could hear the lady of the mansion speaking to the great booby of a major, her son.

"Come along," she said. "What are you afraid of?"

"By Gad!" he said, "I wish I knew."

"You were always chicken-hearted," added his mother. "I don't know what possessed you to go into the army and be promoted, because your father held two rotten boroughs, the votes of which he gave to a liberal Minister, who wished to rob the people."

"How uncommon severe, mama. You know I went into the army because there was a general peace, which all the world says will last; but do you really wish to make me believe that this mysterious man is—a—a——"

"Hush—he has pursuaded me that he is not of this world."

"How extraordinary—I don't feel well."

"What's the matter with you now, booby? Oh! that I, of all mothers, should have a coward for a son! Come on."

"I'm a-coming."

"A nice pair, Claude," whispered Jack, "are they not?"

"They are, indeed, but listen to them, that will be the best, for I can just imagine the bewilderment of Sir James Raffles. But you are rather in the dark about it all, Jack, and when I see it all over, and we are trotting on the road, you shall have the whole particulars. Ah!—do you hear nothing?"

"The tramp of feet."

"Yes; well, now Jack, what do you suppose that trampling of feet means really?"

"I cannot guess."

"Why it is the arrival upon the scene of action of the sheriff with a party he, no doubt, thinks sufficiently strong to take me prisoner. Hush! keep as close to

the ivy as you possibly can and they will not see us, for they do not here expect to see us. Confound them, what do they stop so close to us for?"

The sheriff, with six able-bodied men, had taken a circuitous route to reach the pavilion, where he fully expected to light upon the man who he fully believed to be the identical Claude Duval who had been in his carriage, notwithstanding the lady's assertions of his being the old friend of the family. This idea had been strengthened by finding that the lady did actually make her way from the saloons at twelve o'clock, and then he had resolved upon the capture of Claude in the pavilion, for that it was him whom she meant to meet he never doubted, after what he thought he had so cunningly overheard, but which Claude had uttered for his special misleading.

"Halt!" said the sheriff, in a whisper.

His men immediately came to a stand.

"Now, attend to me, my men. The prisoner you are to take is in the summer-house there, along with a lady. It don't matter a bit to you who he is; I will give you five pounds a piece for the job, but I warn you he is a bold, brave, strong man."

"We'll have him, master," said one.

"Your best plan," said the sheriff, who thought he was very cunning in not letting the men know that it was the celebrated Claude Duval thay were after—"your best plan will be to make a rush in and knock him down at once, and then tie him securely hand and foot."

"Yes, master."

"But be careful that no injury comes to a lady who is in the pavilion. As for me, I—I—will stay here while you go and do it, and when you have got him quite secure, you can call to me, you know. You are six to one, so that you'll run no risk, only it is as well always to make these things quite sure while you are about them; now be off with you at once. You know the entrance well."

The men crept round to the door of the summer-house, and the moment they were gone, Claude felt that the sheriff's presence so near him and Jack was decidedly dangerous, so he crept up to him, and suddenly grappling him by the throat, said—

"One word, or the faintest struggle, and you are a dead man."

The sheriff uttered a groan.

"Traitor!—dishonourable rascal!" added Claude, "so you betrayed me, after all!"

"Mercy—you are——"

"Claude Duval! Do you not tremble at the name of the man who spared you when he might have done otherwise—who neither robbed you nor inflicted upon you the slightest injury, but whom you basely took the first opportunity of betraying. Was that well done, Sir Sheriff?"

"No."

"Can you say no?"

"Yes I can, for I am sorry for it, and throw myself upon your generosity. I was planning only just now some means to save you, and put you fairly upon the road again."

"Really!"

"Yes, I hardly expect you to believe me, but such is the fact; and I hope you have too much honour and generosity to commit a useless murder."

"It is well for you that I have too much humanity. Equity condemns you—Jack have you a rope?"

"Yes."

"Just tie the sheriff hand and foot, as he recommended a few moments ago that another person should be tied. We will consider of his punishment when the fuss is over."

While this was going on with great rapidity on the outside of the pavilion, the lady and her son were waiting for the arrival of the pretended Sir Kenelon Microme, and Sir James Raffles were waiting with no small wonder and impatience

for an end of the whole affair. The six men of the sheriff were creeping on, fully determined to carry out the intstructions they had received from him, and to knock down their man at once, whenever they could get a good opportunity of so doing, upon making a rush into the pavilion. Notwithstanding the sheriff had tried to make light of the matter, they were fully impressed with the idea that they were upon a dangerous expedition. The fact that he had employed six of them, and the other fact, that he so carefully kept out of the way himself, quite impressed their minds. The consequence was, that their imaginations were rather unsettled by the time they arrived upon the steps of the little pavilion, which they ascended in a body. They were armed with sticks, and then, suddenly pushing open the door, they made one wild sort of rush into the place.

"Murder!" cried the major; and then as the men just saw a somebody in the dimmish moonlight, down they knocked him.

"Help! help!" cried Sir James Raffles, making a rush from his hiding-place to the front, and endeavoured to leave the pavilion, throwing down her ladyship, who rolled from top to bottom of the steps on to the gravelled walk.

"Another of 'em!" cried one of the sheriff's men, and then down went Sir James.

While the men were busy tying their prisoners, her ladyship began to cry aloud for help. Claude hearing her, ran round the pavilion, and caught her arm, saying, in quite another tone of voice to that which he had used when talking to her in the saloon—

"Another word, madam, and it is your last. This way."

Upon the impulse of the moment, he dragged her round the building to the spot where Jack had charge of the sheriff.

"Another bit of twine, Jack!" said Claude.

"Yes, here it is."

"Just tie up the old woman, then."

"If you are thieves," said her ladyship, "take my watch, and let me go. I have some rings likewise."

"Oh, murder!" said the sheriff; "is that you, my lady?"

"Who's that?"

"Silence!" said Claude, as Jack finished tying the arms of her ladyship—"silence! or it may be much the worse for both of you. I am in a joking, not a murdering mood just now; take care that you change it not. Jack, what large bush is that yonder?"

"Laurel, I think."

"Then we will accommodate her ladyship with that. Hark you, madam, one Sir Keneton Microme has been here, and he says you are a bad mother. An hour's reflection will do you good, and if before the full expiration of that time you call out for any assistance, there will be some one at hand who will effectually stop your cries for the future. Now, Jack, once—twice—thrice, and away she goes!"

It was not at all gallant, nor was it all romantic. We don't say it was, but Jack took the lady by the heels, and Claude took the lady by the shoulders, and so between them both, they comfortably hoisted her into the centre of the laurel bush, and there left her.

"Now, Jack," said Claude, "I can see for myself what that other hedge is. It is blackthorn, and will just do for the sheriff."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" said the sheriff. "Really I—oh, good gracious!"

Away he went with a crash into the centre of the blackthorn bush, and at that moment one of the six men came running round the pavilion, crying out—

"We have 'em, we have 'em. Two of 'em, Sir Henry. We have 'em."

"Keep 'em, then," said Claude, as with one straightforward blow he sent the man insensible to the ground. Now, Jack, I am ready if you are."

"Quite."

They started off at once from the pavilion, and made their way to where Jack had tethered the horses to the branch of a tree close to the little door in the park

paling, which had been so convenient alike to the young lovers and to our two adventurers. They mounted at once, and without casting one glance behind them at the lordly halls of Winchfield House, they put their horses to speed, and rapidly again took the southern road. They rode five miles before Jack said—

"Remember, Claude, that I as yet know little or nothing of your first proceedings in the hall. I hovered about merely, and like young Norval,

'Marked the road you took.'

But what gave rise to all that ultimately happened—and which, I confess, was entertaining enough—I really, as you are aware, know nothing at all."

"True, Jack. But you shall know all if you will lend me your ears for ten minutes, and as we have done a few miles rather sharply, we may give our cattle a little rest by indulging them with a walk, especially as this is a little bit of rising ground."

While they ascended a hill of considerable length, but not very steep, for they were getting upon those fine sloping plateaux that form so prominent a feature in the Hampshire scenery, Claude related to Jack all that is already well known to the reader.

"The adventure will make a noise round the country," said Jack, "and it will be some amusement to us yet to see what complexion the local papers put upon it."

"It will, if we live to read any more papers, Jack. But I ought not to make such a speech, for I have promised not to despond, and that is a symptom of the blues with a vengeance."

"I am surprised to hear you, Claude."

"I sometimes surprise myself, Jack. But we will talk of something else. I sincerely hope those red coats are safe in their barracks at Winchester."

"The dragoons?"

"Yes. They, at all events, must be considerably a-head of us by this time. Let me see—two hours at the hall—why they are, at their easy going pace, fifteen miles off, I should say, Jack."

"Quite. Depend upon it you have nothing to apprehend from them, Claude. And now that we have got so far upon our journey, and had such hair-breadth escapes, I begin to have the best and most sanguine hopes of a successful termination to it."

"Do you really, Jack?"

"In good honest truth I do, Claude."

"It would make Cicely happy to hear you say so. Ah! what must be the state of their feelings while I am upon this perilous journey? My anxieties can be nothing, compared to theirs. I think I see them now—the sister and the wife. But I must get rid of this train of thought. It is too much for me. Come on, Jack. A sharp trot again, upon this fine road, will put me to rights once more. Confound it! I ought never to begin sermonising."

Off they both set again, at a sharp trot that made the trees pass them as though they were part and parcel of a hunt, of a novel character. It is not very easy to keep up a conversation at a rapid pace, but Claude and Jack managed, still, as they went on, to talk of their prospects and feelings, and ever and anon, Jack took a careful and prolonged view around him, for the purpose of judging as nearly as possible where they were. At length they spoke aloud.

"Claude," said Jack, "we are only twelve miles from the old city of Winchester."

"A pleasant place, I suppose, Jack?"

"No."

"Indeed! I have heard quite the contrary."

"Yes, and so has everybody else. Winchester has a long straggling up and down high street, like the back bone of some extraordinary animal, and from that, to the right and to the left, are to be found little lanes and miserable streets, in-

habited by an old set. The palace and the cathedral are features, but the former is now a barrack, and the latter is in a damp churchyard that always looks as though it were reeking with the rank, pestiferous odours from many graves. No, Claude; don't set your affections upon Winchester."

CHAPTER XXX.

WINCHESTER.

Something seemed to be hanging heavily upon the mind of Claude Duval, and he was uncommonly taciturn—so much so, that Jack, with a feeling of apprehension, said to him—

"Are you ill, Claude?"

"Yes."

"Ah, this fatigue, then, has at last been too much for your iron frame."

"No, Jack. I have, I think, an iron frame, to speak metaphorically, but I have not, as I would fain have, an iron mind."

"Indeed!"

"No, Jack. I begin now to feel and to fancy that the shadow of some horrible calamity is upon my soul. I shudder at the idea of something terrible occurring that will plant in my heart a barbed arrow, which the efforts of a life will fail to extricate. I don't know what it is, but, Jack, each moment, now, a more deadly and heavier weight seems to come upon my spirits."

"All of which, Claude, in plain language, means that you have got the blues."

"I suppose it does."

"It's tolerably clear, now, I am beginning to have real hopes of a successful issue to this strange and most eventful ride from London to Southampton. When we reach Winchester, we are only some twelve or thirteen miles from our destination, recollect, and as we have baffled our foes so far, why may we not baffle them further?"

"There is no reason, Jack, why we should not in the world, only I think we shall not, that's all; but we have, all through my having the blues as you remark, hit upon a most ungracious theme of discourse. Let us change it."

"With all my heart. Do you see a light in the distance, Claude?"

"I do; it is the window of some road-side house by its size and steadiness, is it not?"

"Yes, I knew we should come upon an inn soon, although I could not tell exactly where; but without a doubt that is it. I wonder at what place our next depot of obstructors, in the shape of police-officers, have taken up their abode."

"We shall come upon them soon enough, you may depend. Don't there seem a great bustle at the door of that place, if it be an inn?"

"Yes, I can't imagine what it is all about. Wait a bit, Claude, and I will ride on and see. A single horseman will be less suspected than two."

"Stop, here comes a cart. The driver will tell us who is at the inn, if it be one. Don't you hear him whistling as he comes?"

In a few moments a man trudging by the side of a cart came up to them, and Claude said—

"Is there an inn hereabouts?"

"Yes. Why, that is one right afore."

"Is it full?"

"Why, yes, the sodjers fill it up a bit."

"Soldiers?"

"Why, yes, there's never such a lot of 'em, and horses too. They be rare chaps for old ale, they be."

"Thank you—thank you."

The man and the cart passed on, leaving Jack and Claude to consult upon what they had best do now that they were made aware of the fact that the dragoons, whom they had before escaped so narrowly, were at the inn by the road-side, which if they went straight on, they must necessarily pass at the risk of arousing a sufficient amount of suspicion to warrant their detection, and detection would be fatal.

"What's to be done?" said Jack.

"Push on across the meadows," said Claude, "behind the inn. If we now strike off the main road to the left here, and make a circuit of about half a mile, we shall do very well, and no doubt get past. Of course, to meet those dragoons face to face would be a hazardous thing after what they have been told of my being on the road, but otherwise they are much less to be dreaded than the police, who make a business of trying to take us."

There was but a low insignificant hedge dividing the road from the meadows upon its left, and Claude soon jumped his horse over it, Jack following him. They alighted safely enough in a ploughed field, and then taking care to keep the lights of the inn to their right hand, they struck across the country in as short a time as they possibly could. They quite forgot the carter who had just passed them, and answered Claude's inquiries. The curiosity of this man, who was not quite such a fool as he looked, was aroused, and he went on very lazily, looking behind him every now and then until he plainly saw Claude and Jack take to the fields. The tramp of horses' feet coming from a northern direction stopped this man from taking any very immediate measures consequent upon this discovery, and then, before he could very well make up his mind what to do, three horsemen rode up to him.

"Have you come far down the road?" said one.

"No."

"Have you seen two men on horseback? One dressed like a groom."

"Yes, I have, and they have only just now cut across the meadows yonder. That is the hedge that they went over, after asking of I who was at the 'Stag,' yonder."

"And who is there?"

"Why, the sodgers, if you must know."

"All right; come on," cried one of the horsemen, "we shall have them now. Come on; if we can get the aid of a couple of the dragoons, which the commanding officer cannot refuse me, I will undertake to lodge Claude Duval in gaol in less than six hours."

"You will do it, Sir John," said another, "if any one will; and we will follow you, wherever you may please to lead us, sir; we only hope that if we catch him the reward will be properly divided."

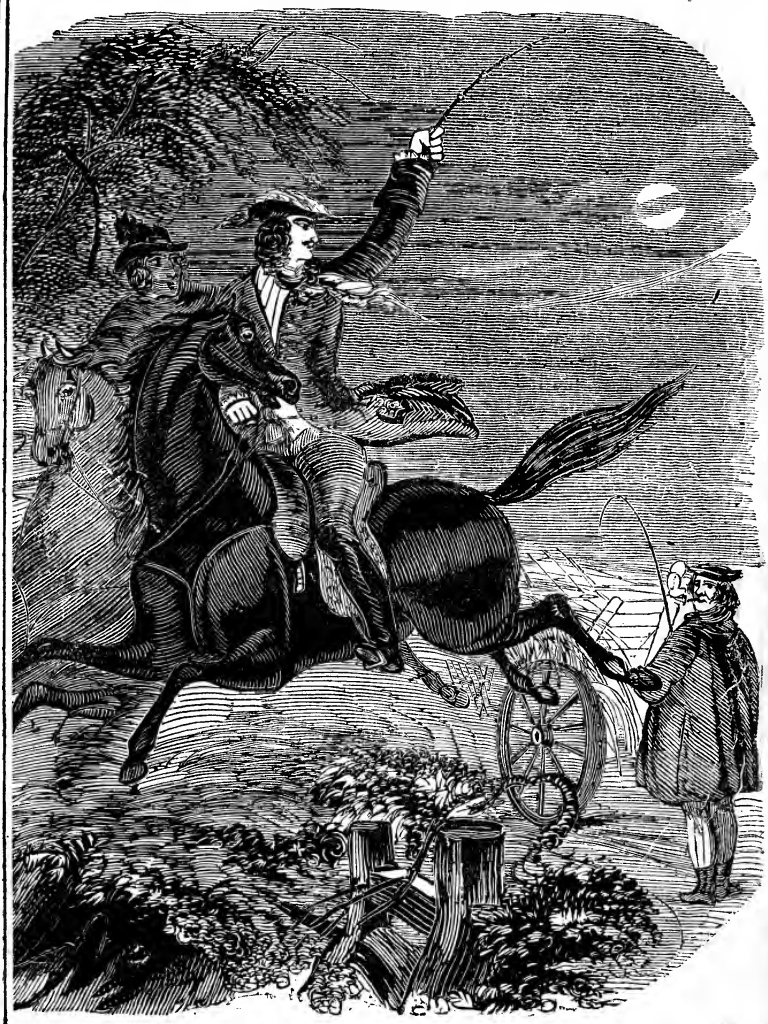
"Oh, as to that," said Sir John, who was what is called an active magistrate of the county, "I want none of it, and it seems to me that you and the two dragoons ought to share it among you. All I want is to take this fellow, who has puzzled the London police, and made everybody think him something so wonderful. D—n him! he'll find it a difficult matter to puzzle a practised fox-hunter; and I can safely say that I have more brushes hanging in my hall than any one in the county."

What strange things serve for human nature to boast of! This man was elated with the idea that in the hall of his house he had an unusual number of foxes' tails. If he had lived in the South Sea Islands, instead of Hampshire, the Missionary Society would have collected no end of money from evangelical old women, to send a missionary to him upon the strength of that one anecdote of the foxes' tails. But what will the reader think when we inform him that "this fox-tail gentleman" was—do not start: such things are quite common in wonderful England—the rector of the parish!

What did he think most of? Being at the death of a creature much more respectable than himself, or of the precepts of Him who taught that—

"He prayeth best who loveth best
Man and bird and beast."

But all this by the way, only we certainly do delight in a fling at reverent hypocrisy. Claude and Jack had no idea of their danger, and went on slowly and cautiously through the meadows, making a half circuit round the inn, and



CLAUDE AND JACK ELUDE THEIR PURSUERS BY A CROSS COUNTRY CUT.

intending to get upon the high road again as soon so possible. The three horsemen, including the fox-hunting parson, reached in a few minutes the door of the "Stag," and his reverence dismounting at once, walked in and asked for the commanding officer of the party. He was shown into a room where that personage was discussing a tolerably late supper, previous to retiring for the night.

"Sir," said the parson, "the notorious Claude Duval is upon the road."

"Confound Claude Duval!" said the officer, "I have heard of nothing but Claude Duval since leaving London."

"But you know, sir, it is a great object to take him."

"I don't know any such thing. It's no object to me whatever."

"Sir, I am a magistrate, and what I ask of you is that you will spare me a couple of dragoons to assist in the capture of the notorious criminal I have mentioned to you?"

"Impossible, sir!"

"Impossible?"

"Quite. If you fancy that dragoons can go highwayman-hunting day and night you are much mistaken. They can't do it, sir—the horses won't do it. Every one is stalled up now for the night, so I tell you it can't possibly be done. Why, good God! what sort of notion can you have of a dragoon, to suppose that, with his heavy horse and accoutrements, he can do what would be heavy work for light cavalry!"

"If I provide horses, you will allow two of the men to accompany me?"

"Dear me!—dear me! How long would they be gone?"

"Not two hours; I know where to pitch upon my man."

"Well, you can get two volunteers if you can; but mind, we must be *en route* by eight in the morning, and by then I shall expect to see them back again. Confound Claude Duval, I never was so pestered about such a fellow in all my life; if people are so cowardly as to let him rob them, why the devil, sir, need you put yourself out of the way about it?"

"As an active and influential magistrate of this county, sir; I——"

"Oh, well—well, take the men, but certainly not the cattle. Good night, sir—good night, sir."

This was about as unequivocal a mode of telling a man to go about his business as could have been hit upon; and indeed the Rev. magistrate was anxious to be off upon his hunt for Claude Duval, so he left the room, and hurried down stairs to where the troopers were taking a supper of bread and cheese and strong ale, preparatory to finding temporary accommodation for the night.

"I have the leave of your officer," said the parson, "to ask two of you to come with me, and assist me in the capture of Claude Duval. It will be a hundred pounds a-piece to you—who will come?"

"I!" cried every one in chorus.

"Settle it among yourselves while I go and see about a couple of horses for you, as your officer objects to your own being used."

While the parson was gone, the soldiers settled among themselves by lots who were to go, and the two to whom the chance fell got themselves ready, and took their pistols and cartouche boxes with them, in case of a struggle, although, from an utter want of knowledge of Claude Duval, they thought it would be one of the easiest things in the world to capture him.

"Mind you catch him, Bob," said one of their comrades.

"Ah, we shall do it,"

"There's one thing you'll do," said another.

"What's that?"

"Why, if you don't catch the highwayman, you know, you may catch a Tartar!"

A general laugh at this not over brilliant sally made those who were going rather bitter, but, as the parson now made his appearance to say that all was ready, they followed him in silence. He had procured a couple of sturdy hacks, well used to the country, and fully up to the weight of the troopers, who were both rather heavy men; so that, take it altogether, that party of five was rather a formidable one, and more likely to be seriously mischievous to Claude than any that had been yet sent against him. "What the eye sees not, the heart rues not," saith the proverb, and certainly Claude and Jack went on with no heart-ache at the proceedings that were taking place against them. The parson made a sort of speech to his party before starting from the inn door.

"My men," he said, "this Claude Duval, whom we are going after, is no

common robber. He is strong, active, and bold, so that there is positive danger in the enterprise. You will not find me shrink from being foremost in that danger, and all I have to say to you is, keep together, and don't do anything without my orders. He has a companion with him, but it is only himself that we must look sharp to. Now, come on."

The soldiers listened to this address with all the coolness in the world, but the two members of the police looked a little fidgetty about it. There was no such thing, however, as their backing out of the transaction, so off they all went down the road, fully expecting to be in for a very tolerable row. The parson had no doubt but that Duval would, after making a sufficient detour to avoid the "Stag," take to the road again, and it was upon the road that he proposed attacking him, and certainly he had very long odds indeed in his favour upon the occasion. He calculated, too, upon Claude's horse, and that of his companion, being by that time knocked up, but, as we happen to know, this was an erronous idea, for the cattle had had a good rest. Leaving, then, the reverend fox and man hunter to pursue his vocation, we return to Claude and Jack, who never at any period of their journey from London thought themselves so safe as they did now, when, in reality, they were environed by the greatest dangers.

"Heavy riding this, Jack," said Claude.

"It is, indeed."

"Where are we now, Jack? Do you think we are past the inn now? If we are, we may as well turn round and get into the high road again."

"I think we may turn round, Claude. Suppose we do so—Oh, all's right. We are on the high road again. How is this? What a sudden turn we must have made. How can this be?"

"Is it the high road?"

"Stop—no, Claude. It is a cross road. I thought, surely, such a circuit could not have been made so suddenly; but if we push on we shall do well now, for this is, like most of the roads in Hampshire, a good one. I think, as near as I can calculate, that we are a mile down the road."

"And so, Jack, we bid adieu to the dragoons, for which I am not at all sorry."

"Nor I, Claude. Somehow or another, we can manage to outwit the police, but dragoons, with all their stupidity, have a rough and ready mode of operation that won't suit us."

"Not at all. Where are we?"

"I know now. Look at that group of old firs. There is an avenue close to them, that leads to the oldest inn in the country. Now, I should seriously advise, Claude, that we go there until the dragoons have passed on, for it is far better for them to be before us than behind us, and we are not particularly pinched for time."

"Well, Jack, be it so. Our cattle have had a good ten or twelve miles round, and a bait will not hurt them a bit. Let us go to yon inn at once, Jack. Is it a nice place?"

"I only dimly recollect it," said Jack. "What is the time, Claude? Can you see your watch?"

"Yes, Jack; it is half-past three."

"And the rain coming on again. The sooner, Claude, we are housed the better."

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS TRAVELLERS.

We must leave Claude and Jack for a while, in order to introduce to the reader some characters in this veritable history, which he will probably think as mysterious as any that the pages of romance, instinct of those of reality, can present him with. About three hours before Claude and Jack reached the clump of fir trees,

close to which was the avenue which Jack said led to the old inn, there came three horsemen from Winchester, and halted about that spot. One of these horsemen was a tall stout man. The other two were slim-looking youths, amply protected from the weather by travelling cloaks and caps, the lappets of which met under their chins. The horses they rode were fresh, active looking animals, and when they halted, the taller of the three said—

"Tell me truly, do you think it policy to go any further on the road?"

"God help me, I do not know," said one of the younger men.

"What do you think?" said the tall one again, turning to the other.

"It is scarcely to be advised," was the reply; "we run the risk of those whom we wish to meet taking some cross road."

"Most certainly we do. Come, what do you say to that?" This was to the other.

"I say again, God help me, for I am nearly distracted by a thousand apprehensions, and—and—and——"

"And what? Speak!"

"I am very—very ill."

"Gracious Heaven! why did you not say so before? I feared this enterprise would be too much for you, Julian; but now, all other considerations must be given up to the one of providing for you some place of rest."

"Yes," said he who was addressed as Julian, "rest is all I want. A few hours' repose will restore me again. Heaven knows I thought I could have held out against this, and much more than this, but, dear friends, I have much overrated my strength."

"As I feared—as I feared," said his elder companion. "And here we are, I don't know really how far off any house of entertainment. Charles, what shall we do?"

"Hark! some one is coming this way. Ask if there is an inn hereabouts. Julian will soon recover with rest, and then we will get back to Winchester. Remember, dear Julian, that no one but yourself and I, and our dear friend here, are suffering anxiety upon your account just now, since this enterprise is a secret kept with uncommon strictness to ourselves."

"Yes, Charles, yes."

A man came on past the clump of firs, and the elder of the three travellers called to him, saying—

"Is there any inn or public-house hereabouts?"

"Oh yes, sir; only just down the avenue, you will find the 'Vine,' as good an old-fashioned place as the country can boast of, though I say it; and Jem Bowley, the landlord, is as good and liberal a fellow as any in Hants, though I say that too."

"What should hinder you saying, my friend, if the inn be good, and the landlord liberal? You have a right to give both the fair character that is their due."

"Why, sir, to tell the truth, you see, I—I—am Jem Bowley."

"Oh, indeed! that alters the matter rather. Perhaps you will show us the way, for one of my young friends here is not very well, and we are rather desirous of a shelter for the ramainder of the night. We have just taken a little canter from Winchester."

"You'll easily find the way, gentlemen. It's straight on, I shall be after you in a jiffy. I am only going to set some—some—ahem!—eel lines."

"Or snares?"

"Lor', sir, don't think me capable of such a thing. You see, sir, the Itchen sends one of its little streams into the valley, and it's famous for silver eels—that's all, I assure you, sir—as sure as my name's Jem Bowley."

"Is not this an odd time to set eel lines?"

"Not near so odd, sir, as to canter from Winchester with a young lad who is not well, though I say it; but no offence, sir. There's always somebody up all night at the 'Vine,' for you see it's an old post-house, and has been for a hundred

years and more, and though we are off the road a little, we don't know a minute when some one may come up calling, 'Horses! horses!' But you go on, gentlemen, I'll be after you in a crack."

The three horsemen proceeded down the avenue, and the elder said, tenderly—

"How are you now, Julian?"

"Better, better; it is only fatigue. I begin to think this expedition was a little ill-advised, and yet, if I had not undertaken it, anxiety would have killed me."

"I'm afraid it would."

"I am sure of it, Charles. How well you keep up."

"Yes," said the other youth, "I feel as though I could go through anything now, but yet, probably, should find a rest quite as beneficial to me as to you."

"No doubt," said the tall man, "no doubt. Ah, there are the lights of the inn. What an immense old straggling pile of building it looks, to be sure."

"It does, indeed," said Charles.

"Do you see it, Julian?"

"Oh yes, yes, my dear friends, do not suppose me to be very bad. I feel convinced that I shall soon, very soon recover. Do all those windows belong to one building?"

"Yes, so it appears. Now leave all to me, and I will wait below while you two go to a chamber and rest yourselves for two or three hours. Indeed, I don't myself see why you should not regularly turn in until the morning. It will be the very best thing for both of you."

"But will you promise," said Julian, "that if you hear any news you will at once awaken us, should we be sleeping, and let us know it?"

"Oh! yes, yes."

"Upon that condition then, Charles, we will retire, shall we, if we can find suitable accomodation. What say you, dear friend?"

"I am only anxious to consult your convenience, Julian."

"How well," said the tall stranger, in a lower tone, "you both keep up your assumed names. I have not heard either of you trip in pronouncing them for a moment."

"Why should we?"

"Nay, such a matter is more troublesome than it appears; but I'm convinced, that our determination and agreement to keep up this incognito, even in our converse with each other, is a wise thing. It not only accustoms us fully to it, but puts an end to the possibility of any listener betraying us."

"It does; it does. But here we are at the inn door. Recollect that, cousin Black; shall we alight at once?"

"Yes, Julian; yes. Alight, both of you, and follow me into the house as carelessly as possible, and I will ask for a private room, and a bottle of wine. You can order cigars, Charles."

"Yes, yes. I will."

The sound of the horses' feet by this time brought out the ostler of the "Vine," and the party having rapidly dismounted, he took charge of the animals, saying—

"Shall I put them up, gentlemen?"

"Yes," said the tall stranger; "is any one up in the inn to let us have a private room?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Two of the women folk take it by turns to sit up night and day alternate, you see, gentlemen; so you see one of 'em is always forward-like, you understand, gentlemen. You'll find her in the bar if you'll walk in. Master's up, and about somewheres, too, I think—ahem—"

It was quite clear there was some mystery about the landlord's proceedings, which the ostler knew perfectly well, and was keeping down the utterance by a cough or two, but the three strangers had plenty of mysteries and anxieties of their own to occupy their attention, without troubling their minds at all about those belonging to other people. In the bar, half dozing over a good fire, was a

young buxom-looking wench, who started up at the approach of the travellers, and said—

"Beds or horses?"

"Beds," said Mr. Black; "beds, if you please, or rather one room will do for these two young gentlemen, and I will sit up by a fire if you can let me have one in a private room."

"Yes, certainly, sir. This way—the fires are all laid, and I can set light to one in a moment."

"We shall want a bottle of your best port."

"And cigars," said Charles.

"Yes, gentlemen, if you please. This way, it's only on the first flight. Rather a damp night, sir."

"Very."

The girl led them to a comfortable sitting-room, adjoining to which was a large double-bedded chamber, which she offered them the option of having, and which they immediately accepted, so the fire in each room was set light to, and a cheerful blaze soon irradiated both apartments. The two young men busied themselves in looking on the panels upon the walls, until the girl left the room for the wine and cigars, and the tall stranger said—

"Let me advise you both now to go and lie down at once, I will bring you a couple of glasses of wine each, and then no doubt you will have some comfortable sleep."

"And you?" said Charles.

"Oh, never mind me, I will just nod over the fire in this easy chair, and keep watch and ward over you two, and let me implore you both to hope and expect the best."

"We will—we will," said Julian.

"Hush! here is the girl. Go into the bedroom, both of you at once, it will be better. Leave me alone to make any necessary remarks, for she seems rather talkative."

Both Julian and Charles went into the adjoining bedroom, when Charles commenced whistling some careless tune, while the girl placed the wine and cigars upon the table, remarking, as she did so—

"I have brought some biscuits, though they were not ordered."

"Which is very thoughtful of you," said Mr. Black; "but it is nothing more than one might fully have expected from such a pretty girl."

"Sir—sir."

"Indeed it's a fact; but I suppose you have been told that by every gentleman with an eye in his head?"

"Dear me—no, sir," said the girl, quite delighted. "What a funny gentleman you are, to be sure."

She left the room, impressed with a high opinion, at all events, of the taste of the traveller, which, somehow or another, was in remarkable coincidence with her own. When she was gone, he called to his young friends—

"Julian! Julian!—Charles!"

"Yes, cousin Black—yes."

"Come for your wine; she has gone. Don't you hear the wind howling down the chimneys? Upon my word I think you are both of you well housed. Come, forget your sorrows and anxieties for a while, and endeavour not only to hope and expect the best, but to believe in it as well. Don't you know the old piece of philosophy, that by insisting upon believing in what we wish, if even what we do not wish ultimately happens, we have already cheated it of half its disagreeables."

"Yes, yes; but——"

"Come, come, we will have no exceptions; drink."

They drank one glass of wine each, and then Julian took from his breast a small pair of pistols, saying—

"Shall I leave these here, cousin Black?"

"No, Julian; keep your arms always with you; and you, Charles, likewise, for I see that your hand is upon your pistols. Look yourselves to the priming before you lie down, and ram down the charge again, which, as I told you, is apt to loosen. Now good night to you both, and remember that I am here, and that you both rest in the most perfect security."

"Yes, yes. God bless you."

They would only take one glass each of the wine, and then, taking one of the candles which had been left upon the table, they retired into the bedroom, and closed the door of communication between it and the sitting apartment in which was their cousin Black. He drew an easy chair close to the fire, and then, after partaking of a couple of glasses of wine and lighting a cigar, he gave himself up to thought, and remained gazing in the fire, which sparkled and crackled gloriously before his eyes. God knows what thoughts passed through that man's mind then, but that some of them were most agonizingly painful might be imagined by the deep-drawn sighs that occasionally came from his lips. Throwing down his cigar, he abruptly rose, and was about to pace the room, but, suddenly recollecting himself, he sat down noiselessly again, saying—

"No, no, I shall disturb them, and they really want repose."

He then sat and listened, becoming keenly and nervously sensible of the minutest noises, a condition of mind which all who have experienced it will acknowledge to be of the most uncomfortable character; but there were many circumstances conspiring to produce it in this melancholy looking, and yet strikingly handsome stranger, who thus most mysteriously played the part of guardian and sentinel to the two slumbering youths in the adjoining chamber.

"Alas! alas!" he said, "how strange is my destiny, and how strange is the destiny of those whom I love best upon earth. Who, to have looked upon me, and known my position, one short year since, would believe it possible that I am situated as I am now!—Well, well, we must do as Providence wishes we should, and I believe that there may be much happiness yet. Life is like a children's game at see-saw—when we are most down we look for a change which shall raise us, perchance, higher than we have ever soared."

He was silent for a few moments, and then he said—

"Hope—Hope! yes,

'Hope smiles, and waves her golden hair.'

I will not despond, no—no—no! I will meet, as becomes a man, the fiend despair, and, despite its grisly looks, I will engage with the monster hand to hand. But despair always flies from a fair stand-up fight! Ah, what noise is that?—More visitors here at such an hour?—That is strange—yet—no—why should it be—any one might say the same of us!"

He still listened more intently. Then suddenly reseating himself in the chair from which he had abruptly risen, he said—

"Why should I interest myself about what cannot concern me? Some chance travellers have come here, that is all. It is true that we are not what we seem; but it is not guilt that has lent to us disguise. Oh, no—no!"

He heard a confused sound of voices outside the inn, among which he recognised the otler's as having a peculiar twang with it, and then footsteps ascended the stairs.

"This way, sir," said the girl, "this way—not that door, those rooms are occupied."

Another door he heard opened upon the same landing, and some new guest, who trod heavily upon the floor, was ushered into a private room in the "Vine," bythe same young woman who had done the honours to the mysterious strangers.

CHAPTER C.

MORE ARRIVALS.

THE house was soon again wrapped in the most profound repose, and the tall stranger by the fire, as he continued gaping at the embers, felt a drowsy influence stealing over him, which he in vain combated with. It was useless for him to start and change his position. Nature would exert her supremacy—sleep he must, and after maintaining a kind of contest for a time with the drowsy feeling, he fairly dropped off into a slumber haunted by painful images. No doubt the restrained position in which he sat in the miscalled *ease* chair, undeniably tended to produce uneasy dreams, but judging from the startling and moaning, combined with the utterance of various inarticulate words that characterised his slumbers, it was evident that they were not of a refreshing character. How long he slept he knew not, but he was suddenly aroused by a loud voice, calling—"House! house! house! Is any one up here?" The stranger started to his feet—

"What is that?" he said, "what is that?"

It would seem that at the same moment the two mysterious young men in the adjoining chamber, were startled from their repose, for he who was named Julian opened the door of communication that was between the two rooms, and looking in, said—

"Is there anything amiss—what has happened?"

"Nothing, nothing, Julian—you are so fearful. Remember that we are off the high road, and that it is not at all likely that we should here encounter whom we seek. Go to rest again, Julian—you may yet, for all we know to the contrary, require all our strength and all our courage to meet some emergency."

"Yes, yes. Oh, I have had fearful dreams; and during a short hour of repose I have lived an age of agony."

"Calm yourself—calm yourself."

"Speak to the roaring sea to calm itself," said Julian, tottering into the room, and half falling into a chair. "It were as easy as to tell my heart to still its tumults. Hush! hush!"

"What is it?"

"They are speaking. Let us hear. Hush!"

"Betsy!" said a voice. It was that of the landlord. "Betsy, who is in the inn besides a gentleman and two youths, that I sent on? Here's some soldiers and police, and heaven knows what besides, asking if we have got Claude Duval, the notorious highwayman, in the place."

"Mercy! mercy!" cried Julian. "Heaven have mercy!"

The reply of the girl from the house came indistinctly upon their ears, but before either of them had time to make a remark, the door of the room was opened, and a man entered, saying as he did so—

"If there be no one here who wants blood upon his soul, allow me to hide for ten minutes in these rooms. You will not find me ungrateful."

"Claude!" shrieked Julian, springing to his feet.

"Claude!" cried the tall stranger. "Good God!"

Claude Duval, for it was indeed he, looked astonished for a moment. He fixed his eyes upon the tall stranger, and exclaimed—

"Markham Brereton! is this, indeed, you?"

Before Markham—for Markham it really was—could reply to him, Julian sprang forward, and flinging his arms round Claude's neck, cried—

"Ah, do you not know your own Cicely?"

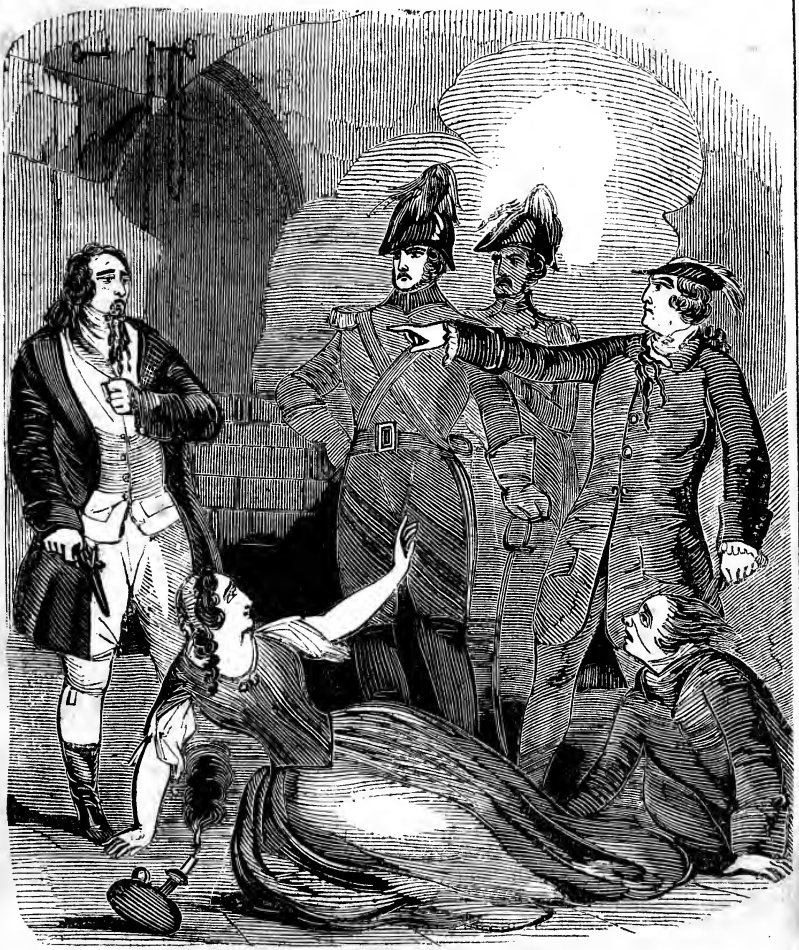
"Good God! is this possible? How—what—why——Tell me, am I asleep or awake?"

"All is easily explained," said Markham Brereton. "The anxieties of Cicely and May would, I do believe, have gone far to drive them distracted, had I not

accompanied them upon the road with the hope of meeting you, and the chance of assisting you. We went right on to Winchester, and having thoroughly ascertained that you had not reached so far, we came back upon the London road, when, overcome by fatigue, I brought them here for a few hours' rest."

"Then, where is May?"

"Sleeping in the next chamber."



A SKIRMISH AT THE "VINE INN."

"I see it all. Cheer up, my Cicely, cheer up. Nay, do not weep thus. Are you not with me? Come, come, this convulsion of tears will make you ill. Do you not hear my voice?"

"Claude, Claude, they will kill you."

"Remember your enemies if you forget your friends," said Markham. "I will go and listen at the stairhead."

"Thanks," said Claude. "I hope to deceive them yet. Jack has, no doubt, taken care of himself somewhere below, and I have opened the window of my room and hung a sheet out of it, one end of which I have tied to the bed-post to induce the idea that I have escaped by such means, so that if I can get a temporary asylum here, all will be well."

"Yes, Claude, yes," said Cicely, "all shall be well. Oh, yes, yes."

"You had better awake May."

"I will—I will."

"Hush! hush! Do not speak so loud," said Markham Brereton, returning. "Do not speak so loud, whatever you do. They are in the house now, and a long consultation is taking place below."

"What force is there?" said Claude.

"That I cannot ascertain, but there are soldiers."

Cicely at this moment returned with May, who threw her arms round her brother's neck, and burst into tears as she exclaimed—

"Oh, Claude, they shall not kill you! They shall kill me! They may have a life, but it must not, shall not be yours! Cicely, Cicely, he shall be saved—must be saved!"

"You will destroy all," said Claude, "by this vehemence. You will destroy all."

"Hush! oh, hush!" said Markham Brereton. Hush, they come. Go into the next room, all of you, and leave me to do what I can. Haste! haste! I can hear footsteps even now upon the stairs. There is not a moment to be lost. Go, Claude, go.—Go at once, and do not let a whisper betray you."

Claude, Cicely, and May at once went into the chamber, and Markham Brereton again placed himself in the chair before the fire, and restored the appearance of undisturbed quiet to the place. He gazed at the fire like a man half-sleeping—but, oh, what a world of painful thoughts was busy about his heart at that time, when he looked so calm and quiescent. Who would judge those, who, in this world look so calm and still, what torrents of hidden passions may still be at the bottom of their hearts. A life of ordinary anxieties could not make up the sum of five minutes of such mental apprehensions for those he loved, as now filled the soul of Markham Brereton. The lagging minutes seemed lengthened into hours, and if an hour had really elapsed, such an extent of agony must have left its traces for ever upon his brow. On—on came the footstep, and there was a tap at the door of the room. Markham Brereton made no answer. Tap! tap! it came again. Still he was silent. The door was slowly and cautiously opened, and a crowd of persons appeared upon the threshold, some of whom bore lights, while arms glistened in the hands of the foremost of the group. Markham pretended to be in a sound sleep. The magistrate who was so very anxious for the capture of Claude Duval, when he saw that there was no immediate perceptible danger, walked into the room, and laid his hand upon Brereton's shoulder.

"Sir? sir?" he said, "sir?"

"Eh? What is it?" cried Markham, rising suddenly. "What is the matter?"

"We beg pardon for intruding upon you, sir, as these are your private rooms, but we are in search of the notorious Claude Duval."

"Of who?" said Markham, rubbing his eyes.

"Claude Duval, the notorious highwayman. By mere accident, after failing to meet him as we expected upon the road, we have ascertained that he came here with a companion."

"Well, sir, are you satisfied that I am not the party whom you seek?"

"Quite so, sir, only I mention so much to account for this intrusion. We intend to search every nook and cranny of the old inn, if it should take us twelve hours to do so, for although there is a semblance of his escape, we are satisfied he is still concealed somewhere upon the premises. We trust, therefore, that you will excuse this intrusion, particularly as your companions are, as I understand, young gentlemen."

"Yes, but they are asleep, and I should, having the care of them, be loath to have them awakened. I have been here some hours, and the rooms were most decidedly vacant when we took possession."

"Nevertheless, sir, you will excuse me for saying that I shall not feel satisfied unless I search the place well, and as a magistrate of the county, you will conclude that I have sufficient authority to do so. I am quite sure, sir, from your appearance, that you would rather assist, than obstruct the authorities in the discharge of an arduous and, after all, thankless duty."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Markham Brereton; "if you must search the place, I should regret indeed to place any difficulty in the way."

He spoke these words very loudly; for although he could hardly doubt but that all that passed was overheard by Claude, Cicely, and May, yet he wished to be quite certain that they should be made aware of what was proposed.

"Murder! murder! help!" cried a voice from the passage of the inn at this moment. "Here he is! here he is!"

Bang went a pistol shot.

"The devil he is!" said the parson, as he rushed towards the staircase. "Come on, all of you. No—not all. One of you stay here and keep a good look-out, I have my suspicions."

One of the officers staid above in the corridor, while the others all followed the reverend gentleman down the stairs, whence the noise had proceeded. They found the maid, Betsy, lying in a fainting fit in the Hall, while an officer, who had been left below, was standing with his recently discharged pistol in his hand looking rather confused, and spitting blood from his mouth, which appeared to be somewhat damaged."

"What's the matter—what's the matter?"

"I hardly know," said the officer. But somebody, deucedly like a gentleman's servant, came up to the door and wanted to come in, and when I said no, he gave me a tap on the mouth that I think has loosened all my teeth; I fired after him, and the girl called 'Murder!' and then got up a faint."

"Which way did he go?"

"Through the house somewhere—I missed him."

"Then two or three of you must keep watch here, for that man is no other than the confederate of him we seek, and whom I declare to you all is Claude Duval, the famous robber."

Some of those whom the parson had with him looked rather pale, but they had gone too far to back out of the enterprise now, and they could only devoutly wish that they had never undertaken it. To the two dragoons the information was welcome enough, inasmuch as it promised them better sport than they had anticipated.

"He fights, don't he?" said one.

"So I have heard," said the other.

"Come up again," said the magistrate. "Come up again, I have my suspicions, and no one can escape below, for the place is well guarded. Come on! come on."

He had his foot upon the first stair, when a shriek was heard from above, and over the balustrade down came the officer who had been left there on guard.

"Below there!" said a deep-toned voice, and then all was still. The man lay insensible in the passage; for the height from which he had fallen was really something very considerable, and probably, before being pitched over, he had received some injuries. The party below looked panic-stricken for a time, and even the parson magistrate looked rather flushed in the face for a moment, and then rather pale. The dragoons began to feel interested in the affair, since it was growing a little serious, but they waited as calmly for orders as though nothing was the matter. The civil force evidently hung back.

"Come on," cried the parson, summoning all the resolution he could. "Come on—I feel quite confident that those we seek are above stairs somewhere, but whether that gentleman whom I spoke to is with us or against us I can't exactly

take upon myself to say. Come on—come on! We will not be deterred by a little danger. Now for it."

"Hold!" said a voice from above.

"Surrender!" shouted the parson. "Surrender, and save your lives. We are in force here, and we are determined to vindicate the law. You are summoned in the king's name, whoever you are, to come down and give yourself up. We only allow you two minutes, and at the expiration of that time, if anything happens, the consequences are upon your own head."

"Let's push on at once," said one of the dragoons.

"No—no," said the parson, "let's hear what the rascal has to say."

"If you are in force, sufficient to do so," said the voice from above, "come and take me. I swear that I will serve every man of you as I have just served your comrade."

"Come—come, submit to the laws."

There was a death-like stillness of some few moments' duration, and then a strange dragging sort of noise was heard above, which for a few moments puzzled those who listened to it, but at length one of the officers said—

"Oh, they are barricading themselves up with the furniture."

A pistol shot at this moment sounded sharply, as from the back of the house, and one of the dragoons immediately said—

"There it is; only two men were left under that window at the back, and no doubt one of them has gone to the devil with a bullet in his brains, and your men will escape that way."

"Oh, no, no," said the parson. "You two keep guard here, and I and my civilians will run round."

The two soldiers guarded the staircase while the parson magistrate went with his men to the back of the house, where he had posted two officers at the only window from which the yard could be reached. What had taken place there, deserves a word, for by it we shall learn some news of Sixteen-string Jack, who hitherto has not made a very conspicuous figure in this most fearfully complicated affray."

CHAPTER XCIX.

A CATASTROPHE.

THE fact was, that Jack was in the lower part of the inn, keeping a sort of watch and ward over Claude's safety, when the magistrate and his party arrived. From that moment, Jack's grand object was to combine his strength with Claude's; and as getting up the staircase, guarded as it was, was out of the question, he had made the rush into the stable yard at the beck, which we have mentioned, followed by a pistol shot from one of the officers. Jack was not at all aware that the magistrate had had the prudence to plant a couple of men there, and he came upon them quite at unawares. His presence of mind, and that alone could save him, did not forsake him in this awkward and most critical juncture.

"Is all right?" he said. "Have you seen anything?"

"No—no.—Who sent you?"

"My master, the magistrate, to be sure."

"Oh, very well. Go and say to him that for some reason or another they have just hung a sheet out o' window."

"A sheet?"

"Yes, don't you see it hanging there. You may depend it's to make believe that he has made his escape that way, and if we had not been here to see, any one might very well have believed it, but no one has passed us, so he must be hiding alone still."

"Then he's booked, but the best plan would be for us to climb in by the sheet while the others push on up the stairs. Don't you see how easy it would be to lay hold of it by clambering into that alder, the first?"

"Yes; and what sort of reception do you think you'd get from Claude Duval, when you got up?"

"He could only show fight. Come, get up."

"I tell you what it is, Master Groom. If you are so mighty fond of hazarding other folk's lives, perhaps you don't mind running a little risk with your own?"

"Not I."

"Then just go up by the alder tree and the sheet yourself. Ha! ha! The devil! You don't mean to say you really will?"

"Indeed I do."

"Then you are a clever fellow—I wish you luck."

Jack, whose only object was to effect a coalition with Claude, was quite delighted at this opportunity of doing so, and soon reached in safety the room which Claude had so recently occupied. He passed timidly through, calling gently upon Claude as he did so; and then, upon emerging into the corridor, the officer who had been placed there pounced upon him, saying—

"You are my prisoner!"

"Indeed!—for what?"

"Never you mind about that."

"Yes, but I do," said Jack; and feeling the importance of getting rid of this man, he called to his aid all his ancient skill and much of his ancient strength, and succeeded after a brief struggle in tumbling him over the balustrade of the staircase.

Claude and Markham Brereton heard the tumult, and just peeped out to see its conclusion.

"Jack, Jack," said Claude.

"Yes. Oh, yes. Thank God I have found you!"

"Hush! speak in whispers. Are they in much force below?"

"Nothing to speak of, except the two dragoons."

"Humph!—what part does the innkeeper and his family take?"

"I hardly know, but it's against us, I think. Good God, Mr. Brereton, how came you here?"

"Never mind, Jack. Cicely and May are here likewise, and we are all armed, and resolved to make a good fight of it. What shall we do now?"

"I tell you what it is," said Jack, "there's no means of getting here conveniently but by the one window in which I came, and up these stairs. No one will have the courage to attempt the window, and all we have to do is to defend the stairs. Is there any tolerably heavy and at the same time portable article in the room?"

"Yes, an old cheffionier."

"Then let's pull it out to the top of the staircase. It will be as good as two more men to us, for we can use it as a barricade as long as we like, and send it down upon our foes when we see occasion."

It was the moving along of the heavy cheffionier to the head of the stairs that had made the strange noise heard below by the officers. The parson had run round to the yard to see what had happened there, for Claude had slipped into his bed-room, and fired a pistol at the two sentinels, to alarm them. When the magistrate reached the yard, one of the officers said—

"Oh, sir. Your groom is, we fear, murdered. He would climb in at the window, though we said all we could to prevent him from hazarding his life in such a way. Somebody has just now fired at us, and no doubt he is killed."

"My groom!—what groom?"

"Your groom, sir, that you sent to know how we were going on; a tall man in brown livery."

"Why, that's no groom of mine, but a confederate of Duval's. Could anything be so stupid. Dear me, what mischief you have done. Why the fellow was fired

after as he went through the passage, and if you had caught him, one half of the affair would have been over."

The two officers looked uncommonly blank.

"Well," added the parson, who did not, by any means wish to dispirit his force, "it can't be helped now. I think it is highly probable they may yet make an effort to escape this way, so two of you are not enough."

"Oh dear, no, sir."

"Four will be, surely; and especially as you need not be at all nice about using your pistols, for remember this highwayman is to be taken alive or dead."

"Yes, sir."

Four officers, with loaded pistols in their hands, were accordingly left, while the parson went back to the staircase-foot with the remainder of his men, and there held a brief consultation, in which the dragoons were allowed to take part. The advice of the soldiers was to go right on up the staircase, fighting and scrambling over every obstacle, and take their man, of which they did not entertain the smallest doubt, and as they offered to lead the van, the officers loudly applauded the plan.

"There is only one thing that puzzles me," said the parson, "and that is the conduct of the gentleman and the two youths who occupy rooms adjoining, or rather across the corridor, from Claude Duval's; they are remarkably quiet, and it is from fear or collusion. I begin to have some suspicion that, after all, they may be friends of Duval's, and if so, there are five against us above."

"I don't see what difference that makes," said one of the dragoons. "We have got it to do, and we may as well do it, so come on. Here we are wasting no end of time, and making the enemy believe we are afraid of him."

While this consultation is taking place below, we may as well take a brief glance at what was passing above. When the large cheffionier was moved to the head of the stairs, the position of Claude and his party was entirely so far improved, and with Cicely clinging to him, and looking with fearful earnestness in his face, while May sat almost fainting upon a chair near the door of the chamber, and Jack and Markham Brereton looked, with their pistols in their hands, like men resolved to conquer or die, the group presented a very picturesque appearance.

"Escape! escape! escape!" was all that Cicely could say.

"Hush! hush! It is not possible."

"Oh, yes, Claude; the front of the house may not be guarded."

"Ah," said Brereton, "that may be a good thought, although a random one. I will go and reconnoitre that part of the premises at once."

Now the sitting-room and bed-room to which Markham Brereton and the two supposed youths, Julian and his young companion, had been shown, were both in front of the inn, while Claude's chamber being across the corridor, had a window, as we are aware, looking into the back yard. But, somehow, people don't so readily think of getting out at a front window as a back one, and the parson, although upon first entering the house he had placed a sentinel at the front door, had been careless of keeping him there, and the consequence was, that the front of the inn was unguarded. Still, it was not an easy descent, for except a projecting piece of half-worn iron, from which the sign was suspended, there was little or nothing to hold by. Nevertheless Brereton, as he looked, began to think that Claude might escape that way, along with Jack; and as for him and Cicely and May, they had done nothing, and the officers could have no hold upon them, and no right to detain them, even if by any accident they should discover who they were. He returned and whispered anxiously to Claude.

"Try the front window, while we keep the police in check."

"But Cicely and May?"

"You can leave them to me, can you not?"

"Yes; and yet——"

"And yet, now that you have joined company with them, you are loth to leave them."

"I am; besides, how could we get our horses? That is to my mind a fatal

objection to the plan. To attempt to go further with any regard to safety upon foot, would be sheer madness, and yet, if we could but get out of this scrape, it would be a glorious thing."

"What's that?"

A few grains of gravel had been flung from without by some one against the window panes, and upon Claude looking as carefully out as a little miserable oil lamp, close to the sign, enabled him to do, he saw a man making signs, to signify that he should open the window and get out. This man had something in his hands, which Claude could not make out. Fortunately the window was an old-fashioned lattice one, and opened like a door, so that there was no chance of it executing a scream when opened, as windows that slide up and down by the aid of ropes and pullies not unfrequently have a knack of doing. Claude had it open in a minute.

"Hist!" said a voice.

"Who are you?"

"The landlord. Get out of the way; there you are! Mind now, you had that with you, and threw it out—not I threw it in—make the best of it. Your horses are in charge of a boy at the milestone, about three hundred yards down the road."

"A thousand thanks."

"A thousand fiddlesticks; I know what's what. Don't swallow above one half that you hear of anybody, and never suppose that I can be very friendly with a preserve-keeping parson, who has had me twice in the Winchester gaol for poaching."

"Oh, that's it?"

Yes, to be sure. Get out and be off as soon as you can. They will be up the stairs directly."

"I know—I know."

Without closing the window, Claude properly secured the end of a stout rope-ladder, that the landlord had cast up to him, so that there was an easy enough mode of descent to an active man. He at once, in whispers, told them all what chances there were, and Brereton said nothing."

"Go, Claude. Go, for God's sake, at once. You and Jack go, and leave us here."

"If I thought you were safe——"

"What on earth can harm us, Claude, except your delay now?—each moment is precious. Go, go at once, I implore you. Cicely, join your entreaties to mine, and you too, May. You must all see that the only chance for Claude is instant flight, by the means now so mercifully presented to him. Oh, go at once."

"Yes, Claude," said Cicely, "my brother speaks truly. Go, and we shall be safe. We will all meet to-morrow, at sunset, in Winchester."

"Where?"

"By the entrance to the cathedral. God bless you, Claude, and as you love me, go at once."

"Oh, yes—yes," said May; "go at once. Do go at once, Claude, and take your friend with you. Remember that we shall be safe. Oh, yes—yes. Go—go at once."

"I will."

"Remember, at the gate of Winchester Cathedral, to-morrow evening, at sunset."

"Yes, yes. Come, Jack."

"I am ready—I am ready."

Markham Brereton held up his hand as a warning to them all, and then he stepped lightly on towards the corridor. Claude could not leave at a precise moment of danger, and he followed Markham closely. They both paused close to the cheffionier, and then they heard the magistrate say, in a voice that was intended to be assuming, but which shook, in spite of all his resolution that it should not shake—

"Forward!—forward! Remember that your reward will be ample; and that, after all, all that you have to go against is a highwayman, who will soon surrender before determined men."

The dragoons began marching up the stairs as if nothing particular was the matter, and they were followed closely by the officers; while, last of all, instead of first, as he had all along pretended to be, came the parson. It was a critical point that.

"Claude!" said Jack.

"Yes, Jack."

"Are your pistols ready?"

"Quite."

"Then we will not and cannot allow ourselves to be taken in this way. The blood of those who would take our lives be upon their own heads. I will fight to the last, and I now feel justified."

CHAPTER XCV.

THE FIGHT.

Tramp—tramp—tramp—came the dragoons. Claude felt a touch upon his arm, and turning he saw Cicely looking ghastly pale, but with a pistol fairly clutched in her right hand.

"Back, Cicely, back."

"No, Claude; where you are there am I."

From the open room door, streaming from the candle that was upon the table, there came a faint sort of misty light into the corridor.

"Surrender, or we fire!" cried one of the dragoons, as they both by a turn in the stairs came in sight of the large cheffionier that was placed upon the top-most step, just tottering, so that a slight push might send it down upon the heads of the invaders.

"Retire," said Claude, "or we fire."

"Good! Blaze away," said the soldier.

Bang, bang, went the holster pistols, and crash went the bullets into the cheffionier. It was quite evident that under cover of this fire, the soldiers and police expected to take the place and party by storm, but they were wofully mistaken. They made the rush. "Fire!" said Claude, and four pistol shots went against them, while, before the echo of the discharge was over, Claude gave the cheffionier the necessary impulse, and over it went, sweeping all before it, until it lodged in an awkward angle of the stairs, so firmly wedged in, that it seemed as though nothing but hewing it to pieces would ever dislodge it.

"Speak," said Claude; "are any of us hurt?"

"No—no;" was the prompt rejoinder, and Claude drew a long breath of exquisite gratification. But affairs were very different below.

A bullet had struck one of the dragoons in the face, and turning clean over upon his heels he had fallen headlong down the stairs to the passage below. One of the policemen was hit in the shoulder, and went down clutching the balustrades, and yelling out that he was killed until, he fell upon the soldier. The cheffionier swept the others before it like chaff before the wind, and they had some difficulty to escape broken limbs. The parson was upset in the scuffle, and sent rolling into the passage.

"Hit, by God!" said the dragoon.

"Help—help! Murder! Oh—oh!" roared the wounded officer. "Fetch all the doctors. Oh—oh!"

"Come on, again!" cried the other dragoon, "follow me, and no flinching. Keep the game going. Come on!—what do you give it up? Do you mean to

say that you are beat already? Well, have it your own way. It don't much matter to me. If it's over, it's over. Landlord! a glass of something hot and a pipe. How do you find yourself, Bill?"

"Going."

"You don't mean that?"



"I—I—do."

The dying soldier's face changed. The hue of death crept over it, and a glazy film came over his eyes. He grasped at imaginary atoms floating in the air, and then with a guttural groan he surrendered up his spirit to Him in whose hands it might be refashioned into an angel or a demon. There was a death-like

stillness for a few moments, and the parson having slowly struggled to his feet, looked wofully chagrined as he surveyed the wreck of his little party. The wounded police-officer was still vociferous in his complaints, which so disgusted the surviving dragoon, that he gave him a not very gentle pat upon the head with the barrel of his pistol, saying—

"Be quiet, will you? There's a better man than you killed. It's like your infernal impudence to make a fuss about yourself. I never saw anybody so ugly in all my life."

"Oh, murder!"

"Will you be quiet?"

"Oh, yes—yes. Dear me! Is a man to be killed, and nobody pity him because he ain't quite an Adonis?"

"My horse!" cried the parson. "Where's my horse, landlord? I'll—I'll go and get more assistance. I'll—I'll scour the country. This affair will make a noise. Murder has been done! I—I—don't know what to say exactly. Good God! here they come again."

The balustrade against which in part the longer cheffionier had wedged itself, suddenly gave way, and that article of furniture which had done Claude such good service, suddeniy came down the remaining stairs into the passage like an avalanche of mahogany. The alarm of the parson and of the remainder of the officers was so great that they, one and all, made a rush into the bar-parlour as a little snug room close to them was called, and the dragoon had only just time to drag the dead body of his fallen comrade by the heels out of the way of the descending mass of wood work. A moment's reflection, of course, was sufficient to convince them of what had really caused this second descent of the cheffionier, and the dragoon again tried to stimulate them to the fight by calling out to them in a loud voice—

"I will lead, if you will follow me. The staircase is clear now, and one rush will do the business. Are you going to have it talked of all over England, that you had not the courage to push on the moment you found your enemy was serious. Why, what the deuce did you expect in the affair, but a few pistol shots?"

"Recollect the reward," said the parson. "Recollect the reward, my men. You don't have such a chance every day. Follow that brave soldier, whose conduct I will take care to represent in the proper quarter, and I will stay here and take care that nobody attacks you unexpectedly in the rear."

The fox-hunter's courage had completely evaporated. Affairs had got much too serious for him.

"Stay where you like," said the soldier. "Cowards in action only confuse brave men. Are you coming, any of you?"

Stimulateed by a hope of sharing amply in the reward, and hoping that the principal part of the opposition was over, the remaining officers determined, especially as the dragoon would go first, to make yet another attempt upon the staircase, and yet another effort for the capture of the man upon whose head such a price was set. They accordingly advanced, and one said—

"Yes, we will support you. Push on."

"All's right—look to your pistols."

They did so, and then the dragoon, with a coolness that they all envied, and which was sufficiently admirable after what had already happened, advanced to the stairs and commenced the ascent as quickly as he could.

"Come on," he cried. "Come on! If I fall, don't stop, but scramble over me. That's the way to do it."

There was quite a remarkable stillness up the stairs. No sight or sound whatever of opposition met them, and the dragoon actually set his foot upon the topmost stair without seeing any one.

"Lights—lights!" he cried. "Here may be some ambuscade. Bring some lights from below."

The door of the sitting room that had been appointed for the use of Markham

Brereton and the two females was suddenly opened in the face of the dragoon, who stepped back a pace, saying—

"Surrender, or I fire!"

"What on earth is all this about?" said Brereton, looking like a man in the greatest surprise, while he held the candle above his head and surveyed the soldier. "Who are you?"

"Who am I? Why, No 28."

"And can you tell me what has been the cause of all this disturbance? Here has been a man coming in here and threatening to blow my brains out if I stirred, and so, having a respect for my brains, as they are the only ones at my disposal, I have not stirred! Have you caught him?"

"No—no!" cried the officers in chorus, for they had by this time arrived, and had crowded round the door of the room.

"Has he got away, then?"

"We don't know. Perhaps he's hiding somewhere, but as we suspect you have assisted him, we will take you into custody at once. We will have somebody if we die for it."

"Come—come!" cried the parson, who had been listening upon the stairs, and upon finding that there was no opposition, had ascended. "Come—come!—What is all this about? I have no doubt that you are a confederate of Claude Duval, the notorious highwayman, and I arrest you accordingly."

"You are able to do so, I dare say," said Brereton, "but I warn you that I am a gentleman, and not likely to put up with any injustice with impunity; I shall bring an action for false imprisonment against any one who shall presume to detain me a moment, I warn you."

"If you were not aiding and abetting the criminal, why did you not lend assistance to the authorities?"

"I was not called upon. Besides, no man is required to do so at the certain loss of his life. The two youths I have with me are in very delicate health indeed, and I particularly request that you will not make any noise."

"Search all the rooms narrowly," said the parson. "Search all the rooms. They cannot have escaped. Our men at the back would have given an alarm if they had attempted it that way, and we ourselves never lost sight of the staircase."

It was remarked by the officer that the magistrate kept as close to the dragoon as though he had never been so fond of anybody as of him in all his life. No doubt he thought that where there was the greatest strength there was the greatest safety, for he had still an uncomfortable suspicion that Claude Duval might bounce out upon him suddenly when least expected, and execute summary vengeance upon him. Indeed, it was quite a matter of mystery to know where Claude Duval could have got to. Certainly all opposition seemed to be at an end, and the spirits of the officers rose proportionately, while the dragoon began to get thoroughly disgusted at the turn affairs had taken, for if there was to be no more fighting, of course his avocation was gone, and the police-officers could manage very well without him.

"Manage it among yourselves," he said, "I'm off."

"Oh, no—no—no," cried the parson, catching him fast by two little ridiculous skirts that hung from his jacket behind. "No—no. Don't you think of going, my good fellow. I'll take good care that it is made well worth your while to stay. You remain where you are, and keep close to me."

"What for?"

"Oh, we don't know yet, exactly, what may happen. You help us to search for the fellow before you think of going, and then we will all go together, you know. Besides, the conduct of this person (alluding to Brereton) is anything but satisfying, so we must still be upon our guard. Do stay."

"Well, well."

"That's right. Now, my men, let us search the place well, and not leave a

nook or cranny unexplored, and, first of all, I will take the liberty of having a look in this inner chamber."

"I assure you," said Brereton, "upon my word and honour, that there is no one there but the two youths who are travelling in my company, but, of course, as you have authority to search, it will be quite in vain for me to protest against it, so walk in at once."

"May I ask your name, sir?" said the parson.

"Oh, yes. Smith."

"Humph! A very common name, that."

"Very."

"And the two young gentlemen? Pray, sir, what may their names be?"

"Smith."

"How remarkable. You will permit me to say, sir, that a man of the name of Smith is, in my opinion, always likely to be taken up on suspicion of anything, and I should plead his name as a justification. That I should, sir. Come on, Mr. Dragoon. We will soon unearth our fox, if he be hidden anywhere near at hand, and who knows but we may be yet in at the death, after such a hard race as we have had of it. Ha! ha! I think we have all showed pluck."

"Have we?" muttered the soldier. "Pluck with the legs, more than with the hands, I think, for I never saw such fellows as you all are for running out of danger in all my life, not I."

"A-hem!" said the parson, as he pretended not to hear this remark at all, and, followed by the officers, with the exception of two left in the corridor for fear Claude should rush out of some hiding place and escape down the stairs, and keeping just half a pace behind the dragoon, he entered the inner chamber.

There were two beds there, and upon each lay a seeming youth. It did not take above a minute or two to thoroughly satisfy the magistrate and officers that no one was there concealed, and then, with a bitter feeling of disappointment, the parson said to Cicely—

"What is your name?"

"Smith."

"And yours?" to May.

"Smith."

"Confound you all. I don't believe a word that any of you say, and I'll take you all into custody. If I don't, may I never follow a pack of hounds again to get the brush in a good field. May I fall in a ditch, if I don't."

"But, sir," whispered one of the officers, "if they are friends of Claude Duval's, and he has really made his escape in some unaccountable way, the best plan will be to follow them, when they leave here, secretly, and they may, without meaning to do so, lead us to him. Whereas, you see, sir, if you take them into custody, we at once lose all clue whatever; don't you see, sir?"

"Well, there is something in that. Let it be so. But first we will complete the search of the rooms, for I really cannot make up my mind to the idea that he has got away, and if we catch him hiding, we shall still go to Winchester in triumph with our prisoner."

Their search was carried on with spirit, but it was totally ineffective. No Claude Duval, nor any indications of his presence were discovered, and the chagrin of the party was manifest in the countenance of each individual member of it.

"So," said the dragoon, "my comrade has been killed for nothing."

"I cannot understand it," said the magistrate. "The six men in the yard declare that no one has attempted to escape by the window where the sheet hangs out, and we know that no one has gone down stairs."

"Hark, ye, sir," whispered the necromances of an officer who had recommended the system of espionage upon the family of Smiths. "Hark you, sir. There are front windows."

"Front windows?"

"Yes, to Mr. Smith's two rooms, and he may have helped our man out of the inn that way."

"It must be so."

"I have no doubt of it; so you see, sir, it's more necessary than ever that we should watch these people."

"It is—it is. You shall arrange it, and you may depend upon my duly representing your sagacity in the proper quarter. Let us go down stairs and consult about the precise steps to take in the matter. I see that it is of no use attempting to do anything here."

They now affected to feel quite satisfied with the search they had made, and in the course of five minutes more Markham Brereton was left to the undisturbed possession of his room. He waited until he was quite sure that no one of the officers lingered. At last he thought he was quite sure of that, and then he went into the adjoining room.

"All is well," he said. "All is well, Julian."

"Hush!"

"What is it?"

"There is a man in the corridor, just behind that door that opens upon it. We have distinctly heard him. It is a spy upon our discourse. Are we suspected, Markham? Speak low."

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE OLD CATHEDRAL.

Markham Brereton listened attentively.

"Are you certain of what you say?" he whispered.

"I am—I am. No doubt they suspect our connexion with Claude, and have set a man to watch us, in which case it will be next to impossible for us to keep an appointment with him. Alas! there are yet many difficulties in the way of a successful issue of these affairs. What will become of us all?"

"Do not despair. Let me think a moment."

Markham remained silent for a short time, and was evidently in deep thought. Then, beckoning Cicely and May to the window which was quite out of earshot of the door, he said—

"It is quite clear that unless we wish to be apprehended, we must keep up the idea that we are not connected with Claude in any way."

"How can we do that?"

"By conversing upon indifferent subjects. You must take your one from me, and when I make a remark which is intended for the listening officer, you must reply to it in proper style. As yet, recollect, it can be nothing but suspicion on the part of the police that we are in any way connected with Claude."

"Then, are we to give up all hope of gaining him?"

"By no means. But, for Heaven's sake, Cicely, be of good cheer, and join me cheerfully in doing the best I can to ward off evil consequences both from him and from us."

There was a something in these words that sounded almost like reproof, and they silenced Cicely at once, so far as any complaints went, so that Markham was at liberty to say whatever he thought would be necessary for the purpose of hoodwinking the officer. Raising his voice slightly, he commenced as though he were continuing a conversation.

"Yes, the most remarkable thing is, as you say, that we should be robbed once, and then come in all likelihood to the very inn where the thieves put up."

"It is so," said Cicely, taking her cue from Markham. "Is it worth while, think you, to make known our loss to the officers of justice who are here?"

"Hardly; and to tell you the truth, I am almost inclined to your first opinion, to the effect, that these men here are only pretended officers of justice."

"That was what I thought."

"It may be so. At all events, his lordship will be glad to see you both safe, and, after all, what is the loss of a few trinkets to you or to him?"

"Nothing—nothing!"

"When you are at your family seat, and once more surrounded by your illustrious relations, you will only laugh at these adventures upon the road."

"They will amuse the duke," said Cicely. "Don't you remember once the duchess came into the library with a newspaper in which there was something about this very Claude Duval? I have a lively recollection of the circumstance, but at this distance of time I have no idea of what it was all about."

"Some of his daring exploits!"

"Doubtless."

The officer outside the door had all this while his finger against his nose, and was looking as mysterious and as cunning as an owl in an ivy bush.

"Ha! ha!" he said, "so—so these are young noblemen, after all. Who knows but I may make as much by being civil to them as by the reverse, or by looking after Claude Duval. The duke? Humph! What duke, I wonder? Upon my life, it was a good thing I came here to listen, for if I have missed the scent I expected, I have lighted upon another which may do just as well."

"I am vexed at the idea of our cousin being made prime minister," said May, "as we shall not have him at the hall now."

"You cannot expect him," said Markham, "until parliament is prorogued; then, doubtless, you will see him. I hope when you do so, your ladyship will not forget the little favour I asked of you for my young friend, the count."

"Surely not, Sir James."

"Ha! ha!" said the officer, "who but me—I'll stick to this lot—won't I. Bother Claude Duval! I wonder if the party below is off; I want this affair all to myself, that I do."

Full of the idea, that if he were left alone he should be able to introduce himself to people of consequence, the officer darted down stairs, and met the magistrate in the hall.

"It's no go, sir," he said; "they have been talking quite confidentially, and I am satisfied that they really know nothing of Claude Duval, and have no sort of communication with him."

"Indeed?"

"Oh yes, sir, you may trust to me for that. It's of no use remaining here except upon one chance—that Claude Duval may be hiding in the vicinity of this place, and even in that event one man only left here, to dog his footsteps until assistance can be got to apprehend him, is fully sufficient."

"Oh, yes—yes."

"I will stay if you like, sir; and provided I get any information, I can send a man on horseback, you know, sir, posthaste to you to let you know, and you can adopt such measures as your well-known foresight will enable you to do."

"Well—well. A-hem!—of course, if you do get any news, it is very well known that there is no magistrate in the county can make better use of it than I."

"We all know that, sir."

The magistrate felt himself amazingly flattered, and, after pretending to think for a few moments, he said—

"Very well. Remember, then, that you stay here on my account just now, and by my orders, and I will be answerable, of course, for any reasonable expenses."

"And as these birds have flown, there can be no use in my staying here in an infernal uncomfortable inn, where nothing is as it ought to be, and damp beds, I dare say. Moreover, the death of this soldier is sure to make a noise, and I must go to put that matter in the proper light; so, landlord, my horse; I'll be off—and as for you, my man (to the soldier), you had better come with me, and I will place you all right with your officer, you may depend."

In the course of the next ten minutes the inn was quite clear of police, with the

exception of the officer who was resolved to pay great attention to the young scions of the personage whom he fully believed to be travelling *incog*, and for the present staying at the inn.

"Of course," he said to himself, "they didn't wish it to be found out who they were, and that fully accounts for many little suspicious circumstances in their conduct. Hang me, if I did not think there was a kind of a—a—something—a sort of a superior look about them. However, if I don't do the civil to them, and make something by it, it will be odd to me. Relations of the prime minister's, and sons of a duke. I rather think this a chance of a nice little bit of patronage."

The officer winked at vacancy, and tapped his nose a great many times, all of which was intended to imply how clever a fellow he thought himself, and what an opinion he had of his own capacity of seeing further into a millstone than his neighbours. Our friends above stairs waited rather anxiously for the result of the scheme they had put in practice for turning the tables upon the spy. When they saw the magistrate and the party of police depart, they really thought they were left alone at the inn, and Cicely and May were for ordering the horses and being off at once, but Markham Brereton overruled that, saying—

"Do not be hasty. This, after all, may be a mere blind. Let us have patience. That quality alone has gained the day many times in the face of great danger."

"The dawn is coming," said Cicely.

"Yes," replied May. "Another day has come upon us. This window, which looks to the east, is already beginning to feel the effects of the sun. Oh, Markham, if me and Claude do really succeed in escaping all these perils, what abundant food for conversation we shall have by, I hope, a happy fireside, in time to come, and in another land."

"We shall indeed," sobbed Cicely. "But I fear——"

"Banish fears," said Markham, "and welcome hope in its place. Fear is a craven, but bright-eyed hope ever whispers to us of promised pleasure, and if it creates not the happiness of the future, it at all events lends the radiance of its beauty to the present."

"It does—it does."

"Let me advise you now both to lie down again for another hour, and rest yourselves, for this night can scarcely be said to have been one of repose to you; and when the day has fairly set in, we will take a morning meal, and then start, according to how we shall find the situation of affairs."

"And must we," said Cicely, "think you, break the appointment with Claude?"

"I hope not. But it is far better to do that, than, by keeping it, to bring his foes upon him. If we break it, depend upon it no one will sooner than Claude divine the true reason of our doing so, and he will act accordingly."

"Yes—yes, you are right, Markham. Oh, forgive me, that, with my many fears, I am such a great charge and trouble to you."

"Forgive me, Cicely, if, in the impatience of the moment, and amid the many anxieties that oppress me, I have by chance spoken a harsh word to you, or a kind one in a harsh tone. I did not mean anything, dear Cicely."

"I know it, I know it, brother."

"There now," said May, "one would think you had both quarrelled, to hear you speaking in such a strain. Come, Cicely, we cannot do better than take Markham's advice, and secure some repose while we can get it. Heaven only knows what fatigues we may yet have to endure. Come, come, I am sure you have not slept one clear hour since Claude has been gone."

"Indeed I have not."

Cicely was led into the adjoining apartment by May, and Markham Brereton once again sat down to wait the coming of those events, each one of which was so important both in itself and in its results to those in whose happiness he felt so deeply interested. He had not sat long there, when a soft insinuating sort of

tap came at the door of the room. Markham listened intently, but made no answer. Tap! came some one's knuckles against the panels again after the lapse of a few moments, and then Markham Brereton thought his wisest plan would be to make no mystery, but, as a matter of course, if any one tapped at his door to say "come in." When he did so the door was opened in a gingerly sort of manner, and the officer's foxy-looking face appeared at it with a disagreeable leer, which he fully intended should be at once fascinating, pleasant, humble, and full of satisfaction and proffers of service. Markham at once guessed, by the look of this man's face, that he had swallowed the bait that had been laid out for him concerning the nobility of Cicely and May, and his own claim to social distinction likewise.

"What is it?" said Markham Brereton.

"Beg pardon, sir, for intrusion, I assure you; most sincerely beg pardon. Hope, sir, you have rested pretty well, and the young gentlemen too."

"Who are you?"

"Why, sir, begging your pardon, I am an officer of police, and you see, sir, as Claude Duval, the notorious highwayman, may be still somewhere in the neighbourhood, I thought, seeing that you were a real gentleman, I ought to stay, to see that nothing amiss happened to you and the two young gentlemen, you see, sir."

"You are very good."

"Oh dear, sir, don't mention that. I assure you that I shall feel only too well pleased to be of service to you. But Claude Duval is a very desperate fellow, and I assure you, sir, from my own personal experience, it is something very far from a joke to cope with him. However, this I will say, that if there is any man in England of whom he has a wholesome sort of dread, it is of me."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. I would not say so, I assure you, but upon the very best grounds."

By this time the officer had insinuated himself fairly into the room, and the foxy sort of smile with which he spoke continued upon his face, making him a special object of disgust to Markham Brereton, whose natural straightforward and manly disposition was always shocked at anything approaching to cringing or meanness.

"Why sir," added the officer, "you see Claude Duval was nearly taken by me once, and therefore, after such a hair-breadth escape, he naturally enough don't want to meet me again."

"That may very easily be believed, but as our stay here will certainly not extend beyond another hour, I don't see exactly how you can be of much service to us."

"That, sir," replied the officer, "briskly brings me to the point, and if you have no objection, I will do myself the honour of accompanying you on the road, and I pledge myself that you shall be in no sort of danger from an attack on the part of Claude Duval."

"But we may be going out of your way."

"Oh, any way will do for me, as long as I have the pleasure of feeling that I am obliging real gentlemen, and making myself useful in a proper quarter."

Markham Brereton would gladly have been without the company of the officers, but he was afraid, if he entirely declined it, he might be giving rise to fresh suspicion, and undoing all that he had done in the way of convincing that cunning individual of his own and his young companions' rank in life, so he merely said—

"I am not alone, and although in trifling matters connected with our journey I consider I may act just as I please, I wish, as regards your proposal to accompany us as a protection on the road, to speak to the two young gentlemen who are with me."

"Quite right, sir—quite right."

"This safety is to me an object of paramount importance; however, as regards myself, I am, of course, pleased at any proposal that in any way tends to assure me of it. Just wait here for a few moments."

"Certainly, sir—certainly.—A-hem! Won't I keep my ears open," muttered the officer to himself.

When Brereton got into the next room, purposely leaving the door just ajar, he placed himself in quite a painful posture of listening, and he had the pleasure of hearing Brereton say—



THE MEETING IN THE CATHREDRAL.

"This s a police-officer, my lords, who proposes to accompany you. What shall I say to him? Would it be at all agreeable to you?—he is in the next room."

Cicely and May at once understood that they were to reply for the officer's hearing, not from Markham Brereton's, and the former took upon her to add to the state of mystification in which that amazingly artful individual already was.

CHAPTER XCVII.

WINCHESTER IN THE OLDEN TIME.

"It's certainly as you, Sir James, and the Marquis think proper," she said.

"Oh, don't consult me," said May, "I'm agreeable to anything. Only, as there are three of us, we are surely safe enough from any attack from a mere highwayman?"

"Yes," said Cicely, "and you don't know, Sir James, how we can fight, if necessary; I can hit anything I please with my pistols, I assure you."

"Well, but you know," said Brereton, "if any accident were to happen to either of you, the Duke would be frantic; so, although I think with you, that we are strong enough to protect ourselves, I should like for us to be strong enough to present such an appearance as would prevent an attack, so I vote for letting the officer go with us."

"Do you mean it?" whispered Cicely.

Markham nodded.

"Very well then, Sir James," said Cicely, aloud, "very well. Of course we bow to your decision in this matter, and if you think proper to let the officer come with us, you can take his name, and the Duke or my uncle can, in any way they may think proper, reward him; they can give him money—I think I have some forty or fifty guineas in my purse, and the Marquis as much."

"Oh, all that will be right enough," said Markham; "then I will tell him to see that all is ready for our departure as soon as possible, for I suppose we have all had enough of the wretched accommodations of this place. I have, for one."

"And I," said Cicely. "We are both of us, I assure you, Sir James, quite ready for the saddle again, so get ready for us, and we will be off. These adventures will do for us to talk about another time, and we shall, no doubt, have many a good laugh at the recollection of them."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the officer to himself; "upon my word, I have dropped in with a good thing here, and no mistake, and I shall pocket, I dare say, a cool hundred in cash, besides being recommended to the prime minister and a duke. Well, luck's all entirely. Now, who would have supposed any such thing could have turned up from my coming to hunt Claude Duval? All I wish now, or care about, is, that they may not be going in the same direction as he is, for upon my word, I'd as soon meet the devil himself upon the road."

The officer heard Markham Brereton returning, so he pretended to be not at all listening, but merely looking at the fire and some memoranda which he hastily pulled out of his pocket. At the entrance of Brereton he affected to give a sort of start, as though he were disturbed in a reverie, and then bowing, he said—

"I beg your pardon, sir—I was thinking of some affairs in London."

"You must, at times, have much upon your mind."

"Oh yes, sir, a great deal; but I hope, sir, the young gentlemen are quite agreeable to my escorting you and them?"

"Why, very likely they thought themselves strong enough to resist any highwaymen, but I don't want them to run the chances of a conflict, even should we prove victorious; so I have overruled their objections, and I can only say that your reward for accompanying us shall be fully equal to your deserts."

"Oh, don't mention that, sir."

"Oh yes, but it is proper to mention it."

"I hope you, sir, and the young gentlemen, don't for a moment imagine that I offer to guard you for what I can get?"

"No, no. But yet you will find that we shall not be ungrateful. But there is time enough to talk about all that by-and-by. Will you be so good as to see that all is ready for our departure, for we wish to go on at once. Our horses are somewhere below."

"Certainly, sir," said the officer, with alacrity; "I hope, sir, that you and the young gentlemen will do me the honour of leaving all troublesome little matters connected with your journey to me; I will take care that everything shall be arranged to your satisfaction."

"Take this, then," said Brereton, handing him a five-pound note. "Take this, and pay what expenses we have incurred here."

This effectually completed the conquest of the officer's heart, and he bowed almost to the ground as he took the note, and then he bustled out of the room, quite delighted with the manner in which he managed affairs, so as to make himself a sort of gentleman in waiting to a marquis, a lord, and probably a baronet. It was quite wonderful to see the airs that the officer gave himself in the lower part of the inn. He considered that he was in such authority, that it was competent upon him to say or do just what he pleased; and if we remark, that exactly in proportion as he was cringing and humble above to Markham Brereton, he was insolent and swaggering below, we shall probably convey a tolerably good idea of his conduct. The horses were got out with all possible expedition. The bill was paid, and the change at once pocketed, with a determination that it should be forgotten, and then he proceeded up-stairs to tell his new patron that all was ready. On the road he assumed again the foxy smile, so that by the time he got to the door of Markham's room, he was again the very humble dependant. He tapped gently.

"Come in."

In came the foxy face and the foxy smile.

"Oh, it is you?"

"Yes, if you please, sir. The horses are all ready, and waiting, sir, at the door, and the breakfast is spread, if you please, in the parlour below."

The officer, in his over civility, had the unfortunate knack of putting in the "If you please!" to foregone conclusions, like the footman, who was asked by his mistress if the rain had ceased, and replied—"Yes, ma'am, if you please."

"Very well," said Markham Brereton, "we shall be down directly."

The officer bowed himself out again, and then Markham proceeded to the next room, and held a brief conversation with his two fair companions, at which it was finally agreed that they should take the Winchester road, and at the first convenient confluence of circumstances get rid of the officer, but if he perversely would stick to them, they meant to keep their engagement with Claude, and leave him to deal with the troublesome escort.

"Now, let me advise you both to take a good breakfast," said Markham, "for you don't know what troublesome adventures we may fall in with to-day."

"We will do our best," said May.

"Yes," added Cicely. "We will indeed, Markham, and we will not have so many sad complaints for you as usual."

"No more of that, Cicely, if you love me."

They descended the stairs together, and upon the entrance into the parlour of the inn, the officer made so low a bow, that the top of his head almost touched the sanded floor, and then he put himself into such a state of bustle and perspiration, by flying in and out with hot coffee and fresh buttered toast, &c., that it was quite a shocking thing to see him, and the people of the inn really thought that the man had actually taken leave of his senses for ever. Notwithstanding their promises to Markham, neither Cicely nor May could make much of a breakfast, which was by the officer attributed to the costly and delicate manner in which they had been brought up, for nothing now, but the stern and stubborn truth fully demonstrated to him, would have sufficed to knock out of his head the conviction that he was making himself serviceable to some scions of the highest nobility. It was really laughable to see him, and the inn parlour might at that time have been not inaptly likened to the stage of some theatre, upon the boards of which some entertaining farce was enacting, and no comic actor could have made more of his part than did this thoroughly deluded officer. It was a rich and racy treat to see him. When the breakfast was finished the party rose,

and in the course of another five minutes they were upon the road. It was then that the officer ventured to insinuate the question of which direction the noble party would like to take.

"We are going to Winchester," replied Markham, bluntly.

"Oh!"

The officer's countenance changed, for he knew that if upon any road there was a chance of them meeting with Claude Duval it was upon that, and he was quite willing to take all the profit of playing the part of escort to the two noble gentlemen without any of the danger. If they had gone any other way his heart would have been quite light and gay, but to go on the very road that Claude Duval was taking, was to really run the chance of having to do what he promised, namely, fight him. However, he found that he was "in for it," to use his own expression, and all he could do was to put a bold face upon the matter, and do the best he could. He hoped that even Claude Duval would not attack a party of four; so after a time he recovered his equanimity, and it was quite amusing to see how, with an air of determination, he would ride on before, and pretend to look about him, to see if any highwayman was in ambush, and then when the road was all clear, wave his hand for them to proceed. In this way then, just as though they were going through an enemy's country, they proceeded, and now we shall here, in order to go some distance onwards, take up company with Claude Duval and his friend Jack, who were jogging on together. They had, of course, by this time got a considerable distance on the road from the inn, but as yet they felt they were anything but clear from the dangers of the road. Even between them and Winchester, there were to be expected many dangers, for the officers, who all down the road from London, had been hitherto disappointed in getting a clutch of their prey, were, no doubt, concentrating their force in the neighbourhood of Winchester, and thence to Southampton. As they proceeded their anxieties naturally increased.

"Jack," said Claude, "we have troubles both ways now. We have our best and dearest anxieties behind us with Cicely and May, while before us we know there are those who are armed against our lives, and who, for the glitter of gold, would not scruple to murder us."

"Yes," replied Jack, "and that they dignify by the name of justice."

"They do, indeed. Well, I should be comparatively easy if I were quite sure Cicely and May had escaped the suspicions of having any connivance in our escape, but I'm afraid that the next news I hear of them will be, that they, with the gallant Markham Brereton, are in custody for doing so much to enable me to fly from crime to peace."

"Do dot fancy that, Claude."

"Alas! Jack, I'm sorry to say, there is too good a reason to fancy it; but I am not one to meet sorrow half way, at all events, so I will look forward, and hope for the best, if I do not in my heart think it."

As they thus jogged on in conversation, they arrived at a narrow lane, close to which was a finger-post directing them down it, and an announcement that that was "The nearest way to Winchester."

"The nearest way is our way," said Claude. "Come on, Jack."

Down the lane they went immediately, but they had not proceeded many paces on, when a loud voice cried—

"Stand!"

"What for?" said Claude, as he drew one of his pistols, and glanced in the direction of the sound.

Just over a garden paling he saw five men on horseback, and one immediately cried—

"That's him! Fire away, my lads! Fire! fire!"

Bang! went three pistols just as Jack and Claude stooped to let the bullets fly over them.

"All's right," said Claude. "Fire and turn about."

He fired, and down dropped one of the men; Jack did the same, and with a like result.

"Now for it. It's your turn," cried Claude to the third man, but he hastily rolled off his horse, and fled into a cottage that was close at hand. "Off and away!" cried Claude.

Jack fully understood him, and clapping spurs to their horses, off they went at great speed—a speed which they did not relax until they had obtained a good two miles between them and the garden in which the three men had indirectly lain in ambush, not for the purpose of making the smallest attempt at capture, but simply to shoot them down as though they had been wild animals, going about seeking whom they might devour. They saw a boy now before them driving a cow, and Claude pulled up.

"My lad," he said, "how far are we from Winchester?"

"Winton *beant this'n* way."

"Not this way?"

"Lor, no. *This'n* leads to Andover."

"Don't try to deceive me, you young rascal; I saw a finger-post at the corner of this lane, and it said on it—'The nearest way to Winchester,' and since then we have come on as straight as a line. I have a good mind to lay my horsewhip about you.

"*That'n*," said the boy, "wouldn't make *this'n* the way to Winton."

Claude was pleased at this piece of argumentation, and he laughed as he said—

"How do you make it out, then, we are wrong, my lad?"

"Why, cos three fellows only *stuck'n* it up this marning—I seed *un* a doing of it, and *arter* they *gitten* into old Jones's garden, I seed *un* a doing of it, and I *hurd un* say—'When they *sees this'n* it will lead 'em on.'"

"Jack, you hear that?"

"Yes, and understand it too, Claude. We have escaped a most perilous ambuscade. I can see by the position of the sun that we are not going to Winchester direct, or Winton as the people about here call it, but I have been expecting a turn in the lane that would have taken us right. They have paid dearly for the attempt though, Claude."

"They have. I don't think that either of the three will be inclined again to assist in the removal of a finger-post from its proper situation.—What are we to do, Jack?"

"Go on until we find a turn to the left. Andover is to our right now, of course, and after all, who knows but, by encountering this lesser danger, we may have escaped a much greater, which was on the high road waiting for us."

"It may be so. Here, my lad, here is a crown for you."

The boy eagerly clutched at the proffered coin and looked astonished at the amount of it. It was probably more than he had ever had in all his life, and he was so utterly confounded and dazzled at it that he was unable to speak, and so by riding on at once Claude avoided the thanks which most likely when he did recover himself he would have attempted to utter.

"More time lost, Jack," said Claude.

"Yes, Claude, but remember that from the first moment of our leaving London we have practised an amount of patience that few in our situation would have dreamt of. With the knowledge that a price was set upon your head, and that society at large, through the medium of its most degrading passion, was attempted to be aroused against you, you might have had a natural feeling of revenge; but such has not been the case. No one has fallen by our hands, but in sacred self-defence."

"You are right, Jack, and in another land, if we should have the good fortune to get to one, nothing will be more pleasant or consolatory to us than such a conviction. I would not have it otherwise for the value of ten thousand worlds. Cicely, Jack, has implanted in my nature some of her gentler and better feelings.

CHAPTER XCVI.

CHILD'S HILL FARM.

After this they rode on in silence for some time; it was a silence on the part of Claude, which Jack would not interrupt, for he saw that feeling was busy at his heart, and that he was plunged in one of those reveries common to him of late. While this state of abstraction on the part of Claude lasted, Jack took good care to look busily out for a turning that would again lead them into the direct road to Winchester, and at about a mile further on he found what he sought. It became necessary now to arouse Claude.

"This way—to the left," cried Jack.

Claude started as though suddenly awakened from sleep.

"Ah Jack," he said, "so I was, as usual, dreaming. My thoughts were far enough away at that moment."

"So I guessed, but it was absolutely necessary for me to recall you from the land of dreams. This turning will, I make no doubt, take us back again into the direct road; and now, Claude, I can tell you, from the character of the country, that we cannot be very far from the old city of Winchester, and it is time we should think upon what we are to do untill nightfall."

"True, Jack. It would be rather unwise for us to ride into the city as though we owned it. We might be recognised, and the good citizens in that event might make too much fuss about us, which is always disagreeable; so, like other great personages, we will take refuge somewhere until the shades of evening allow us to proceed. Where shall we go to, Jack?—you know the neighbourhood well."

"I do. There is a hill overlooking Winchester, called Child's Hill, and upon that hill is a farm-house which some months ago was empty. A murder had taken place in one of the rooms, and superstition had peopled the place with gloomy fancies—if we can get there Claude, we might remain concealed until night."

"But shall we not starve, Jack?"

"Certainly not, unless our appetites are over nice, for I have brought with me some bread from the inn, and a bottle of wine."

"Corn in Egypt, Jack! You are indeed a most provident provider. What should I have done without your foresight. Indeed, Jack, one way and another, you have preserved me during this period of extraordinary adventure. How far are we from this house you mention?"

"About four miles, Claude. But who shall say what a world of danger lies between us and Child's Hill; I would that we were there. Claude!—stop! stop!"

"What is it, Jack?"

"Look before you. Ah, they stop to consult."

Claude did look before, and to his consternation he saw six horsemen about a quarter of a mile on the road before him. We say consternation, for Claude, notwithstanding his courage and resolution, did feel an amount of consternation upon this occasion, and which the reader will easily be able to appreciate if he will place himself, in imagination, in Claude's position.

"Officers—Jack," he said.

"There cannot be a doubt of it. Fly, Claude."

"No—no—yet a moment—we have time. The thought of flight is distasteful to me. Stop, Jack, are you sure that they are foes? and if they are, it is only six to two."

"Are you mad, Claude? Is the thought of death or capture, in a wounded and mangled condition, worse to you than the thought of flight?—if so, fly! We have the start of a quarter of a mile. I tell you, Claude, that such a start is everything. On!—on!—on!"

Claude yielded to the impulse that Jack gave his mind.

"The devil take the hindmost!" he cried, with his habitual gravity, turning

his horse's head northward again, and off he went. Jack was close upon his heels, and so quick was the determination to fly, and the flight itself, that they gained nearly half as much distance again upon the six men; who, however, when they did move from the state of surprise into which they were thrown, gave chase with all their might and main. Both Claude and Jack took one glance behind them, and saw the pursuers coming on, and then turning their whole attention to the management of their horses, they fled like the wind along the lane which they had had the misfortune to traverse by mistake, in consequence of the direction-post being set upon the corner of it, by the three men who had made the attack upon them. A mile was passed over in an inconceivably short space of time, and then the first object that presented itself to Claude, who was a little in advance, was the boy to whom he had given the five shillings, and who had informed him of the fact of the finger-post being placed maliciously where it was. Claude pulled up so suddenly, that he brought his horse nearly upon his haunches, as he cried to the boy—

"Do you know me?"

"Oh, yes. You are Claude Duval, the famous highwayman,—don't I wish I was. A fellow as said you had nigh shot him, told me."

"There are six men behind me. Can you hide me and my friend? If you cannot, they will take my life, you may depend."

"What? They are coming as I hear, a pelting along as if old Nick was behind 'em."

"Yes—yes—they are my enemies."

"Come on—come on, don't say *nothin* now. Come on through this'n gap in fence, loike—don't e say *nothin*. *This'n* way."

"Oh, Claude, Claude," whispered Jack energetically, "Do you trust to this mere boy?"

"Yes. Remember my reason, Jack. There's much gained by trusting. Come on—come on, don't hesitate. We are now like virtuous women, Jack. If we hesitate we are lost. Come on."

They both hastily dismounted, and followed the boy through a gap in the hedge. It led to a kind of broken up meadow, in which there was a quantity of litter.

"Now for it," said the boy as he approached Claude's horse, "lift up his hind leg, master."

"His hind leg?"

"Yes. There he goes. That is done very well."

Claude had lifted up the hind leg of his horse, and the boy immediately lifted the fore foot on the same side, when over went the horse among the litter without doing himself the least injury.

"*Hold* him down," cried the boy, "by his head; he can't get up without his head."

Claude understood him in a moment, and throwing himself on the ground he held his horse's head down. The same operation was performed with Jack's horse, and he likewise laid hold of his horse's head, while the boy commenced covering them both with litter, chiefly composed of straw, for a large stack was in the ground. Then he passed out through the gap in the hedge into the lane again, and taking a knife from his pocket, he began peeling the bark from a thick piece of alder. In another moment the six horsemen had turned the winding portion of the lane, and they came thundering on. They had lost sight of Claude and Jack, and seeing the boy they drew up, and one cried in an imperious v ice—

"Have you seen two horsemen pass?"

"Two horsemen pass!"

"Ye fool."

"What? A tall fellow and a little one, and the tall fellow with a grey coat on, and a horse with a switch tail and a spot on his nose?"

"Yes—yes."

"Then I ain't."

"Tooral, looral, looral, loo, while the pack I carried,
Brown Bet she says to me will you—
Teoral, looral, looral, loo, be to me mar-ri-ed."

"Now, you rascal," cried the officer, "if you don't tell me at once if you have or have not seen any one pass here, I'll break every bone in your skin."

"I seed two, a big un and a little un."

"Really, Mr. Jenkinson" said another of the party, "while you are talking to this boy, who seems next, door to an idiot, our prey may escape us; I beg you will come on. There is no turning from the lane now until you get fairly into the high road."

Without another word, off they all set at a gallop; and when the sound of the horses' feet had died away somewhat, Claude called to the boy, saying—

"Is all safe now, my friend. Can we come out?"

"Bide a bit—bide a bit, and they'll be back again this'n way."

The boy continued cutting the alder and singing to himself—

"As Sally was trudging along the highway,
A great squire he met she, and to she did say,
Will you my lady love, sweet Sal-ly, be?
Don't you wish you may catch me? says she,
Says she,
Don't you wish you may catch me?—says she.

Oh, Sal—ly, I'll buy you a new *goulden* coach,
Ear bobs and bracelets, *gould* rings, and a broach,
If you will con—sent my light o' love to be.
Don't you wish you may catch me? says she,
Says she,
Don't you wish you may catch me? says she.

"And wery right of she it war too—a-hem! a-hem! They're a coming."

Tooral, looral, looral, loo!"

Up came the six horsemen again, and he who was named Jenkinson, at once dismounted from his steed, and approaching the boy with a horrible forced smile upon his face, that would not have deceived a cow—

"Well, my lad, so you are here, enjoying yourself I see the best way you can."

"Likely enough," said the boy.

"Perhaps you don't earn much. Now, what would you say to a guinea?"

"*Nothin*—I wouldn't be *sich* a gaby as to say *anythin* to a guinea, as couldn't say *nothin* to I *agin*."

"Upon my word, you are a sharp lad; I suppose, for a couple of guineas you will tell us which way the two horsemen went who came up here just before we arrived. They did not go on. We know that, mind; so now, my lad, here's two golden guineas if you tell us where they really went."

"What? Ain't all guineas goulden?"

"Yes, of course. Ha! ha!—upon my word, you ought to go to London. I say, Smith, could not you get this lad a situation of a £100 a year in London?"

"Oh, yes," said another of the officers. "Quite easy, I'll get it for him. Only let him tell us what he can, and he shall have it. Would you like a situation of a £100 a year, my boy?"

"How much is it a week?"

"About £2."

"And how many shillings?"

"Forty exactly."

"Ah, then, I couldn't do it. I gets a shilling a week here for minding the cows, and it's as much as I can do from *marning* to night, so you see if I was to *yarn* forty times as much I should break down, dang it if I shouldn't."

"But don't you know, my lad, in London people are paid more in proportion as they do little."

"Dang it, what a place that'n must be. Why, I'd swing on a gate all day and eat apples, dang it if I wouldn't."

"Well, well, you shall have what you like, and do what you like. Only tell us which way the men have gone."

"Lor, what a pity."



CICELY SHOT BY THE MILITARY IN THE CATHEDRAL.

"What's a pity?"

"Why, ain't it a pity as I don't know, cos if I did, do you think I'd be sich a gaby as not to tell, and I should think not."

"This fellow," said the officer who had just questioned the boy, to the others, "is either as cunning as we are, or he is the greatest fool I ever came near. Which do you think?"

The officer looked puzzled, while the boy continued cutting the bark off the piece of alder tree. After a brief, but rather crest-fallen consultation together, they agreed to go back again towards Winchester as quickly as they could, and there make a report of the fact, that the parties they wished to capture were in the immediate neighbourhood, and that by keeping a good look-out they might be taken. With this resolve, after casting sundry sour and menacing looks upon the boy, off they went at a hard trot. This time they were gone in earnest, and the boy knew it. He only waited until the sound of the horses' feet became rather faint, and then he climbed up into the alder tree from which he had cut the piece that had made him seem to have an occupation.

"One—two—three—four—five—six!" he counted, as he saw the horsemen ride away. "They are all gone. I shouldn't have wondered now a bit if them chaps had left one of their lot behind to watch what I was about. Lor, they ain't half awake—*that'n* as spoke to me war a *reglar gaby* he *war*."

The boy descended from the tree, and then he called out—

"All's right, they *is* gone at last—all's right.

Claude at once sprung to his feet, and so did Jack. The two horses, finding themselves no longer held down, rose likewise and gave themselves a good shake.

"Are they out of sight?" said Jack.

"Yes," said the boy, "and out of hearing too. Lor bless you, they *is* a poor lot. Now, mind, they *is* gone on the road to Winchester—I heard one say so."

"My boy," said Claude, "we are indebted to you for our lives. We, no doubt, should have killed some of them; but six to two are long odds when fire-arms are in the case, and very likely this lane would have been the stage upon which the last scene of my career would have been enacted. What can I do to recompense you?

"*Nothin.*"

"Nay, but I have an ardent desire to do something."

"You can't do nothin. I ain't got no friends and no relations, and I gets wollopped for a shilling a week, so you can't do nothin, you see."

Claude took out a pocket-book and wrote down the name and address of the boy, after which he said—

"Now, if in a month's time I was to send for you to come to me over the sea, and send you money enough to come with, would you do so?"

"Yes."

"Then good bye, you will hear from me again."

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE HAUNTED FARM-HOUSE.

Claude and Jack immediately mounted, and, without waiting for another word from the boy, they both rode off down the lane, to find again the turning that led to Winchester. After they had proceeded a short distance, Jack spoke—

"Now, Claude," he said, "our object should be as soon as possible to get shelter until nightfall, for here upon these roads, in broad daylight, we run the greatest possible risk of capture."

"What can we do, Jack?"

"We must get into some house."

"Yes; but some house is a very indefinite sort of expression indeed. What house will open to receive us? Can we not reach the old farm-house you spoke of?"

"Upon Child's Hill?"

"Yes."

"I think not, Claude, I think not. It is very close to the city: but if we attempt it, we must make a considerable detour, and then there is just a chance, and that is all. To the left we must seek out some road that will take us past the city towards two places called Arlesford and Tichborne. We might then possibly come in by a road that would lead us to the top of Child's Hill, and possibly, by dismounting and leading our horses, the trees might hide us from observation."

"Can we do better, Jack?—that is the question."

"I fear that the only other alternative will be to hide in the fields, or get into some copse or thick preserve until nightfall. Which do you prefer, Claude?"

"Decidedly the attempt to reach the farm-house, Jack. There is great risk in hiding in preserves—they are rather too zealously looked after in this country to afford secure places of shelter, except upon some momentary emergency. I will not go against your judgment, but my own feeling prompts me to seek rather, by a circuitous route, the shelter of the abandoned farm-house you mention."

"Be it so then, Claude. Come on. I will find out the way to it as well as I possibly can. Don't talk of taking my judgment, when you know that I prefer yours, so come on."

Jack was especially anxious now first of all to get into the high road, and then to get out of it again on the left, so that he might know then that at every step they were leaving the principal danger behind them, instead of, perhaps, facing it; for although Claude had made up his mind not to deviate from his direct route, except upon the most urgent necessity so to do, he had found so many perils besetting him, that it would have been the height of absurdity to keep to such a resolve. Of late, therefore, he had said nothing at all about it. In the course of ten minutes they were again upon the turning that led them into the high road, and then, full of nervous apprehensions for Claude, much more than for himself, Jack began to creep on a little in advance, to look for some turning that would take them from it again. To any one at all acquainted with the locality of Winchester and its surrounding roads, Jack's policy will be apparent. He wished to leave the city upon his right hand, and so to get upon the high ground to the south-east of it, without entering it. This could only be done by finding some cross roads, but, of course, there were many such, and in a country so intersected by routes as England is, there can be no difficulty, provided any one knows the direction in which his destination lies, in readily reaching it. Presently a beautiful shady lane opened to the left, and Jack paused at it, saying—

"This will do, Claude. The sun will guide us now, and I think that a couple of miles, if we can successfully make them in this direction, will take us quite past the city and its suburbs."

"And to the hill you mention?"

"Yes, Claude. Come on at once. I shall be in a world of fidgets until we are housed now. Besides, the horses will soon require rest."

"They will, Jack. A couple of hours' repose now would do them no hurt. It is especially harassing to them, the variety of paces to which by circumstances we are compelled to put them, and if we have the good fortune to meet with our friends according to appointment at the cathedral, I should like that we all made but one risk of it to Southampton, and in that case we may find our perils at an end."

"I sincerely hope so, Claude."

As they went down this lane, they could not help being much struck by its many natural beauties, and it was quite evident from the character of its roadway, that it was not much frequented. The most magnificent tress arose majestically on each side, and here and there were some rare specimens of exoties, which had been carelessly probably planted in the hedge row, and done better there, than

with all the fuss and attention of a professed gardener. As yet they could see no termination to the lane and each step they took down it seemed to improve Jack's spirits.

"I begin to have good hope, Claude," he said, "that all will be well now. This lane, as you will see by the position of the sun, goes directly in the direction we wish, and if it but continue another mile, we shall be able to think of bearing to the right again, and looking for the high ground."

"I have hopes too now, Jack," said Claude, "and after galloping so far, and through so many serious perils, it would be a hard thing for us to break down and fall into the hands of our foes. I wish to Heaven, Cicely and May had not started from their security in London. Their appearance upon the road has seriously complicated my anxieties."

To this Jack only made some common-place kind of answer, and then they increased their speed a little, and the other mile of which Jack had spoken as a distance which when once traversed in safety, would enable them to think of turning again, was gone over without encountering a single soul, a fact which was fully attributable to the unfrequented character of the lane, and partly to its being the time of day when the country people were engaged at their various employments. The lane soon began to expand a little, and finally they emerged from it upon a broad road. Jack at once recognised it, and told Claude that, by continuing upon it to the right, they should soon wind round the farm, and get upon the high road. No one appeared in the way, and on they went until the road began perceptibly to ascend; and Jack, who was some paces in advance, suddenly paused, and said—

"Behold Winchester!"

He pointed between two trees as he spoke, and upon Claude reaching the spot he saw that the whole city and the surrounding country to a considerable extent was spread out before him like a panorama. The scene, as viewed from that height, was a very fine one, for

"'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view!"

Jack pointed out to Claude the old grey cathedral, shapeless and massive, looking like some monster hulk stranded, by some freak of fortune, in a churchyard. The numerous chimneys of the convent, and the long expanse of the old palatial residence, were objects worthy of attention, but Claude was as well pleased with the little streamlet, that gave a motive power to several water wheels, and wound through a portion of the city, as anything else in the place.

"And this," he said, "is the far famed Winchester!"

"It is," said Jack; "the much vaunted, puffed old city, that disappoints every visitor. The celebrated old cross is upon the door-step almost of a huckster's shop, and the cathedral, although truly magnificent within, is in one of the worst situations of the city—namely, a damp churchyard, and without, looks more like Noah's Ark than anything else that can suggest itself to the imagination."

"And where are we now, Jack?"

"We are upon Child's Hill, from which by far the best view of the city can be obtained, and from which it looks the best. People should stand here for half an hour, and then go away with the idea of Winchester which here they have received, without descending to particulars. Or if they want to see more, they should make one nigh visit to the cathedral."

"Which I will do, but not to see it, Jack. It will be to look into the eyes of those who are dearer to me than all the cathedrals or all the cities in the world. But where is the farm that is to be our place of refuge? Is it not time that we sought it?"

"Yes. It is close at hand. I only wish that it may be found still vacant. Let us now dismount, Claude, and the trees and bushes will then suffice to hide the horses; or if they are seen they will not be thought anything of, not being mounted, for at a distance no one will suppose them to be anything else but some that are being used for agricultural purposes."

They both dismounted and led their horses for some distance, when, among the

trees, Jack pointed out to Claude the old thatched roof and twisted chimneys of the farm-house which they were seeking, and a few minutes more brought them to a stone wall, over the top of which unpruned shoots of the peach, the apricot, and the vine were straggling. There was a door in this wall, which Jack tried. It was fast, but finding a stone of sufficient size to accomplish his purpose, he forced it open, and they both entered a neglected garden with their horses. What a wilderness this garden now presented to the eye, in comparison doubtless with what it had once been. Everything had gone to rot and waste, and rampant weeds had, like tall bullies, waved up their heads in the place of fine flowers, which shrank and withered in such evil company. Wall-trees had fallen and trailed their lengths upon the ground, and the hedge-sparrows and the chaffinch had boldly built their nests in choice flowering shrubs.

"This is desolation!" said Claude.

"It is, indeed; but yet, to our eyes, it should be grateful, inasmuch as it affords us evidence of the continued non-occupation of the place."

"It does; but do you not, Jack, find something that appeals to all your most melancholy feelings in a neglected garden? I always do."

"To some extent, Claude, but here we may safely turn our horses loose. I have secured the door again pretty well, and they can come to no harm while we take refuge in the house itself. We can easily station ourselves at some window which commands a view of the surrounding roads, so that we shall see if any one approaches us."

They took good care to secure the garden door effectually, and then taking the bits from the horses' mouths and tying up the stirrups, they left them to amuse themselves in the garden at pleasure, and made their own way into the farm-house, by opening one of the windows that was within a few feet only of the ground. There was a damp and musty smell of decay in that deserted house, that struck with a chilling influence upon their spirits. But when they had opened some of the shutters a much more cheerful effect was produced, and the place wore quite a different aspect from what it had only a few short minutes previously. They found a top room which had a commanding aspect from its window, and there stationing themselves, sufficiently removed from the actual glass as not to be seen, they gazed upon Winchester, and the many roads coming into it in all directions. They had not been long thus situated, when they heard a drum beaten rapidly, and with the regular movement of a military signal. Claude started; but Jack said immediately—

"Oh, that is nothing, Claude. The barracks are not so far off, but that we may hear the military signals. Ah! There is a trumpet too. I was aware that a regiment of cavalry was here."

A trumpet was blown sonorously, and the drum ceased.

"Jack, I cannot help my thoughts, and they seem to tell me that these sounds have some reference to us. You may depend, now, that the greatest possible exertion will be made to apprehend us, and that, after the desperate encounters that have taken place, and the deaths that have occurred, the military force will be alone considered capable of coping with us. I suspect that news of the death of the trooper has reached the barracks."

"It may be so, Claude, and yet we must not alarm ourselves. Our place of retreat is not known, and we can, from our vantage ground here, listen to and look upon any preparations that may be made against us."

"I hope we can."

"I'm sure of it, Claude—Come, now, allow me to show you what a capital caterer I am, and let us taste the wine which I succeeded in procuring from the public-house."

Jack produced his provisions, but it was quite clear, notwithstanding he strove to shake off the feeling, that his mind was ill at ease. Every now and then the tap, tap of the drum, or the brazen sound of the trumpet, would make him start. Suddenly, then, he dropped the bread he was eating, and changed colour.

"What is it?" cried Claude.

"Hush! Yet no. No one can hear us. Look from the window to the right there. What do you see?"

"A troop of dragoons."

"And—and——"

"Coming this way. Ah! they halt. They place a couple of sentinels at the corner of yon road. On they go. Now they leave two more men. I see what the game is, Jack. They are determined to trace me by some means, and so they are lining every road with troopers. We shall have a more difficult task to perform to leave this place, Jack, than we had to get to it, but we are not beaten yet."

Claude's spirits generally rose with the urgency of his danger, and now that he fully understood the means that were being adopted for his capture, he was better satisfied than before. Jack, as the reader has, no doubt, well perceived by this time, was of rather a different disposition, and for a few moments now his heart sunk within him at the urgency of the circumstances that surrounded him and Claude. He could not speak.

"Courage," said Claude. "Courage, Jack."

Jack sighed.

"What! are your going now to show the white feather yourself, because you chance to see a few colours waving in the wind? Nonsense, Jack, nonsense. We shall yet only achieve the greater triumph by triumphing over the greater obstacles. Come—come! you must not desert me now, Jack, because things look bad."

"Desert you, Claude? I desert you?"

"Certainly not. I only said that to rouse up your old spirit a little. Now you look something like yourself. Why, man, they can but kill us; and death, you know, is a sort of genteel independence with all your wants gratified. Place a fellow in his six feet of earth, and he is the only freeholder whose title no one will carp at."

"I am all right again, Claude."

"I rejoice to hear it."

"What do you propose doing, then, as things have taken such a turn?"

"Waiting until night. I have the highest opinion of the courage of these soldiers, but I have far from the highest opinion of their cunning, and I think we shall find a means, not of fighting and defeating them, but of hoodwinking them."

"Yes—yes!"

"Don't you remember the old saying, Jack, 'that if you can't play the lion, you must play the fox.' That, then, is precisely our situation, and while they play the lion, we will take upon ourselves to come out in the character of sly Reynard, and for me, I am resolved to spare no pains in the enacting of it."

CHAPTER C.

THE COMING NIGHT.

By attentively watching the progress of the soldiers, they could see that at every turning and available spot for accurate observation, sentinels were duly placed, so that admitting Claude and Jack not to be in the city, they must, if unknowingly they had approached it, have fallen into the hands of some of the troopers. They likewise saw two persons on horseback in plain clothes visit the sentinels, and say something to each, and they made no doubt that these were magistrates, who were giving the soldiers as good a description as they could of the parties they were to use their best endeavours to apprehend. When all this

was done, and the troopers were so placed that their officers considered, and justly too, that not a stray cat could pass into Winchester without their acquiescence, Jack looked at Claude as though he would have said—

"What now can we hope to do?"

Claude smiled.

"Well," said Jack, "I am right glad indeed that you take things so easy."

"The fox!—The fox! Jack."

"You still hope to be able to play that character then?"

"Hope? I intend to play it. I have made up my mind to do so. I tell you what it is, Jack, if I did not know that Cicely and May would keep their appointment at the entrance of the cathedral this evening, we would, as soon as the sun had fairly set, start for Southampton by this route and so get past the city; but what I propose to do, is, to make such changes in our apparel and costume as we have the means of doing while the daylight lasts, and then, leaving our horses here, meet our dear friends at the cathedral gate."

"And then?"

"Why then, Jack, we can, if favoured by circumstances, all get here together, and plan our future progress; but at all events, you and I, no doubt, will be able to return and pick up our steeds again. One thing is quite evident, and that is, that our retreat here is not even suspected."

"That is tolerably clear, Claude."

"Well, then, can you see any rational objection to my plan, Jack? If you can, let me know it at once, and I have no sort of objection to changing it."

"No, Claude, it must just be as you say. Let it just be so, and we will do our very best, as you propose, to play the fox, since such is all that is left to us. Thank Heaven the day is so far advanced that we shall not have much delay now to engender in our minds that worst of all feelings, suspense."

"True. The sun is already hurrying down the western sky."

While Jack and Claude are thus waiting anxiously for sunset, we can afford time to take a glance at the progress of Markham Brereton and his two fair companions, and the officer who so officiously had thrust his company upon them. As they proceeded without meeting with anything in the shape of an obstruction on the road, the courage of the officer, which had been a little damped by finding the direction in which they were going, revived, and he began to talk rather large of what he would do if any knight of the road should have the impudence to show himself in a menacing attitude.

"I think," remarked Brereton, "that you said you had already had something like an encounter with Claude Duval?"

"Oh yes, sir. Certainly I had the honour of mentioning as much."

"How was it? If it be not giving you too much trouble, I should like much to hear, and I am sure my young friends here will feel likewise interested in the recital."

"Well, gentlemen," said the officer, with quite a smile upon his face, "I shall have great pleasure in telling you all about it, and why it is Claude Duval is so afraid of me."

"Afraid of you?" said Cicely.

"Markham Brereton gave her a look to admonish her not to be imprudent, and she at once checked her ardour in defence of Claude, and added—

"Of course, any one in his profession may well be afraid of an officer of the police, whose official province he knows it is to apprehend him."

"Yes, sir; but what I mean is, that Claude Duval, the notorious highwayman, has special cause to dread me, as you shall hear—a-hem! Late one night a gentleman was robbed upon Ealing Common of a considerable sum, and he came and laid his complaint before the police; of course, all we could do was to say that we could not help it. But next night another person was robbed, and the next night another."

"And by Duval?"

"Yes, so they all said. Well, when I heard of three robberies then in succes-

sion, I began to think it was too bad, and ought to be put a stop to. I spoke to the magistrates upon the subject, and they shook their heads very gravely and said—'Certainly it ought to be put a stop to, but if we send a force upon the common, away goes Claude Duval; for some of the country people are sure to give him notice of it, and anything short of a good force is no use.' Upon this I at once said—'Gentlemen, I'll go alone, and I won't say that I shall bring in Claude Duval, but I do say that I will try it.'"

"That was courageous."

"Well, gentlemen, it was no more than I felt I ought to do under the circumstances; so at night-fall, in the midst of a drizzling shower of rain, off I set to Ealing Common, dressed very genteelly in black, more like some rich banker or City merchant going home to his country house, after being late at business in the City, than anything else."

"That was to make yourself attractive, I suppose, to the attack of the highwayman," said Brereton.

"Exactly so, sir. What I wanted was for him to attack me, as you say, for what else would take me to Ealing Common?"

"Precisely, Pray go on."

"Well, gentlemen, when I got to the middle of the common I began to wonder where the highwayman was; and after parading to and fro for some time on my horse, I went towards a clump of trees in the distance, and there I waited. Not a very agreeable state of things, you may guess."

"Certainly not."

"Well, gentlemen, in about half an hour I heard the tramp of a horse's feet, and out I sallied, picking my way over the common as though I were only intent upon reaching home. In the course of a few minutes, trot came somebody after me, and, of course, I sincerely hoped it was Claude Duval, for you see, gentlemen, I by no means wanted to have my trouble for nothing; I went to catch a thief, and I wanted to bring one home with me."

"You are a truly valorous man."

"Oh, you may say that, gentlemen. Well, I did not slacken my pace at all, for I thought that if he really meant to come after me, he could easily overtake me, and sure enough he did. At a long swingeing gallop, he came alongside me, and said—"

"May I have the pleasure of knowing who you are?"

"No," said I.

"Indeed!" said he—"you are upon the road. Have you never travelled this way before?"

"Yes," said I.

"Then, perhaps, you have heard of one Claude Duval?"

"Well, gentlemen, at this question, I stopped."

"I have," said I, "heard of Claude Duval, and I want to see him."

"That," said he, "is easily accomplished; you may look at me—'your money or your life!'"

"That was coming to the point," said Brereton.

"It was," said the officer, "but as it happened, it was just what I wished: I turned upon him in a moment, and in a voice that rather made him start a little, said—'There is a third alternative, and that is to take you into custody, and lodge you in jail.' With that, I made a grasp at him, and a porton of his collar came away in my hand. He fired a pistol at me, and grazed my cheek, and then he tried to escape, but I pelted after him, and caught him by the back of the neck."

"I'll give you £1000," he cried, "to let me go."

"No," said I, "not for the jewels in the Tower."

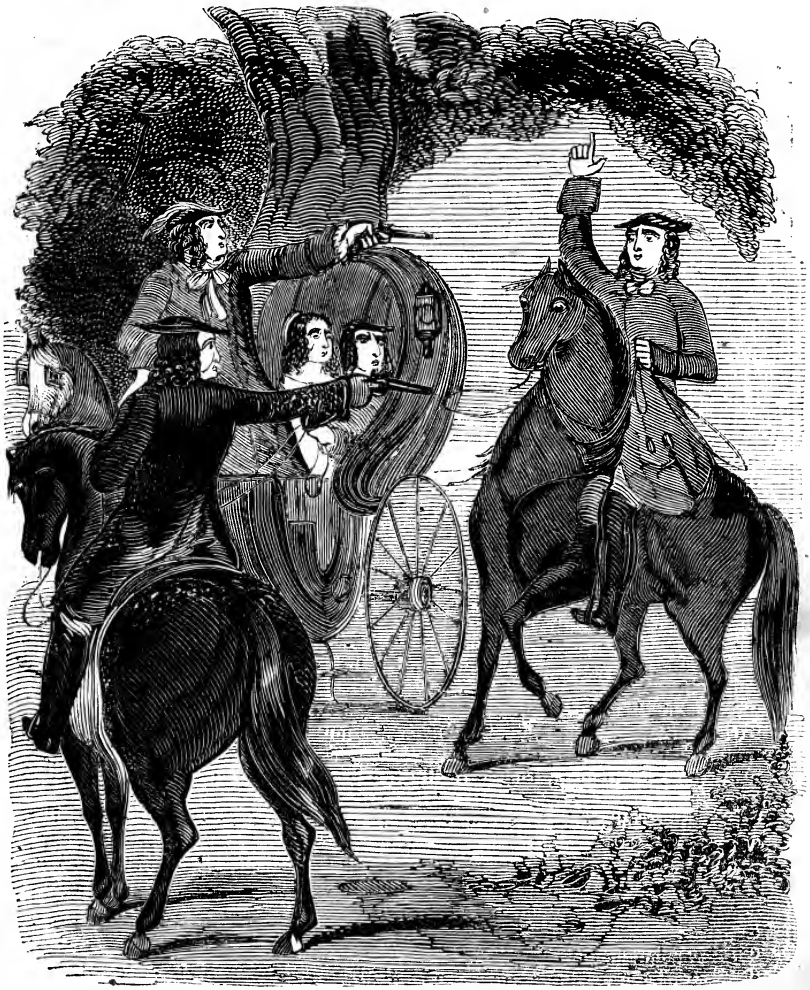
"And so you caught him?"

"Wait a bit, sir; I thought I had him, but it turned out that I only had hold of his cravat, and he cleanly untying it in front, off it came suddenly. The shock threw me from my horse, when, as you may readily suppose, before I could mount, particularly as the horse got restive, as horses will do when they have seen a struggle

going on, he had got a start of me that it was out of the question for me to think of following him."

"And so ended your adventure."

"Yes, gentlemen. But Claude Duval, they say, has often told his companions, with an oath, that there was only one man in England that he would rather not meet, and that was Jenkins. I am Jenkins, gentlemen."



CLAUDE AND JACK HAVE ANOTHER HAIR-BREADTH ESCAPE.

"Oh, that is your name."

"Yes, gentlemen, an old English name is Jenkins—a very old English name indeed, I can assure you."

"Well," said Brereton, "I once met Claude Duval, but I had not such an adventure with him as you have had. I candidly confess that he robbed me, after overcoming all the resistance I was fool enough to offer to him, for I had not

really sufficient to lose to make it worth while risking my life for the protection of it."

"Ah, but, sir, the principle of the thing—I think of that; that's what I go upon. If we only had a small matter of eighteenpence, you know, in one's pocket, one would not like exactly to have it taken from one by main force—that's my view of the question, sir."

"Well, no doubt you are right, but after all I do not regret my adventure with Claude Duval, for it enabled me to take such a good look at him that I shall never forget him while I live, I should know him again anywhere."

"And so should I, sir.—So should I."

Brereton gave at this moment a sudden start, and exclaimed—

"Good God! There he is!"

"Murder!—murder! fire!" cried Jenkins. "Help!—help. Let me go. Murder!—murder. Oh, gentlemen, don't say I spoke of him. Oh good gracious, let me go!"

As he uttered these words, off he set in the direction from whence they had come at a tearing pace, and he had gone half a mile before he found out that he was not pursued, and by the laughter that came upon his ears he began to suspect he had been hoaxed. Rage and mortification filled his mind by turns, and he paused to ask himself if he should now abandon the noble party that had played him such a trick, or still remain with the hopes of getting something from their generosity, if not from any over estimate of his services. Cupidity got the better of shame, and he rode back. Markham and his fair friends were really in hopes they had got rid of him, and that shame would keep him away, but in this supposition they certainly, as it appeared, reckoned without their host, for back he came. When he got within speaking distance he forced a laugh as he said—

"Well, gentlemen, don't you confess now that I did that well?"

"What, well?"

"Why, the pretending I was frightened, and scampering away in the manner I did."

"So well," said Brereton, that you entirely imposed upon us, and we really considered you were frightened at the prospect of an encounter with Claude Duval."

"Ha! ha! that is good. Oh dear, no, gentlemen, I always had a turn for joking, so, when I saw you had a mind for a little jest, of course I followed it up by pretending to be dreadfully alarmed. I hope the young gentlemen were not put out of their way by this little frolic."

"Not at all," said Cicely.

"Certainly not," said May. "We were too much amused at your consternation to think of anything else."

"Ah now, gentlemen, that is really too bad, when you know it was all a joke."

"For my part," said Markham Brereton, "I don't yet see where the jest lies, for through an aperture in the hedge as we passed I saw a pair of eyes, which, if they did not really belong to Claude Duval, must have belonged to the devil himself, who for the occasion had thought proper to take his likeness."

"You—you—don't—really mean that, sir?"

"Indeed I do."

"But you laughed?"

"Yes, to see how you scampered off I did laugh, and I think I should have done so if a pistol bullet had whizzed past my head. I have been in the army, and it is no part of my disposition to know what fear is."

"The deuce," muttered the officer to himself. "This is some general now, I should not wonder. But if he really saw Claude Duval, and he is dogging our steps—I only wish I was at home."

The thought of the danger that he might be running had such an effect upon the mind of the officer that he turned ghastly pale, and kept glancing around him so suspiciously, that both Cicely and May, if their minds had been sufficiently free and

unembarrassed to admit of frivolity, would have been highly amused at him. As it was, melancholy thoughts of Claude, and what might be his position, would intrude themselves to

"Spoil youth's frolic soul;"

and it would indeed have been something wonderful that could have coaxed more than a passing smile from either of them at that juncture.

"Mr. Jenkins," said Markham Brereton gravely, "I cannot conceal from you my impression that Claude Duval is even now positively engaged in watching our party."

"You—you—really don't—think that?"

"Indeed I do."

"Then I—I can only say that whatever your own notions may be, gentlemen, I don't exactly advise you to turn and run, although, perhaps, that would be the safest course to pursue."

"Oh, no—no," cried May and Cicely.

"Certainly not," added Markham Brereton. "That is not what we are inclined to do. But, Mr. Jenkins, I make no secret to you of the fact that the safety of these two youths is of more moment to me than my own life, so I propose that you and I ride on a little in advance, and if Claude Duval really meditates an attack, let it be made upon us, and during the struggle they will be able to escape, and if we are both killed we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that they are safe."

The officer's nose assumed quite a bluish tinge.

"Satisfaction!" he gasped. "After you are dead?"

"Yes, certainly. You are not an infidel, are you, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Oh, no—no—and yet somehow, do you know, I think, sir, we had better all keep together. Don't you think we look much more imposing all together?"

"It may be so."

Markham Brereton saw that the fears of the officer would, after all, not be sufficient to induce him to part company with them. The fact is, that rather too much had been done to induce him to think them great personages, and it had had the effect of inducing him to think, likewise, that some very considerable advantages were to be gained by staying by them. After a few moments more he even summoned up courage to say—

"Let us look to our pistols, for if Claude Duval does attack us our only chance will be by all firing at him at once, and so, perhaps, managing to hit him among us. Is your priming all right, sir? A miss-fire in the moment of danger is like throwing away your life at once. Only let us all fire together. That will do it."

CHAPTER CI.

THE SENTINELS.

Cicely was so indignant at this proposal for the death of Claude, that it was not without some difficulty she could manage to control her feelings. One glance at May, let the latter see what Cicely thought upon the occasion, but May placed her finger upon her lips and shook her head admonishingly. Markham Brereton, in order not to awaken any suspicion, did examine the priming of his pistols, a bullet from one of which was much more likely, in case of any conflict, to go through the head of Mr. Jenkins than of Clauue Duval. They were now so rapidly approaching Winchester, that Brereton began to look seriously along the road for Claude and Jack, or some news of them. He thought, and justly enough too that if they had been taken or killed by the officers, some account of it would be brought along the road, and so, while he heard no news, he considered that he heard good news. The presence of the officer was a great bar to the free intercourse of Brere-

on and the fair fugitives, but if he, Markham, had known the real state of things at Winchester, he would not have been so eager to dispense with the company of Mr. Jenkins, who really, as will presently be seen, became an useful ally. At about one mile from the city they heard the clatter of horses' feet, and presently a turn in the road disclosed two dragoons coming on at a trot. The soldiers did not pause until they reached the party, and then one cried—

"Our duty is to speak to all strangers on the road. Who are you?"

"What?" exclaimed Markham Brereton. "Is Winchester under martial law?"

"No, sir, but we are turned out to apprehend two men—Claude Duval, the highwayman, and another. We have a sufficiently good description of them to know that you are not them, but our duty is to report all persons who pass our post."

"Allow me," said Mr. Jenkins, taking out a little brass staff from his pocket. "You see that I am a police officer—I am in search of this very Claude Duval; so that, without further trouble, you may allow me and these gentlemen to pass. My name is Jenkins."

"That will do, I suppose," said one of the troopers to the other.

"Oh, yes—yes. Pass on."

"Have you any good ground," asked Brereton, "for supposing that Duval is coming upon this road?"

"We know nothing about it, sir," replied one of the soldiers, "all we are aware of is, that sentinels command all the roads into the city, and that we have orders to apprehend two men of a certain description if they cross our post, and to question all comers."

"Then, he has not reached Winchester yet," said Jenkins. "I wish you may catch him, that's all. I never did know a fellow give so much trouble in all my life."

"Nor I," said Brereton. "Come on."

They passed the two troopers, who, after going a few paces further, turned again and followed them to the city, not with a design of following them, but simply because, having been to the end of their post, they naturally turned, and their pace happened to be much the same as the pace of Markham Brereton and his party. In this manner, then, Cicely and May came into view of the old city of Winchester in the course of ten minutes, and had passed the guards that had been stationed for the purpose of interrupting Claude. Mr. Jenkins began to get curious about their destination.

"A-hem!" he said. "Well, we have baffled Claude Duval. You see what it is to show an imposing front. No doubt he saw me, and hesitated to attack us."

"No doubt."

"A-hem! I suppose you are at home now?"

"At home? Oh, dear, no."

"May I, then, make so very bold as to ask how far, gentlemen, you think of going upon this route?"

"Oh, yes. Do you know the New Forest?"

"In Hampshire—just across the Southampton water? I have heard of it often enough, but I don't know it. It's some distance, that, from here."

"Yes, but there we are going."

"Humph!"

"Do you know a place, there, called Brocklehurst? If you do, you will know that a certain Duke has an estate close by, which we may go and just have a look at. However, we shall sleep to-night in Winchester, for I must not fatigue these two youths by too much travelling, for their time is their own, and my time belongs to them."

"Yes, sir, that I can understand."

"Exactly."

"Then you will put up for the night at Winchester?"

"Yes, and at the best hotel. Will you make enquiry for it? And I hope you

will have the goodness to say, merely, that four gentlemen travelling wish for accommodation."

"I understand, sir," said Jenkins. "Lord bless you, sir, if you were actually to tell me who and what you and the two young gentlemen are, the secret would be as safe with me as though it had never been mentioned."

"For my own part, Mr. Jenkins," said Brereton, who began to think that, after all, the officer's presence would have the effect of covering them from suspicion or questioning. "For my own part, I should have no sort of objection to being perfectly frank with you, but there is a certain great personage who might not approve of my being so—you understand?"

"I do, sir."

"The time, however, Mr. Jenkins, will assuredly come, and that not at a distant date, when your eyes will be open to something that you now have no suspicion of."

"Think you so," said Jenkins; but he added to himself, "I know more than you think for—I know that you are a Sir James somebody, and the two gentlemen are the sons of some duke, and the nephews of the prime minister. Match me for cunning. Catch a weasel asleep."

What a conjurer in a small way this Jenkins was, to be sure. And so, upon a much more amicable and seemingly confidential footing than before, they all trotted into the City of Winchester, and passing down the narrow lane in which stands the jail on the right hand, and the convent on the left, they emerged into the long straggling High Street. The spacious frontage of the Crown Hotel was very inviting, so they made up their minds to make it their resting-place, until events should let them see what was the next wisest course to pursue in the present painful posture of their affairs. The officer bustled about, and saved them all trouble, and by dint of winks and inuendos he impressed the people of the inn with so high an idea of the importance of the guests, that the whole establishment was in an uproar to serve them with the very best of everything. It was a great relief to both Cicely and May to obtain rest and refreshment, and a greater relief still to be able to talk to each other, and to Markham, without the interference of the officer, who did not dream of intruding himself into their sitting room.

"Here, then," said Brereton, "we wait until nightfall, when, with or without the officer, we will make an attempt to keep our appointment with Claude."

"Oh, yes—yes," said Cicely.

"And in the meantime," said May, "cannot some information be got. Surely the military preparations that have been made, will warrant any amount of curiosity concerning Claude. Will you not put some questions to the people here, Mr. Brereton?"

"I will, the first time I can see the landlord. Probably, as I have ordered dinner, he will make his appearance, and then I will question him. There can be no possible danger in doing so, and at all events our minds will not be left upon the rack of suspense."

All this conversation was carried on in such a tone as to defy listening, even if any one had been practising a system of espionage upon them, which was not the case, but still caution, under their peculiar circumstances, could not be said to be thrown away, and the least act or word that might have a tendency to open the eyes of the officer to the manner in which he was being duped, would be highly dangerous both to them and to Claude and Jack. As Brereton had anticipated, the landlord made his appearance, for with a low bow he placed the first dish upon the table. The waiters of the establishment followed with the rest of the dishes.

"Pray, gentlemen, what wines," said the landlord, "would you prefer?"

"Hock, Sauterne, and—and——. We will think of what else."

The landlord bowed and *exit*. He soon returned with the wine, and then Markham Brereton said to him carelessly—

"I perceive that the city is restored to its usual quiet now, by the arrest of Claude Duval."

"Arrest of him, sir? Lord bless you, gentlemen, they have not got him yet, I can tell you, and perhaps they won't—he's a slippery customer, sir. Why the officers here are laying all sorts of extraordinary wagers about whether he'll be taken or not."

"Indeed! We made sure, by the military prepar ons, that by this time he must have been captured."

"Not a bit of it, sir—I should soon hear of it if that was the case."

"It's a sad thing to see that it is necessary to make so many preparations for the destruction of one man?"

"Ve y sad, gentlemen—very sad, indeed. Is there anything else I can bring you, ge tlemen? We have everything in the house at a moment's notice, gentlemen.

"Thank you; we shall do very well at present. Of course you will let the man below have what he likes at our charge. He is an officer of police whom we picked up upon the road."

The landlord bowed again and again, and made his *exit* from the room. A couple of waiters attended at table, and Brereton did not think it was politic to forbid them, notwithstanding their presence was so serious a check to the conversation of the party. They did not hurry the duty over, but they got rid of it as quickly as they could, without showing any undue haste, and when all was cleared and they were alone again, they one and all looked from the window to notice if the day was waning. If some good and beneficent genius could but have whispered to them that Claude and Jack were in perfect present safety, and only awaiting for the sunset, they would have felt a sensation of satisfaction to which they were indeed strangers.

"The night is coming," said Cicely.

"Yes," remarked May. "Let us hope that all will be well."

"We ought not to feel any anxiety about this meeting by the cathedral," said Markham Brereton, "for if Claude be not there, we may still conclude that he is in safety, but has found out that there is danger in keeping the appointment, while, if he really keeps it, we shall know that all is well."

"Yes, Markham," sighed Cicely. "Reason tells me to be tranquil, but feeling beats an alarm, and will not be appeased. Hark, what is that?"

A trumpet sounded, and there was a trampling of horses' feet in the street below the window at which they sat; upon looking out, they saw a troop of horse soldiers trotting down the high road. They were going to relieve the guards that were placed at the various entrances to the city. This fact was speedily ascertained beyond the shadow of a doubt, and it had one comforting assurance—namely, that if Claude had been captured, there, of course, would be no necessity for relieving the guard. This was so strictly true, that neither Cicely nor May could, in their utmost imaginative terror, make anything else of it. The return of the troop was a thorough confirmation of the fact, and then for a time all was stillness again. The officer, after the dinner, tapped at the door of the room, and when he came in, Markham Brereton thought it was a good opportunity to broach the subject of the cathedral, for the danger of attempting to proceed to it without his cognisance was by far too evident for him, Markham, to think of doing so.

"I understand," he said, "that the principal object of interest in this place is the cathedral."

"Yes, sir," responded the officer, "but if you leave early in the morning you will hardly have an opportunity of visiting it."

"Unless we go to-night."

"Is it not too late, gentlemen?"

"Not at all; I suppose it is possible to get a sight of it for money at any time? I never yet heard of anything in this country that had not its price, and more especially anything connected with the established church."

The officer laughed, as he replied—

"Ah, sir, you are right enough about that, no doubt, and for that matter, you

might, by paying sufficient, lodge in the cathedral if you like; so if you and the young gentlemen wish to visit it this evening, I will make the necessary enquiries."

"Thank you. Just say that if any one will be there at eight o'clock to show it to us, we shall not grudge recompensing them for the trouble."

"That will be all right, sir, no doubt—the clerk will jump at the offer; but I will, of course, gentlemen, take care that your wishes are attended to."

"Not sooner than eight."

"Certainly not, sir."

When the officer was gone, Markham Brereton turned to his fair friends, and said—

"Now the period of an appointment with Claude will be about seven o'clock, and, therefore, as the ice is broken concerning our visit to the cathedral, our great object will be to get there early. No doubt this officious fellow will accompany us. Indeed, he is not now to be shaken off, and so he must take the consequences of so doing."

"He must," said Cicely. "Avarice alone has been the cause of all his pretended civility and proffers of service to us, so that he has really laid us under no debt of gratitude, and as you say, Markham, he must take the consequences of his own scheming. Those consequences we will, of course, all of us, make as light as possible, consistent with Claude's security."

"Exactly so. Now, as soon as the street begins to wear a dusky aspect, I will propose we walk through the town. If he will still hang upon us, we cannot very well prevent him, for although he might appear not to think anything of it, we run the chance of his playing the spy upon us, which would be ten times worse than if we took him with us, for in the latter case we have a command over him, and in the former none."

Both Cicely and May saw what good reasons there were for enduring the society of Mr. Jenkins, and then in about another hour the streets wore a dim and sombre look, and Markham, in answer to the landlord, who came himself to know if they would have lights, said—

"Not at present, for we purpose taking a stroll for an hour in the city."

They all fully expected that upon that news being taken to him, the officer would appear. They were not disappointed. He came, as he said, to offer his humble services to them in the walk, as it would be some time before the clerk would be at the cathedral according to orders. Brereton at once accepted the officer's services, and in the course of another five minutes the incongruous party was in the street.

CHAPTER CII.

NIGHT AT THE CATHEDRAL.

As Jack had truly described it to Claude, in a damp and musty churchyard, where in summer a stench arises from old graves, and where in winter the air is filled by the sickening steam from vegetable and animal decay, stands, like some large Leviathan stranded accidentally in that spot, the cathedral. About the exterior of that building there is nothing but what may be all summed up in the one word, ponderosity. Yes, it is ponderous, and that is all. The night was absolutely still. So calm an eve had seldom peeped out from the heavens. Not a breath of air stirred the leaves upon the old elms—the long grass, rank and yellow, upon the grave mounds stirred not, and there was that peculiar clearness in the atmosphere which in this country is usually the precursor of rain. All nature seemed to be indulging in one of those silent pauses which are unnoticed amid the turmoil and roar of life in cities, but which, in the deep solitudes of the country, come upon the imagination with a wonderfully mournful effect, sending the thoughts far back to other scenes and other conditions, and conjuring up to

the mind's eye forms that long since have mingled with the dust. The hour of seven has struck, and for half an hour the sun had sunk in the west, when the dim shadowy forms of two men came picking their way among the tombs. They paused not until they reached the entrance of the cathedral, and then, by the iron railing which shuts out the profane vulgar from too close a contact with the doors, they stopped. Those men were Jack and Claude.

"This is the place," said Claude Duval. "Oh that I could see those whom we came to meet."

Jack did not at first reply to these words. He was looking warily about him, for he keenly felt the peril of their situation, and a kind of presentiment of some dreadful coming struggle lay brooding at the bottom of his heart. When he did speak it was in low and anxious accents.

"Yes, Claude. Heaven send we were far away from this place. Its aspect to me is soul-depressing. We seem to be quite alone among the graves here, and beneath the shadow of this huge pile of stone."

"Quite, Jack—quite. The doors here seem close enough. Do you know, Jack, I have a great admiration for the continental fashion of the open church night and day. Many a conscience-stricken heart, upon the impulse of a moment, might wish to commune with its Maker, but in England the doors of the temples are closed except for the mere formalities of worship. Oh, what a trade is this religion in England!"

"Yes, Claude, but you and I may set the locks at defiance if we please, and I have been thinking that by far our safest way would be to hold the conference we propose within the walls of the building, instead of without. Shall we make an attempt at an entrance?"

"A happy thought, Jack. We go to desecrate no shrine—to outrage no sanctuary. Open the door if you can, Jack. You are better at that than I am. From the interior we can manage, no doubt, to keep watch for the coming of our friends."

While Claude kept watch that no one approached, Jack plied his skeleton keys and soon turned the lock of one of the small doors that led into the long centre aisle of the cathedral. There was no other fastening but the lock to contend with, and when that was overcome the door yielded at once.

"Come, that's done," he said.

"Is it open?"

"Yes. We can keep it nearly closed, and watch from the inside the arrival of our friends. I suppose, Claude, if they come not within an hour, now, you will give them up?"

"I shall be inclined to do so," said Claude as he made his way into the cathedral. "How cold the air feels here, Jack, in this vast shell of stone."

"It does, indeed. But our advantage is great here, now. Nothing is more unlikely than that this place should be to-night visited again, and if it should be it will only be a night-watchman to try the doors. We shall be able to see him coming and to hold this one sufficiently firm against him to convince him it is locked as usual. How strange it is that the very atmosphere of such buildings as these seem to overcome one with a religious awe. I could never make out why it was so."

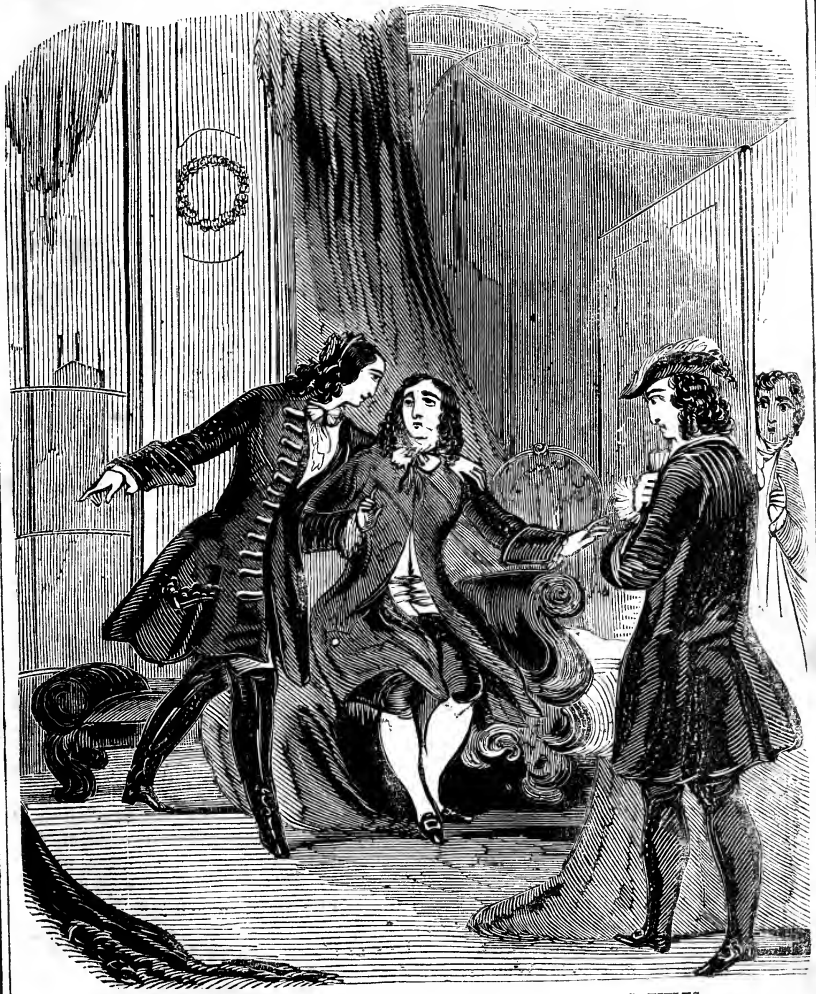
"Then I will tell you. It is the large space that produces that effect, and nothing else. There is something so grand and majestic in a large covered space, that for a time it overpowers the faculties, and most people involuntarily speak in whispers when they find themselves beneath a roof of extraordinary span. If this temple were dedicated to an Indian idol, instead of to the true God, that effect, which is purely physical, would be the same."

"Is the place growing lighter?"

"Yes, Jack. Ah, how beautiful!"

The moon had suddenly sailed out from amid the clouds, and shone through the windows of the cathedral, revealing its gigantic proportions to the eyes of Jack and Claude. Under the magic and exquisite influence of that calm reflected light the tall columns, the fretted roof, and the marble flagstones, seemed as though

they were all fresh from the hands of the sculptor, while the carved images upon stone tombs came out in broad relief, seeming almost instinct with life. They were men of the world, those two silent spectators of the scene of beauty before them but chilled as were their feelings and sensations by many a rude turmoil of life, even they for the time forgot everything but the beauty and the majesty of the shrine in which they were. A low moaning noise came upon their ears. A startled



MARKHAM BRERETON DELUDES JENKINS BY HIGH-SOUNDING TITLES.

bird that had crept in at a broken lattice pane sixty feet from the floor fluttered across the roof, and then a gust of wind swept round the hoary pile, and the clouds once more crept over the moon's face.

"The calmness is over." said Jack.

"It is," said Claude. "Oh, would that they were here. What a melancholy wailing the wind makes in this vast space. We shall, after all, have a night of

storm, surely. And they are not here. Jack, I cannot remain caged in this place much longer. Are you keeping an eye upon the door?"

"I am peeping out, Claude, but as yet see no one. Let us have a little patience yet. It would be to them a most grievous disappointment to get here after much peril, and then not see you."

"It would be so. It would be so. We will wait as long as we possibly can, until hope itself has fled, and there can be no further likelihood of their coming."

These words had scarcely passed Claude's lips, when Jack said to him—

"This way—this way! Look out, Jack, and decide for yourself if these are them. No—no. They cannot be. There are four."

The reader can come to a tolerably good conclusion as to whom the four persons were, now approaching the gate of the old cathedral. There were Markham Brereton, Cicely, May, and Mr. Jenkins, the officer, who thought he had dropped into such a good thing. As it will be, doubtless, recollected that Markham Brereton had made no attempt to keep the officer from following them, it may be inferred that he stuck tolerably close to them all the way from the Crown to the Cathedral. This fourth personage, however, was a puzzle to Claude and Jack.

"Hark!" said the former—"don't speak, Jack, while I take a good look at yon fellow who is in their company. What, in the name of all that's foolish, could have induced them to pick him up? Why—why it's a police officer!"

"A what?"

"A police officer—I know the rascal's foxy-looking phiz, and should know it among a thousand—his name is Jenkins. By what evil chance has Cicely fallen into the company of such a man. This is a circumstance which staggers me."

"Do not be hasty. Who knows but this may be a something that the party could not prevent. Wait until you know more about it."

"I suppose I must. They pause."

"Well, gentlemen," said Jenkins, to the party which he thought so noble. "Here is the old cathedral sure enough; but it will be some time yet before the clerk is here with the key to show it, as I told him eight o'clock, you understand."

"Ah," said Cicely, "but the door is not fast."

"Not fast—I wonder whether thieves have found their way into the sacred building. It cannot be—yet—yes—it is so. The door is only ajar; perhaps, after all, the clerk is there waiting for us. Suppose we walk in, gentlemen?"

"With all my heart," said Brereton. "Oh, Cicely," he whispered, aside, "if Claude and Jack should be in the cathedral, for the sake of him and all of us, repress any sudden gush of feeling. Remember in how ticklish a position we all stand."

"Yes—yes."

They all followed Jenkins, who pushed the door wide open, but as Claude and Jack were behind it purposely, he failed to see them.

"A-hem!" he said. "A-hem! Is any one here? Eh? eh? Well, it is a strange thing for the doors of the cathedral to be left in this manner, open to any one, and nobody here to make any charge. God bless me, this is quite unprecedented. Is any one here? Why don't you speak?"

The whole party followed the officer, and Claude then, suddenly stepping up to him, grasped him by the collar, as he said—

"Pray what do you want here, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Murder! murder! Who are you?"

"Claude Duval!"

"The devil!"

"Claude, Claude," cried Cicely, as she sprung forward. Brereton and May too advanced, and Jack went to the little door and looked out. He thought he should be doing the best service to them by placing himself as it were upon guard, so that he should see if any one approached the place. He could not do better than this.

The officer's faculties, were so astounded by the unexpected assault upon the

part of Claude, that for a few moments he remained in a fixed attitude, as though he had died and stiffened in it. At length, recovering himself a little, he gave a yell of despair, for he thought, to be sure, that death would be his portion.

"Fool!" cried Claude, "what want you here?"

"Do not kill him, Claude," said Cicely. "At some better opportunity you shall hear all, and you will then be able to understand how he forced his unwelcome presence upon us. At present, your safety is a paramount consideration."

"Are you quite well, Claude?" sobbed May.

"Quite—quite; but this man——"

"Oh, spare me—spare me!" cried Jenkins. "I begin to see somehow, although I don't quite comprehend it, that I am in the wrong box. Oh, spare me—spare me! Don't take my life. It would do you no good to do that. Only let me go, and I will swear to you, by all that's sacred, that I will not betray you. Dictate to me any oath you please, and I will take it. All I ask is my life—my life!"

"You abject wretch!"

"Yes—yes. I am abject, for I am praying for my life—life that is so precious. Oh, spare me—spare me!"

Claude, by the dim light of the partially emerging moon, that again began to peep through a crevice in the clouds, looked cautiously around him for some place in which to put Mr. Jenkins for security, and observing at some distance to the right an ancient tomb, railed round, and within the enclosure of which was some sculptured figure of an archbishop lying on its back, with the hands closed in prayer, he said to Brereton—

"Hold this man for a moment, my friend."

Brereton did so, while Claude, advancing towards the tomb, found not much difficulty in pulling away one of the iron rails, so that there was thus space enough to allow of the passage of the officer through the bars. He then returned, and seizing him, he dragged him to the tomb, not, however, without some difficulty, which arose from the fears of Jenkins having rendered him perfectly supine and helpless, so that his legs doubled up under him, and he could not walk. Having, however, got him to the tomb, Claude tumbled him in and replaced the bar, so that Jenkins, in the dark, and amid the bewilderment of his own fears, did not know exactly by what process he had been placed in such a cage. He tumbled right over the sculptured bishop, and rolled down upon the other side of it, still roaring for mercy.

"Hark you," said Claude, "if I hear another word from you, it shall be your death warrant."

The officer was as quiet immediately as the defunct archbishop, or bishop without the arch, into whose company he was so unexpectedly thrown. Claude immediately returned to his friends.

"There is now," he said, "no time to lose. We have a couple of horses not very far off, and we must manage somehow to get the thirteen miles to Southampton. Oh, Cicely, after so many strange adventures and hair-breadth escapes, do I hold you to my heart again?"

Cicely sobbed aloud.

"Do not mar the meeting," said Brereton, "by tears. No one knows or ever suspects who we all are but Jenkins, and he is secure. Come away now, at once."

Suddenly, before another word could be spoken, Jack closed the little door, and shot two bolts that were within, into their sockets, as he cried—

"Lost!—lost!—lost!"

"What do you mean?" shouted Claude, "are you mad, Jack, that you fill those who cannot bear such shocks, so full of terror."

"I am not mad, I wish that I were so. A company of foot soldiers have just marched into the grave yard, at double quick time."

"Soldiers?"

"Yes; we are discovered, and all is lost."

"Except life and a thousand chances of escape," cried Claude, "see to all the doors, Jack. Perhaps, after all, this is a false alarm—nothing can be more unlikely than a discovery of us. Some guard in this direction may be about to be changed; or, perhaps, a sentinel is to be placed at the gate of the cathedral, but I cannot think that the troop of infantry has any direct meaning as regards us here."

"Claude!—Claude! we will live or die together!" cried Cicely.

"Yes, yes, dearest, we will live together, but don't talk of dying yet, for I do not intend to do so to oblige anybody. Jack, look to your fire-arms."

"Hush, hush."

Tramp! tramp! tramp! came the company of infantry from the barracks, and when Claude and those who were with him really thought that they were about to pass on without any pause by the gate of the cathedral, a loud voice cried—

"Halt!"

"They come," said Jack.

"Hush! hush!" whispered Claude, "let us listen, I am not sure yet, that we are in more than usual danger."

"Now, sir," said the same voice that had cried halt, "pray open the door at once, and my men will search the church; but, really, I think your statement is very improbable. You must have been deceived by some accidental likeness."

"No, Captain Hurst, no," said another person, "I tell you, sir, that I was coming to the cathedral to light the reflecting lamp in the centre aisle, and I saw a man whom I know to be Claude Duval, the celebrated highwayman, walking with another man; I saw him twice in London, and cannot be mistaken as to his identity. His features are indelibly stamped upon my memory, but his companions I don't know."

CHAPTER CIII.

THE CONTEST IN THE CATHEDRAL.

THERE was now no sort of doubt about the danger that was approaching to Claude and his friends. One of those little cross accidents which will at times mar the best and boldest designs, had crossed the fate of those persons who had almost begun to think something like safety was dawning upon them. The speech of the clerk of the cathedral was only too painfully explanatory, and how to effect, now, a successful rally from the pressure of such a state of things, was a riddle difficult to answer. Cicely spoke first.

"Is there no other door, Claude," she said, "at which we may leave the place?"

Before Claude could reply to her, it seemed as though evil destiny had determined to cut off this small hope of escape, for the officer commanding the little party of military, said—

"Well, sir, if your suspicions are correct, you will, of course, have the credit of finding the highwayman, for a sentinel is by this time at every outlet from the building."

"God help us!" said Cicely.

May clung to Claude, and burst into tears. Jack and Markham Brereton were anxiously whispering together while the rattle of the clerk's key in the lock of the door, which Jack had bolted in the inside, could be plainly heard.

"Fasten all the doors you can, Jack," said Claude.

"Yes, yes."

Jack flew from door to door, but he found that his services in that respect were not required, for that at which they had entered was the only one left merely to the frail security of a lock, all the others being fast bolted and barred upon the inside.

After fumbling at the lock for a time, they heard the clerk say—

"Confound it; this is the right key. What hinders the door from opening I wonder?"

"Why, of course, the persons inside," said the officer. "They have fastened themselves in. Get out of the way, my men will soon force an entrance."

"But stop a little. I don't want the old door broke, if I can help it. Let me just make sure that I cannot possibly open it."

He commenced again fumbling at the lock, and certainly Claude might be said to have a little respite in which to think, but too truly desperate was the condition in which he found himself. There he was, caged up in the vast area of that cathedral, with sentinels at each place of exit, and a strong force about to enter and seize him. The desperate plan of waiting until the door was forced, and then making a sudden rush from the place, and so probably meeting death from the soldiers, seemed to him the only chance of saving Cicely from the dangers of an actual fight in the cathedral. He said enough to let them all feel that such was his intentions. Cicely flung herself before him—

"No, Claude," she said. "No. You fancy that you can die alone, but discard that idea. You shall not do so, for now I solemnly swear by the God in whose temples we now are, that if you are killed I will not survive you."

"Cicely—Cicely, rely——"

"No more, Claude—no more. You have said that we should live or die together, and we shall. Here are five of us. Let us make what resistance we can, for our fates are bound up together, and may not now be separated."

"That is true," said Brereton. "Claude, I advise a retreat to the further end of the cathedral."

"Do with me as you will," said Claude. "But you don't know how willingly I would lay down my own life to see you all in safety."

With hurried footsteps they now all betook themselves to the further end of the cathedral. They ascended some steps, and pushing open a pair of folding doors, they found themselves in the crypt where service is performed, and the moon having again fairly struggled out from amid a mass of clouds, there was amply sufficient light in the place for them to see everything.

"We can make a stand here," said Brereton. "By these folding doors we shall have an advantage. I advise that we stay here, and, above all things, let none of us fire until we are first fired at. Let all we do be done in self-defence. Thus, let what we do be done effectually. Fire low, and do not, if possible, waste a shot."

They formed in an anxious group at the head of those few steps, and just within the folding doors, one of which they kept closed. And now they were so far off from the outer gate of the cathedral, that they could no longer hear any of the conversation that took place outside between the officer and the clerk, but they were soon made aware of the fact that the latter had given up the idea of opening the door that Jack had bolted by fair means, and had surrendered that part of the business to the soldiers. Heavy blows with the butt-end of muskets against the old oak panelling resounded like the reverberations of thunder through the cathedral. In rolling echoes from wall to roof the sound was multiplied until the whole space seemed full of destruction. Bang! bang! went the muskets against the panels, and then a sudden cracking sound proclaimed, the door burst from its hinges. There being now nothing to obstruct the sound, they heard the officer crying "Forward!" and in another moment the troops were within the building.

"Surrender at discretion!" said the officer, "or you will only meet with certain death."

"Oh, save me!—save me!—The first thing you do, save me!" cried Jenkins, popping his head through the railings of the archbishop's tomb. Murder!—Help! help! Save me, whatever you do, I am nearly dead already, indeed I am."

The sudden appeal from such a quarter, produced no small amount of amazement in the minds of all who had forced a way into the cathedral. The officer ordered his men to halt, and sent a sergeant with four men to the tomb, to see

who it was that implored assistance in such piteous accents. Claude Duval and his party might have taken an opportunity of firing upon that sergeant's guard, if they had not fully made up their minds not to be the aggressors.

"Who are you?" said the sergeant, when he got to the iron railings of the tomb.

"Jenkins—Jenkins! Did you never hear of Jenkins? Oh, have mercy upon me!"

"How the deuce did you get into this cage?"

"It ain't a cage, good people. It's a tomb, and for I don't know how long, I have had no company but that of a dead archbishop, and there he lies. Oh, take me out. Take me out!"

"It's very easy to say take me out," said the sergeant, "but how to do it is quite another thing. You had better come out as you got in. I suppose you managed to squeeze yourself somehow through the bars, for they seem all right enough."

It will be recollected that Claude had replaced the bar he had torn away, so that in appearance it looked just as solid as any of the others, and it could only have been found by trying them all round."

"I can't get out," said Jenkins. "Only look!—my head won't go through."

Mr. Jenkins rather incautiously, to demonstrate to the sergeant that his head would not go through between the iron rails, gave it so vigorous a push that it did go through, but the getting it back again seemed to be quite a different affair. In vain he turned and twisted it in all directions, and nearly dislocated his neck. There he remained as if in the pillory.

"Help, help, help!"

"Don't make that row," said the sergeant, "you did it yourself. I can't waste time upon you. I must report myself. Right about face. March!"

"But you won't leave me in this predicament? Anybody might come and knock my brains out, and I not able to move my head from one side to the other. Oh, you wretches, I only hope and trust some of you will catch it, as most assuredly you will. Murder! Murder!—I won't be quiet—that I won't. Murder! Murder! Fire! Help! Murder!"

By the time the sergeant had got back to the main body, some usual military precautions had been taken. A file of men were placed at the beaten down door, and a corporal was busy lighting a large link that the party had brought with them. In another moment, and while the sergeant was repeating to his officer the odd situation of somebody who called himself Jenkins, the torch was ignited, and a dull reddish glare was cast upon the soldiers, and upon the majestic architecture of the cathedral. The officer now divided his force into three portions, one of which he kept in the centre of the building under his own charge, while the other two he sent right and left to march up the side aisles, with orders to penetrate into every nook and corner, and make prisoners of whoever was met with. He then ordered the men he had with him to advance. They had not gone many steps, when a loud voice—it was that of Claude—cried from the position in which he and his party were—

"Halt!"

So mechanically had the soldiers been in the habit of pausing at that word, that they did so for the moment, until the voice of their officer, crying "Forward!" came again upon their ears.

"Advance another twenty feet and we fire!" cried Claude.

"Forward, men. Forward!"

The officer came gallantly on with his sword in his hand, and as the troops seemed resolved to take the party by storm, there evidently was no other way of stopping their progress but by firing at them, and Claude did not do so a whit too soon, for the officer, when he got near the steps, made a dart to ascend them rapidly—he gained half way up, when Claude fired a pistol at him. He turned clean over upon his heels, and his head fell upon the marble floor with a frightful crash, that would have been death without the assistance of the pistol shot that

had entered his lungs. The soldiers halted now without orders, and raising their muskets to their shoulders, fired a volley. The effect of that discharge of fire-arms within these echoing walls was something truly prodigious. The noise was of the most tremendous character that can be conceived, and it was some minutes before any sound could be heard amid the roar of that mimic thunder.

"Speak, speak! all of you," cried Claude. "Are you hurt? Cicely, May, Jack, Brereton."

"Well—well."

All answered but Jack—for, as yet, no Jack was upon the ground; but Claude was so delighted to find that neither Cicely nor May had received any hurt, that he forgot to ask where Jack had disappeared to.

"Fire!" he cried. "Fire upon them. That is right."

Both May and Cicely fired the pistol they each held in their right hand, and with Claude's and Brereton's shots they made four, which certainly did some execution among the soldiers, for there was evident confusion for a few moments, and the link lay half out upon the floor.

"Fire away, my lads!" cried the sergeant, who now took the command of the soldiers. "Fire away, and then rush in upon them and take them."

Another volley immediately succeeded, and then the soldiers made a rush forward.

"Fire!" cried Claude, and four more pistols flared and thundered in their faces. A bullet had just touched Claude's shoulder, and Brereton, too, was slightly wounded.

"Forward, forward!" cried the sergeant. "Give them no time, my lads."

One of the soldiers dashed up to the folding-door. Claude met him, and successfully eluding the bayonet, closed with him, and wresting the gun from his hands, sent him headlong down the steps again, with a blow upon his skull that put an end to his worldly troubles. It was at this juncture that Claude heard the voice of Jack crying—

"Back, back, back! There is safety this way."

He obeyed the summons and retreated. Two more soldiers scrambled over the body of their fallen comrade, and rushed into the crypt. Claude at a venture levelled the gun he had at them, and pulled the trigger. It was loaded, and one of the soldiers fell. The other did not fly, but he turned and cried to his comrades—

"Come on. Come on!"

There was a momentary respite from hostilities, while the remainder of the soldiers scrambled into the crypt, and Claude felt a hand grasp his arm, while Jack's voice whispered—

"Follow me. I have found a door by which, I think, we may leave the cathedral. This way. This way."

"Thank God, Jack!"

"Quick! Quick!"

"Is all well with Cicely and May? Where are they?"

"Here, here!" cried Cicely. Oh, Claude, is not this horrible?"

"It is forced upon us. Ah!"

The soldiers had hastily formed, when they had got fairly within the crypt, and had fired a volley at the fugitives, whom they could only see in the distance. Cicely had been leaning upon Claude's arm. She fell with a shriek upon his bosom. The musket fell from Claude's hand, and he felt a cold rush of air as an open door swung close at hand. Jack dragged him past it down three or four steps, and then pushing open a little arched door, he dragged him and Cicely through it. May and Markham Brereton, who was supporting her, followed, and Jack closed the door.

"Not a word—not a word," whispered Jack. "I have purposely opened a side door through which they will suppose we have escaped. It is ten chances to one that they will do so, and then we shall be here in security. Hush, hush! if you value your lives say not a word."

"Cicely! Cicely!" gasped Claude. "Cicely! Cicely!"

There was no reply.

"Good God!" said Jack, "you don't say she is hurt, Claude?"

"Savages! monsters! they have killed her! Let me go, and take such vengeance as a maddened heart may take before it burst, unhand me, Jack."

"Claude—Claude—will you sacrifice us all because you must have revenge? Shame upon you if you do."

Probably no other argument in the world than this would have had any effect upon Claude, but this did—it was just the sort of appeal and reproach which he was sure to feel acutely, and he was silent accordingly. The soldiers came marching on, while the shout of the serjeant of "Forward!—forward!" came plainly upon the ears of the fugitives, and then, when he reached the open door through which the cold air came, they heard him cry—

"Escape—escape! After them, my lads—they can't be far off!"

There was a rush of feet, and then all was still for a few moments, after which one solitary voice, at an apparently long way off, called—

"Murder!—murder! Help!—help!"

It was Jenkins, who, being disregarded by everybody, was still in his awkward position, with his head through the rails of the archbishop's tomb. At any other time Claude might have laughed at the predicament in which Mr. Jenkins was placed, but now, with the insensible, and, for all he knew, dead form of Cicely in his arms, the hilarity and joy of his heart seemed to be gone from him for ever.

"Jack," he said, "I must see how it fares with her. I cannot—will not stay here."

"Follow me," said Jack. "Mind the stairs—God knows where this leads to; but follow me, Claude, and we will get a light as soon as we are out of the reach of the door. Hope for the best—she has perhaps only fainted, Claude, from over excitement. Follow carefully."

Jack slowly decended a narrow stone staircase, and Claude, clasping Cicely to his heart, followed him as closely as foot could fall. Markham Brereton and May brought up the rear of this now most melancholy and forlorn procession. Oh, what language could paint the feelings of Claude during their slow and dreary progress down those steps?

CHAPTER CIV.

THE VAULTS.

Down, down many steps—old worn steps, some steep, and some so slant that by the foot reaching them unexpectedly a jerk was given to the whole system—down—down—far below the floor of the old cathedral. Cobwebs gathered round their faces—reptiles ran screeching before them, and a damp unwholesome odour came from deeper, deeper still.

"Jack—Jack," said Claude, "where are we going?"

"To safety, I hope. Have yet a little patience. How is Cicely?"

"God! I know not. If she would but speak. Cicely—Cicely! No—no. I tell you they have killed her—why did they not kill me? They have killed my heart?"

"Oh, Claude—Claude," said May, sobbing, "you will kill me too, to hear you speak thus. Mr. Brereton, speak to him, I pray you."

"Courage, Claude—courage," said Markham Brereton. "Do not allow yourself to be beaten down in this way."

Claude made no reply, and Jack in a few moments said—

"We are at the foot of the stairs. Stop all of you, while I get a light. Stop a moment."

They all paused, and in a few moments they saw a faint blue light from a phosphorus match—then quite a variety, and then Jack lit a little piece of wax candle, and held it up so that its tiny beam fell upon the group upon the stairs. Those beams could not have fallen upon a stranger scene. Claude was first, with Cicely in his arms. She was pale, but her paleness was nothing to his. It seemed



as if the blood had for ever departed from his cheeks. It was a paleness nearly allied to that of death itself that he exhibited. The heart of this strong, bold man was nearly crushed and lost. Behind him, a few paces higher up, appeared May and Markham Brereton. They looked all the anxiety they felt.

"Come on!—Come on!" said Jack. "We can pause here, Claude."

He hastily stuck the little piece of wax candle against a projection in the

stone wall, and then, throwing off his coat, he laid it upon the damp ground, saying—

"Place her here, Claude, and you will soon, I hope, see that she is not much hurt, if anything at all."

Claude did not speak, but he slowly descended the remainder of the steps, and then, stooping low down, he placed his insensible burden upon Jack's coat. One tear fell upon the cheek of Cicely. Jack saw it, but he would not notice it.

"How fares it with her?" said Markham Brereton.

May knelt down by her side.

"The—the light!" gasped Claude.

"Yes—yes."

"Nearer—nearer still! Thank—thank you, Jack. Nearer yet. Hush!—hush!"

Cicely's hands were crossed upon her breast, and compressed tightly one upon the other; and for a moment or two, Claude only looked in her face.

"Does she sleep?"

May shuddered, and laid her hand upon Cicely's brow.

"Cold—cold!"

"No—no!" cried Claude, "not quite cold. Do not tell me that."

"I have some wine here, in this small flask," said Jack. "Touch her lips with it, Claude, or try to make her swallow some. It may recover her."

Claude took the little flask in silence, and gently poured a few drops of the red wine that was in it upon the lips of Cicely. In about half a minute there was a slight spasmodic movement of the throat, and then, after two or three nervous twitches, the eyes opened.

"Cicely!—Cicely!" cried Claude.

She did not speak.

"Cicely—Cicely. I implore you. My Cicely! 'Tis I. Do you not know my voice? Speak to me, if it be only one word?

"Cicely!—Cicely!"

She did not speak, but she looked up in his face with such an expression of hopeless agony, that it was indeed heard-breaking to see her.

"One word. Only one word!" added Claude, in tones of anguish. "If you cannot speak, Cicely, it is my crimes that have killed you."

A strange, half-uttered sob, like that of some dying bird, came from her lips, but the sound did not form itself into any articulate one. Claude shook like one wrestling with death, and while the tears chased each other down his cheeks, he tried again to place upon her lips a small portion of the wine from the little flask that Jack had handed to him, but he trembled so excessively that he was unable to do so. Markham Brereton, without a word, took the flask from him, and with a steadier hand administered the wine. It had, as before, a temporary effect, and Cicely appeared to be looking down at her hands, that were crossed and placed one upon the other, tightly upon her breast. Claude placed his own hand upon one of them. It felt like lead.

"My Cicely," he said—"my only love—my wife, speak to me now."

She was evidently making a great effort, and he stooped low, reclining his ear to catch the smallest articulate sound, and then, in a feeble whisper, she did say—

"Claude."

"Yes—yes, she speaks—she speaks! Again Cicely—again."

A change came over her face. It was like the change upon the fair face of some sunny landscape, when clouds sweep between it and the glorious orb of light. A horrible metallic-looking lustre came across her eyes, and the flesh of the round and beautiful cheeks sunk deeper—deeper still. The breath came in intermitted gusts from her bloodless lips.

"Dying—dying," cried Claude. "She is dying."

"No—no," almost screamed May. "It must not—cannot be."

"Cicely—oh, Cicely," murmured Markham. "Sister, speak to me."

The dark shade came more and more over her face. The cheeks sunk more to the bones, and a startling projection of the lower part of the face did much to alter the whole aspect of it. Claude wrung his hands and wept bitterly.

"She is dying!" he said. "She is going from me. She is dying—Cicely!—Cicely. They have killed you—God! they have killed you."

"No—no," almost shrieked May.

"Look upon her," cried Claude, echoing the shriek. "Look upon her and tell me if she lives—Cicely—Cicely—Cicely, I say. One word—only—only—one word."

There was one faint sighing breath. It came like a zephyr, and it passed away like one. It was the last breath of Cicely. Claude staggered back until he was stopped by the wall, and there he stood, looking more like some figure sculptured upon a monument than a living man. His lips were parted, and his face was of a marble paleness. His matted hair hung in dishevelled masses. His hands were clasped, and all he said was—

"God—God—God!"

He then fell forward upon his face and lay profoundly still. Jack was inconceivably shocked, but May and Markham Brereton were kneeling by the side of Cicely, and their whole attention was absolved in a contemplation of the dead. Markham gently took up one of the hands that lay across the chest of the dead. It was cold and heavy. He placed it by her side. Slowly then he raised the other, and then with a shudder, he saw that there was a gun-shot wound in the breast, from which the blood was slowly oozing. The bullet had entered her lungs, and hence she had been totally incapacitated from uttering one word.

"Yes, she is dead," said Markham.

It seemed as if those words were a talisman to call Claude Duval to life again. With a bound he sprung to his feet, and in a voice that rung through the vault, he cried—

"Revenge! Revenge!"

May clung to his knees.

"Claude! Claude!"

"Vengeance!"

"Claude!"

"By the Great God!"

"No, Claude. No—no—no—a thousand times no! You shall take no impious oath of revenge—of ill-directed revenge. You cannot tell what hand sped the bullet that did this mischief. Are you to make war against all the human race for one chance act? No, Claude, you dare not—you shall not. Speak to me. Do not look so cold and stony at me. Claude—Claude, I say. Oh, brother—brother, speak to him. Is he going mad?"

"Duval," said Markham Brereton, "recollect yourself. Speak to me."

Claude pointed with both his hands at the corpse of Cicely. Speak to that, he said—I say speak to that. And so they have killed you, my poor girl! He knelt down, kissed the cold lifeless lips. And this," he said, "is human justice!—this is human vengeance. I—I think at times there have be soft places in my heart, but there never will be again—never—never—I am adamant now."

"For the love of Heaven, brother, think of something," whispered May, "to remove him from this fearful condition."

"What can I say?"

"Anything that will occupy him. Lead him to think of placing her in the grave—and—and of prayer."

The emotion of May overcame her, but, wrung with grief as his own heart was Brereton took the hint that his sister had given, and touching Jack upon the shoulder, for he was standing glaring at Claude as if stupified, he said—

"A grave!"

Jack started.

"A grave for the dead," said Brereton.

After dashing aside some tears from his eyes, Jack looked about him vacantly. He then approached Claude and laid his hand quietly upon his arm.

"Old friend," he said, "shall we not consign to the earth what is now earth?"

He pointed to the dead body. Claude looked at him, and then said in a deep hollow voice—

"It is over!"

"What is over, Claude?"

"Follow me."

He stooped and lifted the body of Cicely from the floor, and carried it as tenderly in his arms as though she did but slumber, and any rude shock might yet awaken her to a sense of pain. He strode in silence towards the staircase by which they had all descended. In vain May tried to stop him—in vain both she and Brereton spoke to him. On—on he went, with his still and cold burthen. Jack snatched the little wax light, which was now nearly expiring, from its place against the wall, and rushed after him.

"He goes, perhaps, to destruction," said Brereton.

"Then he shall not go alone," said Jack. "I am willing to die with him. I come—I come, Claude. Your old and faithful friend will be with you to the last."

"What does he intend to do?—oh, what does he intend to do?" cried May. "Will any of our intellects survive this dreadful night? Claude—Claude!"

Markham Brereton rushed after Jack, and May could not remain alone in that mournful place, so she followed close upon the footsteps of her brother. Claude did not pause, but ascending the whole of the steps, he passed through the little door into the cathedral. At that moment Jack's little light expired. The clouds, however, had swept away from before the face of the moon, and a clear white light was shining in the cathedral. The door at which the soldiers had left the building was now closed, and there was nothing to indicate that the sacred pile had so recently been the scene of strife and bloodshed. Claude strode on until he reached the communion-table, in that portion of the church which the limited requirements of Protestantism had apportioned off for the services of its ceremonials, and then, sweeping off a book and some other matters that were on the table, he laid the dead body of Cicely thereon.

"Let the priests," he said, "who affect to do their duty here to God, do their duty to these remains of one of His best and purest creatures."

"Will you leave her, then?" said Jack.

"Yes, yes. Cicely, farewell—farewell, dear one."

Again he kissed the pale lips, and turning to his friends, he said—

"Well, why do you not go? Why do you linger here?"

"Come away at once, then, Claude."

"No, I stay with my dead. You, all of you, go, for there is danger; but, I stay with my dead."

"No, Claude," sobbed May, "you must come with us. They will kill you if you remain here. This is no asylum for you!"

"I want no asylum, now, but the grave. They have killed the better part of me, for they have crushed my heart. What more can human spite or human vengeance do against me? Yes, Cicely, I will stay with you. Go—go all of you, and God's blessing be with you."

"No," said Jack, "it is my belief, that when the soldiers fail in finding you in the environs of the cathedral, they will return here, and they will fire upon any one whom they may see, in revenge for the loss they have themselves received. I will stay, Claude, and die with you."

"And I," said May.

"And I," said Markham Brereton.

Claude looked at them all.

"No—no—no," he cried. "This should not be a temple for human sacrifice. Go, I implore you all to go, and leave me to my fate. I have nothing to do with

life now. I pray you, if you love me, think gently and kindly of me when I am gone, and leave me to die with her. But a little space she has gone before."

"As you please," said Jack, "if you will stay, you involve us all in your destruction, but if you leave here you save us. If you like. Claude, you may sacrifice the living for the dead. Say no more about it, Claude."

CHAPTER CV.

THE REVENGE OF CLAUDE.

Could Claude Duval hear such words as these from those attached friends, who had done so much, and suffered, and sacrificed so much for him, unmoved? Could he, without rousing himself to a different state of feeling, accept that one last instance of their devotion to him? No, it was not in Claude's nature to do so. There was a brief struggle between the morbid feelings that the death of Cicely had awakened in his bosom, and his better thoughts, and then the latter triumphed. For a moment he bowed down over the corpse, and his very soul seemed to be shaken by the wild tumult of passion that he felt. Then he rose, and by the pale moonlight, they could see that his face had undergone a remarkable change. For the first time, marks of age began to show themselves upon the countenance of Claude Duval. They all remarked this phenomena, but they said nothing. Claude was now in reality twenty-nine years of age, and he looked ten years older at the very least, when he rose up from that prayer, or vow, or whatever it was, which had bent him over the dead. He turned to his friends—

"You have conquered me," he said.

"Thank Heaven!" said May.

"Yes," said Markham Brereton, "I, too, thank Heaven. Remember, Claude, that you do not alone suffer; she was my sister, the last tie of blood that bound me to the world; I loved her too for her gentle virtues, but life must not be cast away like a broken reed, because those whom we love precede us upon the grand route to eternity."

"Enough—oh, enough," said Claude; "dear friends, now let me ask of you one last, and only favour. It is, that you will not speak to me of her."

"As you please, Claude."

"There will be times and seasons when it may drive me mad to think of this night. Do not! oh, do not, you three, who are the only witnesses to what has happened here, refer to the dreadful scene, unless I speak of it to you."

"We promise!" they all said,

"It is enough. Come away."

Claude took three steps from the communion table, upon which lay the corpse of Cicely, and then he wavered, for he could not think of so parting with the fond object of his only love. With a sob that struck a most painful dread into the bosoms of his friends, he turned, and again sought the communion table, where he bent over the lifeles remains of his Cicely.

"Oh God, can it really be!" he cried. Can it really be—oh God!"

May would have sprung towards him, but Brereton held her back, saying—

"No, no. The streams of the mind, like those of the material world, will not be stayed. No human power can do so. They must, and they will run their course I pray you, May, to let him alone."

"I had hoped," said May, "it was over."

"And I."

Claude rose again, and walked towards them. He spoke quite calmly—

"Earth," he said, "has me back again."

Jack slid his arm within that of Claude's, and as he led him gently on, followed by Markham Brereton, he said—

"Come, Claude; our horses, you know, wait for us at the Old Farm upon Child's Hill. Come, the night is clear, and we shall reach Southampton yet before midnight."

"No—no."

"Oh yes, Claude, "we shall easily."

"No, I say, Jack; no."

"But is not such your intention, Claude? In a foreign land you will find that peace and consolation, which in England you will never know."

"Listen to me, friends."

They walked slowly by Claude's side, and thus he spoke—

"My span of life will now be short, but until some bullet lays me low, I will be a scourge and a desolation. Society rose up in arms against me, saying 'no longer this man shall be again a vexation—we will kill him.'—Well, I was willing to go far away, never again to show my face beneath the sun of England, and God knows, and you know, that I made what may be called superhuman efforts to accomplish such a purpose."

"You did—you did."

"Well, they would not let me. The bloodhounds came upon my track; I was sold for paltry gold to him who should slay me. And I need not say with what relentless hearts they have carried out their object. I shall not live long, but while I live, it shall be to make war against the laws, and the laws' administrators and executers. My career may and will in all human probability be a brief one, but it shall be a bloody one."

"Oh, no—no, Claude."

"Sister, say no more; I am fixed."

"This is a sad determination, Claude," said Markham Brereton, "for those who wish you well to listen to. I pray you think better of it."

"There are moments into which are compressed the agonies of years, and there are moments in which the mind lives an age of thought—I have had such moments."

"But," said Jack, "remember——"

"I will remember, Jack," said Claude, "that you are my dear friend, and that I am your's. Further, then, do not let you and I go in our remembrances."

"This is sad, indeed," said Brereton.

"Not sad for you—nor for you, May. Markham Brereton, you love her!—Take her. She is a good girl. Take her, and the best thing you can both do is, as speedily as may be, to forget that there is in the wide world such a person as Claude Duval."

"Oh! brother—brother!"

"I do love her with all my heart," said Brereton, "and I will, while I live stand between her and all harm; but we can neither of us forget you, Claude, if we would, and we would not forget you if we could."

"No, never—never, brother."

"You will be his Cicely?"

"Yes."

"Then so far I am content. God bless you both. Perhaps I am mad, but if I am, ask yourselves what I have suffered, and then perchance you will not wonder at it. Come, let us leave this place now. Methinks the air is full of blood."

"Blood, Claude?"

"Yes, I seem to move as through a heavy misty atmosphere, which has the scent of human gore. This feeling will pass away; but now, as you say, Jack, we must seek our horses, and then—why, then, to London."

"To London?"

"Yes, Jack. Once more to London. I have been a something to be feared and dreaded. What shall I be now? We shall see—we shall see. The moon shines bravely. How rich and rare it makes the old cathedral tolook. One

would scarcely think, now, the creatures that could fashion this were such men of sin, and carnage, and horrors, as human nature may be."

"I will step a few paces before," said Markham, "and see if our route is clear."

"Yes, yes," said Jack, "it will be well to do so."

Markham hastened on to the little door by which they had entered the cathedral, and by which they hoped to leave it. He approached it very carefully, and as he came near to it, he found that it stood open. He was about to pass out by it in order to look abroad, when he heard the tramp of a footstep without. He paused instantly. Tramp—tramp—tramp came the footsteps, and Markham Brereton's watching experience at once told him that he was listening to the tread of a couple of soldiers. They passed the door, and after proceeding a distance of about thirty feet, they turned and came as regularly back again. Being convinced that there was no danger of their penetrating into the cathedral, he approached the little crevice that the door was open, and peeped out. There he saw two sentinels on duty, with their full arms and accoutrements. He walked gently back again to his friends.

"There are sentinels in couples," he said, "posted round the cathedral, and any attempt to leave it would be attended with the greatest danger."

"Danger?" said Claude.

He pronounced the word in such a tone, that Brereton replied at once—

"Claude, if you wish to throw away your life, you can do so. There is the door; but I thought, whatever might be your plans of revenge, that you had given up the idea of suicide."

"I have—I have. Forgive me. We will leave this place if we can. That word 'Revenge!' Brereton, is useful to me. Say it, if you see my spirit sinking, and I shall again recover, and be once more myself. Come on, and let us listen if any chance of eluding these sentinels presents itself."

"They all proceeded close to the door, and after waiting a moment or two, they heard the sentinels coming on with the same regular tramp. When they neared the door, one spoke to the other, saying—

"Stand at ease, Jem."

"Very well; I ain't so chilly as I was. It's a deuced dull road this."

The stocks of the muskets rung upon the stone paving as the two soldiers stood at ease beneath the ancient porch of that House of God, which upon that night had been so awfully desecrated by man in his worst aspect. What were the money-changers in the Temple to those who sought that ancient pile, which had so often echoed to the voice of holy supplication, for the purpose of slaughtering a fallen creature for money?

"Let us listen to them," said Claude. "We may gain some useful information from these men."

Brereton and May stood close together, rather to the right of the little doorway—Claude was the foremost, and Jack was within about two paces of him. They all four kept perfectly still while the following dialogue took place in rather a low tone of voice between the two sentinels.

"It's very odd how they got away," said one."

"Very."

"I can't at all understand it; and our officers think, I suppose, that they must be in the building yet."

"Not a doubt of that, or they would not have distributed their whole force round it in sentinels—doubled, too—while they went to the barracks for a stronger party to look into every nook and corner of the old church."

"I suppose not. I only wish they would come back."

"Yes, this is dull work."

"It is; but what puzzles me is, what became of the woman. I saw her clear enough, and shot her through the heart. I never felt so sure of a shot in my life. I saw her fall back plainly, and if she was not killed by me, nobody ever yet fell by a musket bullet."

"Jack," said Claude.

"Yes, Claude."

"You hear that, Jack?"

"I do. Hush!"

"Are you quite sure now, Jem, that you hit her?" said the other soldier.

"I tell you what it is, I wish this hour may be my last if I didn't. Thinks I, what makes these fellows fight so is this woman, and if one of them is only laid down, they will give in. What makes you doubt it?"

"For the best of all possible reasons, that I saw no woman."

"But you heard that police fellow say that they were dressed in men's clothes, and what's more, the hat of that one had fallen off, and then there was no mistaking her."

"Well, I don't envy you the feat. Now, to tell the honest truth, Jem, I didn't like the job at all, and the only time I fired, I let fly so high that I reckon the bullets went a good six feet over anybody's head."

"Then if I don't report you, my name is not Jem Mason, and I didn't come from the county Cork, old boy."

"You may report and be hanged. Thank God, I have a good friend in Captain Sopwath, and I don't think he will let me come to any harm on the word of an Irishman. I was a fool to exchange one word with you, and I'm only sorry I am posted with you."

"Are you, by gosh? It's mighty soft hearted you are. I only wish I had another shot at them."

Claude's hand had been upon the door for the last two minutes. He did not say another word beyond the remark, if remark it could be called, that he had made to Jack, but suddenly, like a flash of lightning, he flung the door open and stepped out. The soldiers started, but before either could adopt any offensive line of operations, he seized the musket of him who had not murdered Cicely, and wrenched it from him.

"Fly for your life!" he cried.

The Irishman immediately raised his piece and fired at Claude. The ball grazed his side, but he felt nothing of it. To reverse the musket and rush upon the soldier was the work of a moment. The one who had been disarmed by Claude, cried in a loud voice—

"Good! good!"

The other, finding his shot ineffectual, threw down his musket and tried to escape. He got about a dozen steps from the spot into the churchyard, when Claude, by a terrific hop, overtook him. Whirling the musket in the air round his head, he brought the brass bound stock down with terrific force upon the skull of the soldier. There was a horrible crashing sound as the bones of the head gave way before that blow, and the body fell rolling over a grave mound. Claude felt that the blow did not want repeating, and casting the musket down, he was within the church again in another moment.

"Follow me," he cried. "Quick! quick!"

They all rushed after him, and across the grave-yard. In two minutes they were in the high street of Winchester.

CHAPTER CVI.

TO LONDON.

They emerged close by the Old Cross. May had darted from the arm of Markham Brereton, and was clinging to that of her brother. She looked in his face tearfully.

"You are calmer now, Claude."

"I have begun to be avenged," he replied.

"On—on," said Jack, in an anxious whisper. "To your right, Claude, and walk fast; we shall get through the High Street to Child's Hill. Quick—quick, Claude, or you may lose all the advantage we have gained."

"Yes," said Brereton, "they will not put up with this defeat very quietly. If we do not soon get clear of Winchester, we shall have more of our enemies than may be pleasant. What a night this has been?"



CLAUDE AND JACK INGENIOUSLY CONCEALED FROM THEIR PURSUERS BY A COUNTRY LAD.

"And not over yet," said Jack.

"Claude, with May clinging to his arm, made his way to the right as he was directed to do by Jack, and at a rapid pace sped down the High Street of Winchester. They soon reached the little branch of the river Itchen, which is the motive power of some water-wheels, and with the babbling music of the streamlet in their ears, they began the ascent of the hill that overlooks the city. That hill

is mostly chalk, with but a thin upper stratum of loam, which a slight shower penetrates in a moment; and there had been rain enough already upon that eventful evening to make the narrow path up the side of the hill perfectly slippery. Several of our party had falls, but none of them were serious, and after about ten minutes' toil, they reached the summit of Child's Hill. Then the country spread itself out in those sweeping slopes and uplands, so peculiar to the coast portion of Hampshire; and upon glancing towards the city, they could see the lights twinkling like stars, and dimly too they could distinguish the massive old cathedral, dusky and grey, huge and shapeless, against the night sky.

"Follow me," said Jack, "the farm-house is quite close at hand. Follow me."

Jack pursued, for some distance, a path skirted on the left hand by a plantation, while on the right it was open to the meadows and corn-fields, and after a short time he opened a gate, and in a few moments they were all in front of the house. It was no part of their inclination, however, to make a stay at the old farm, as no doubt all the environs of the city would be speedily reached for the fugitives, so Jack led them round the house to the door in the garden wall. The horses could just be seen dimly, but at the sound of the footsteps approaching, they approached in the most docile manner.

"What shall we do?" said Brereton; "two horses don't conveniently mount four people."

"Leave Jack and me," said Claude. "You, Brereton, and May, mount and be off. We will shift for ourselves somehow."

"Fly," said Jack, after a moment's pause. "This is no time to be particular. Let us all go on until we find an opportunity of getting some conveyance. We can walk, Claude, tolerably fast; and Mr. Brereton and your sister can accommodate their progress to ours."

"I will walk," said Brereton. "You, Claude, mount your own horse, and if you fall into any danger, never mind us, but gallop to London. I'm sure Jack and I can walk fast. Now, May, mount—keep your brother company."

"That will do very well," said Jack, "but for God's sake, be off quickly. All our lives may hang upon the events of the next quarter of an hour."

May and Claude mounted, and in another minute the little party left the old garden of the farm-house, and emerged into one of the cross-roads that pursue their way upon the high ground in the neighbourhood of Winchester.

"Stop one moment," said Jack.

They all paused.

"As I thought," Jack added, "if we had staid another minute, we should perhaps have found it difficult to escape. I can hear men ascending the hill side. We have been traced in some way, and we shall have yet a hard struggle for it. Come on."

"At a walk, merely, so that the sound of the horses' feet should not be too apparent, they proceeded along the road which took a north-easterly direction, and they soon, notwithstanding they appeared to go very slowly, left a considerable distance between them and Winchester. Suddenly they heard the grinding sound of wheels rapidly approaching them, from the direction in which they were proceeding, and in a few moments the lamps of some vehicle flashed upon the darkness of the road.

"Some one is coming," said May.

"Get to the road-side," cried Jack. "Leave me to see who it is."

The lights rapidly approached, and the party soon saw that they belonged to a chaise that was being driven at a very rapid rate by some one. Whoever that one was, he seemed to have observed that somebody besides himself was upon the road, for he called out in an imperious tone—

"Get out of the way, will you, or I'll run over you."

At the same moment they heard him lashing his horse furiously. The animal swerved to the road-side. Up went one of the wheels on to the bank, and over went the chaise as easily as possible, to all appearance. But as regards upsets on the road, appearances are often deceitful; for although the chaise may come down

agreeably enough, its occupant may not do so; and in this instance, the man, who had evidently considered that the high-road was made especially for his convenience, rolled out head over heels with a vengeance, that for the time being seemed to completely knock the breath out of his body. The horse lay kicking, but Jack sprung towards it, and quickly released it from its harness, when it sprung to its feet, and was off like the wind.

"Is he killed?" said Jack, as he took one of the side lamps from the chaise, and approached the man who lay in the road. "No: he is only stunned. Claude, this is a chance that may not again come to us."

"How do you mean, Jack?"

"Why your horse, you know, will go well in harness. Suppose we put him in the chaise, and you and May, and Mr. Brereton can get into the vehicle, while I ride saddle. We shall all get on without fatigue, and quickly too."

"It's a good thought," said Brereton; "but what shall we do with this man?—not leave him in the road, Jack."

"Certainly not. Lend me a hand, Mr. Brereton, and we will place him comfortably among the long grass in this meadow close at hand. There's a gap here in the hedge that is just the thing to carry him through."

Jack took the man's head and Markham Brereton his heels, and so they carried him through the gap in the hedge into the meadow, where they laid him down. Jack's private opinion was, that he was very drunk; but at all events he could come to no harm where they placed him, and as they intended to borrow (?) his chaise for a short time, it was the very best thing they could do for him. Jack had released the horse without any damage to the harness, and when he and Brereton raised the chaise, which they easily did, they found that, beyond one of the steps being broken off, it had not sustained the slightest injury. Indeed the step, by catching the ground first when it fell over, had sustained all the shock of the upset, and saved the whole machine. Claude's horse was quickly put in, and May and Brereton got into the vehicle. By a little—a very little crowding, it held Claude likewise, and Jack mounted his own horse, which May had been riding, and they were all ready for a start again.

"I'll go before," said Jack, "and pay the toll-bars, so that there will be no delay as we proceed: and now come on."

He set off at a hard trot, for he knew very well what Claude's horse could do, even with three people in a chaise behind him. At a good even pace of eight miles in the hour, away they went; and Winchester, with all its sad recollections to the party who were taking flight, soon faded away in the distance. They agreed that Jack should be the pioneer of their flight, and he was looking out for some road that would take them still further to the right, and out of the general track, when a loud voice from the road-side cried—

"Hilloa! where do you come from?"

"Winchester," said Jack, as he pulled in.

"Is there any news of the notorious highwayman, Claude Duval?"

"Plenty. He is nabbed at last."

"You don't mean that!—I say, Griffiths, here's somebody from Winchester says Claude Duval is caught at last."

"The devil he is," said another voice. "Well, I told you I thought it was of no use humbugging here any longer. Where was he taken?"

"In the Old Cathedral," said Jack. "The whole city is alive with the news, but they say he shot two or three people before they got him."

"That's likely enough. We had better push on to the city. Thank you, sir. Sorry to have interrupted you. Good night, sir."

"Good night," said Jack. "It's no interruption. I'm very glad I was able to tell you."

"Off went Jack again, and soon overtook the chaise which Claude had quietly driven on, but not so far as to be out of ear-shot, for he would quickly enough have gone to Jack's assistance if the conversation with the officers—for officers they were—had not chanced to go off quite so smoothly as, by good fortune, it really

did. The fact is, they had no suspicions of any one coming from Winchester. They looked for Claude as coming in the opposite direction altogether. After the party had driven on another mile or so, Jack let the chaise come up to him, and then called out—

"Stop a moment, Claude. I want to speak to you."

Claude instantly drew up.

"This won't do," said Jack. "We must get out of this road, right or left, the very first opportunity, or we shall, all the way to London, be running the gauntlet through parties of the police. We might escape them, it is true, but it is not now worth while running the risk."

"What do you advise, Jack?"

"Why, that we go across the country for thirty or forty minutes, until we get into quite a different line of road. What do you say, Claude—shall we adopt that course?"

"Any course you please, Jack, now. Let me be where I will, it is indifferent to me now. I have all the world before me, and I care not in what part of it fortune places me for awhile. Take the whole direction of the route, Jack."

Jack did not think proper to make any remark upon the desponding character of Claude's words, but he merely turned his horse's head again and went on.

"Let May speak to him," he muttered. "The women are always best to cope with a man when his heart is sad."

After proceeding about two miles further, and hoping for a road to the right, which, for various reasons, Jack thought would be preferable, he suddenly came upon one to the left, at the corner of which was a finger-post. It was much too dark for him to see what was there indicated, for the moon was again, as it frequently had been during the course of that night, shrouded by heavy clouds which obscured most effectually its light from the earth. Jack called, however, to Claude to draw up, and approaching the chaise, he said—

"I must borrow one of the lamps to see yon finger-post. I think I know the road, but we must trust as little to chance as possible.

Taking the lamp from its place at the side of the chaise, he held it up at arm's length, and with some difficulty read upon the finger-post—"To Stockbridge."

"Ah! that will do," he cried.

"Where will that lead us?" said Brereton.

"It is the high road to Salisbury, or rather, if I may call it such, it is a high cross-road. We will push right on to Salisbury, and then take our route to London by Andover, unless"—here Jack stooped close to the ear of Brereton as he replaced the lamp in the iron socket, and whispered to him—"unless, on the road between here and Salisbury, you and May can persuade Claude to turn yet his face to the south, and make an attempt to leave England."

"It would be the best."

"Unquestionably."

Markham Brereton nodded, as much as to say the attempt shall be made, and then Jack cantered down the Stockbridge road, promptly followed by the chaise which had formed so great a convenience to the fugitives. This road which they now took was different, very remarkably, from the one they had been pursuing. An air of coldness and desolation had rather characterised the road they had left, but this one to Stockbridge was quite verdant, and beautiful large trees hung upon each side of the way, whose topmost branches at places met over head with a pleasant rustling noise, and even at mid-day must have made a deep shady alcove. At that time, however, when all was darkness around, they made that part of the road look like a cavern. The lights from the chaise whistled along like Will-o'-the-Wisps, lending to the rich vegetation of the road-side a flickering radiance, and imparting to the leaves of the hedge-trees that metallic aspect which artificial light gives to vegetation. Neither Jack, however, nor the party in the chaise paid much attention to the scenery around, for their thoughts were too busy with their own griefs, and hopes, and fears. The picture was to

them a chaos, from out of which were to be shaped the events that were to make or mar them.

"This is gloomy," said Brereton.

Claude started.

"Pardon me," he said, "I did not hear you."

"Hear me, Claude," said May, "I wish particularly to speak to you—I hope you will pardon what I am about to say."

"Say on, May. Say on, sister."

CHAPTER CVII.

THE OLD MOON TAVERN.

May, now that she had got so quietly leave from her brother to speak, was silent for a few moments. It was not that she did not know what to say, but simply because she could not make up her mind which was the best way of saying it. At length, in a faltering voice, she said—

"All that you love, Claude, has not passed away?"

"No, May."

"Then you will, while you grieve for what is gone, think yet of what remains?"

"Yes, May."

"Oh, Claude, I am your sister—your only one. Do you remember when you and I, upon Hampstead Heath, knelt by—by—our father's——"

"Corpse," added Claude; "I remember it well."

"Then, Claude—" she began to weep so bitterly, that her words were scarcely articulate. "Then, Claude, you promised to be father—mother—brother—friend—all to me. You may still be so, Claude. Time, in which we were estranged, has passed away. The years that have gone are lost to us, and time present is but as a dream, but the future is the property of all who choose to use it. Claude, do you understand me?"

"I do."

"Then, Claude, it is that future—which is your property, and my property, and every one's property who likes to put in his claim to the possession—that I would have you use. It is that future, Claude, that lies outstretched before you as a glorious possession which you may make what use of you please."

Claude was silent for a few moments, and he said, in a tone of deep earnestness—

"I do mean to make something of the future."

"But something worthy, Claude? Something worthy of yourself and of those who love you."

"One is dead already."

"One?—One what?"

"One of those for whom I yet cling to life. One of the murderers of Cicely. I swear that——"

"No, no, Claude, you shall make no rash oaths; I feel now moved to say to you what I so much wished to say, and it is, that, for the sake of those whom you still love, you should not now sacrifice yourself to a spirit of revenge. The road is yet open to you to leave England. The boat still lingers by the beach. The ship still tosses on the sea, that will carry us all far—far away. Do you hear me?"

"With all my ears."

"And you will—you will——"

"Have my revenge."

May sighed deeply, and covering her face with her hands, her convulsive sobs shook her whole frame. Markham Brereton, who had said not one word to inter-

rupt the foregoing brief conversation, passed his arm round her waist and pressed her gently to him. It was as though he had said—

"Here is one who will yet be to you, father, brother, and friend. You are not quite desolate, May Duval."

She felt the appeal and looked up.

"Markham?"

"Yes, dear May."

"Can you say anything?"

"Hold!" said Claude. "There is no doubt he could say much—very much. Reason and argument are all upon your side, but I am unchangeable. Do not seek to turn me from my course. You could succeed but in one way, and that would be by killing me. Adopt that plan, and you do indeed stay it, but it is the only way.'

"I have nothing to say," remarked Markham Brereton, "but to hope that if time softens your determination, Claude, you will not allow a slavish love of consistency, as it is called, to stop you from the adoption of another and a better course."

"I will not."

"Now, May," added Markham Brereton. "You have acted quite right. You have done all that any human being could do. You have spoken well, and you have done your duty by your feelings. Leave the rest to time, for I am sure it will bring about the best results. Remember, that wounds freshly made, will not even bear the most delicate handling."

"You are right," said May, "I will say no more."

"That is a great relief to me," said Claude.

"During this discussion, Claude had unconsciously driven the chaise very slowly, so that Jack, hearing that something was going on, had ridden close enough to hear all that passed, and he felt satisfied that a strong effort had been made to turn Claude from his purpose, and still it had been made ineffectually. He said nothing himself, for he found that the dialogue was in good hands, but when he found that, he rode on with a feeling of great depression.

"Alas!" he said, "Claude will sacrifice himself."

Jack was now very fearful that some one might be met upon the road whom Claude would take it into his head to include in his plan of general revenge against all who in any way had been instrumental to the death of Cicely, and he looked out very anxiously as he proceeded. The road for four miles further was solitary, but suddenly the lights of the chaise flashed upon a horseman, who seemed to be pausing for its approach by the road side. They all saw this man. Jack, as he passed him, raising his voice, said—

"Good night."

The man made no reply, and in another moment they no longer saw him. Claude, when May looked into his face again, was very pale. They went on without making any remark about this stranger, until the lights of the chaise flashed upon him again, or just such another figure upon horseback, standing by the road side. Jack was taken by surprise, swerved a little, but quickly recovering himself, he cried—

"Who are you?"

There was no reply.

"Stop, Jack," cried Claude, "I will suffer this no longer."

"As he spoke he threw the reins to Brereton, and stood up in the chaise.

"Who are you?" he cried. "Speak, or I fire."

There was no reply, and Claude fired. The chaise had got on some dozen yards past the spot where the figure had been seen, so that it was, to tell the truth, rather a random shot, but yet Claude took it, and then, before either May or Markham Brereton could stop him, he sprang out of the chaise, and snatching one of the lamps from the side of it, he rushed back to the spot where the horseman had appeared. Jack, being mounted, followed him instantly.

"Hold, Claude! Hold!" said Jack. "Do nothing hastily; you may be running into some snare set on purpose for you."

Claude held up the lamp. There was not the smallest vestige of any one there, or of any one having been there.

"This is strange," said Jack.

"Strange, indeed," said Claude. "Hold the lamp, Jack."

Jack did so, and Claude scrambled to the top of a high bank crowned by a thicket, with here and there young elms shooting up from amid the blackthorn. He looked earnestly around him, but he saw nothing but the quiet undisturbed vegetation.

"Escaped?" said Jack.

"Perhaps so," replied Claude.

He then descended the bank, and slowly walked back to the chaise again, into which he got without a word.

"You found no one," said May.

"No. Into thin air that horseman seemed to dissolve. I am not superstitious, but yet it is very, very strange. Markham, do you believe in the supernatural at all?"

"If you mean," said Brereton, "to ask me if I incline to the opinion that the man on horseback was a ghost, Claude, I answer no as unhesitatingly as you like. Shall I drive?"

"Aye, if you will."

Claude made a movement to give Markham Brereton his place, but the latter checked him, saying—

"I shall do very well here. You watch the hedge as we go along. Who knows but we may see our mysterious mounted acquaintance again. You too, May, keep watch; I shall have enough to do to attend to the horse."

"In this way they all went on for another mile, when Claude cried—

"There—there he is again!"

Brereton pulled up.

"Stop! Fiend—devil; be you what you may!" cried Claude, in an excited tone. "I fear you not, coward. Do you again vanish from me?"

"Gone!" cried Jack. "He is gone again. Oh! Claude—Claude!"

"What would you say, Jack?"

"Nay," cried Brereton, "this is folly. Are we children, to be thus played upon? You take the reins again, Claude, and I will keep my eye fixed upon the hedge, and with a pistol in my hand, that has never yet played me false, I shall not fear to fire at whatever I may see. Drive on, Claude."

Scarcely had these words come from Brereton's lips, when the most horrible yelling laughter that could be supposed to come from the lips of any fiend, came upon the night. This dreadful yell—half shriek, half laugh—lasted but a moment; but it seemed to have filled the air for full five minutes afterwards with its terrible echoes, and it made all those who heard it tremble with affright. The two horses shook and cowered from the hedges, and Claude, as he grasped the side of the chaise, said, in a gasping whisper—

"Can—can such—things be?"

"God of Heaven!" said May. "What was that?"

Brereton was silent, and Jack sat upon his horse, huddled up as though he had been death-stricken by that frightful sound, which had found an echo in all their brains, and loaded the night air with horrors. There was a pause of some minutes' duration, and then the shrill sound of a distant clock came upon their ears. Claude gave the horse a lash with the whip, and off they all went.

* * * * * *

In another half hour it was day-dawn. The mystery of the horseman by the road-side, and of the horrible laugh was discussed, and after exhausting all conjecture upon the subject, Claude and his friends gave it up in despair; but yet it made a deep and lasting impression upon the imagination of them all. They pro-

ceeded right on to Salisbury without meeting with any adventure worthy of notice, and at that city they put up for six hours. After that time they proceeded in as direct a route for London as they could. They passed through Andover, Kingclere, and Reading, and finally entered London by the western road without meeting with any adventure of sufficient consequence to stand beside those remarkable episodes in the life of Claude Duval, which we have already laid before the reader.

"Where shall we go?" said Brereton.

"Follow me at once to Drury Lane," said Jack. "We shall find shelter and welcome at the 'Moon!'"

In a few minutes more they travelled from Holborn into that salubrious (?) thoroughfare.

"Our journey is over," said Claude.

* * * * * *

They alighted at the "Old Moon," which has already been introduced to the reader, in Drury Lane. And thus was Claude Duval once more, after making the most vigorous attempt to leave his evil courses, thrown into the arena again. Was it fate—providence—chance—or what was it that had stopped this man from leaving England as he meditated, and trying, in some foreign land, to regain the good name that had passed away from him in England. Alas! what a thousand pities it was that one gifted as he was by nature, with capacities of a superior order, should, by a confluence of circumstances, be thrown upon the world as one of its scourges—an outcast from all that was good, peaceful, and happy. At that juncture, when his heart was softened by affection—when he had about him those whom he loved and who loved him, and who were ready to share his voluntary exile, surely society should have held back, and said—

"Let him and his go."

But no, the spirit of legal revenge had taken hold of the authorities, and they had offered the most tempting rewards to the underlings of the law for the destruction of this man. It would seem that in this transaction—for it must be remembered that from first to last the authorities knew that it was to leave England Claude Duval wished, they did not say to themselves—

"Let us get rid of this man, who makes our highways dangerous," but "Let us have this man's blood, for he is willing to turn away from his wickedness."

Never had human being been pursued with such inveterate rancour as he had been—and what was the result? One of the most pure and innocent beings that the light of day ever shone upon had been sacrificed, while he, against whom we may say the resources of a nation had been put in motion, escaped, and with a bosom burning with revenge stood free and unshamed in one of the most populous thoroughfares of London. No one had yet gloated over the gold that was to be the price of his destruction. No one had yet succeeded in selling the blood of Claude Duval to the authorities. Disappointment, death, and pain had resulted from the brutal attempt to place society in arms against a human being who had virtually said—

"Forgive me—I will sin no more!"

CHAPTER CVIII.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

After his great fatigue, Claude slept well. The publican had placed him in a room where he knew he would be safe, for the only entrance to it was at the head of his own bed, so that Claude was very effectually hidden. The comfort and serenity of the rest of our travellers were well seen to likewise, and when

the morning light from a small window in the roof of his chamber, not larger than the removal of one tile afforded it to be, fell upon Claude's eyes, it reminded him of all that had happened for the last ten days, which seemed like the feverish excitement of a dream. There he lay, the man who had eluded the police of a nation, who had bearded and insulted all the force, civil and military, who could



ANTHONY CONCEALS CLAUDE DUVAL IN THE BEAM AT THE "OLD MOON."

be brought against him. There he lay, looking up to that small window, as calm and passionless as though he had been one of the most ordinary personages the bright sun ever looked down upon with an eye of warmth. But this quiescent state was not to last. Gradually the mental functions unfolded themselves, awakening fully to life and energy, and then Claude felt it was indeed no dream tha he had passed through, but a fearful, horrible reality. And yet in all his

adventurous career, in all his hair-breadth escapes, there was nothing to chain his attention—all was forgotten save one frightful image, and that he saw in his mind's eye with a distinctness that looked like present visibility. It was the still mute form of the murdered Cicely upon the communion-table of the old Cathedral of Winchester. Yes, that was the image that rose up between him and all other objects, and seemed as though it would for ever so rise up to madden him by the thought that indirectly he had been the means of leading her to such a fate.

"Cicely! Cicely!" he cried. "Oh, God! she is lost to me for ever. I can, in another world, hope for no connection with her pure spirit, for she is with God! while I—oh, horror!—horror!—horror!"

Tap!—tap!—tap! came a sound upon the wall of the room. Claude was still as the grave in a moment. A rustling sound succeeded. Then the click of a small lock, and the night-capped head of Anthony, the host of the "Old Moon," was popped into Claude's little chamber.

"Holloa! captain," he said, "what's the matter?"

"Oh, is it you?" he said.

"Yes; all's right. Are you ill?"

"Sick at heart, Anthony."

"Oh, that will get all right. I know you have gone through what no other man ever went through, and I will venture to say, what no other man ever will go through; but you make yourself comfortable, and always remember that what's past is gone."

"No, Anthony, no."

"No?"

"The past leaves its worse than presence behind. It leaves the pain of the wound that it has inflicted, to fester in the heart. Oh, if I could but forget."

"Humph!" muttered Anthony to himself. "He seems in a bad way this morning, poor fellow. I'll just get up and brew him something rather strong. Well, well—I don't wonder at it, for if only one half of what I have heard about him lately be true, he has had enough to turn the brains of most men. Cheer up—cheer up, Claude."

"I will try, Anthony."

"Then it's as good as done. If a man tries to cheer up, half the battle is over, and he is in a good condition for winning the other half. Be still, and don't, on any account, stir from your hiding-place till I tell you."

"I have no inclination to move just at present."

"Good; I won't keep you waiting."

Anthony was hastily dressing himself while this little colloquy was going on between him and Claude, and by its conclusion, he had completed his toilette. He hurried down stairs, and made enquiries of a scout he kept about Drury Lane as to whether there was anything of a suspicious character going on.

"All is quiet, master," was the reply; "but an old woman has been by the house a great many more times than necessary."

"An old woman?

"Yes, a big old girl, too, that looks, to my mind, not just the thing."

"Well, Bob, keep an eye upon her, and if anything further should happen, just pop into the bar to me, and if I am not there ring my private bell."

"Yes, master."

This old woman, who was reported to have passed and repassed the public-house much oftener than seemed reasonable, might, or might not, be an emissary of the police; but, at all events, he was not disposed to put himself out of the way about trifles, and leaving to his scout, Bob, the task of watching her, he went into the bar to prepare something for Claude. This something consisted of half-a-pint of the finest old port wine, warmed, sweetened, and spiced, but without a drop of water in it. He took it up to Claude himself, and when, by dint of persuasion he had induced him to partake of it, Claude could not but admit that he felt much better in consequence.

"Tell me," he said, "how are my friends?"

"All right and comfortable. Mr. Brereton is waiting to see you; and as for Jack, he ain't up yet. Lord, what a rum story that is of Jack's."

"It is indeed. Do you know where my sister is?"

"Not I; but Mr. Brereton, I dare say, can tell you. Shall I bring him in?"

"Yes—oh yes."

"Very well; you make yourself quite easy, and I will soon put things to rights for you, and above all things, remember that you are quite safe."

"I know I am."

"That's right; so now I'll bring in your friend, Mr. Brereton, to you, as I dare say he will be up and about soon."

The landlord left Claude to his meditations, and in a very short time he returned with Brereton, who, to get into the room had to scramble over the head of the landlord, since it was the bureau that hid it from observation. Claude smiled faintly when he saw him, and held out his hand. Brereton grasped it.

"Are you well, Claude?"

"As well, Markham, as I can hope to be after——"

He paused, and turned his head aside, for the sight of Markham Brereton again brought Cicely vividly before his imagination. Brereton then spoke—

"We are both afflicted," he said, "from the same cause. I have lost a sister whom I loved tenderly, and you a wife, who in another land might, and no doubt would have been, the solace of your life. But it is as useless as it is unmanly to indulge in long continued grief for the dead."

"Can we help it?"

"Yes, in a great measure. Reason will go far to enable us to help it, Claude."

"Can reason reconcile me to her loss?"

"Answer me a question, Claude, instead of asking me one."

"I will."

"What would you have suffered to spare Cicely pain?"

"Anything in the world. I am one who can calmly bear pain, so that it is only myself that suffers, and not those whom I love."

"Indeed then, Claude, you have answered as well as me. Does Cicely suffer?—No. Is she enduring pain?—No. Death is the end of all pain and of all suffering. It is then, not for her, but for yourself that you weep. Think again, Claude, and you will see that I am right. You know that I loved her."

"You are right," said Claude. "All grief for the dead is perfectly selfish."

"Certainly it is."

"You have done me good, Markham, and I thank you for it. I shall be better now, but while I may succeed in controlling my tears for Cicely, I will not forget that I have yet to avenge her."

"Forget that, Claude. Those who took her life were merely the weak assistants of others; and you sacrificed the actual one of them who did the deed. By seeking for the revenge you talk of, you might as well feel your ire kindled at the musket from which sped the fatal bullet."

"You mean that I cannot reach high enough in my vengeance to strike those who put the instruments of their own barbarous policy in motion?"

"I do."

"You are mistaken, Markham."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You may, in your cool judgment, believe or believe me not, but in this matter of private revenge, where there is a will there is a way; he who seeks the revenge is sufficiently unscrupulous as to the means which he takes to accomplish it, and as to the extent to which it may work. That am I!"

"I see," said Brereton, "it will be quite useless to argue this point with you just now, but I hope that time will soften your feelings."

"No—no."

"You do not ask for May?"

"Pardon me, I had forgotten. When the whole soul is engrossed by one sub-

ject, there can be few others than can for a moment even successfully intrude; and yet I do love May. Is she well?"

"Yes, perfectly; but full of heavy affliction. I have procured a lodging for her with a widow woman in Museum Street, close at hand. And now, Claude, what are your real views as regards the future?"

"I am at war!"

"At war! With whom?"

"With what is called society, Markham Brereton."

Alas, Claude! is society worth your making war against?"

"It has made war against me, Markham, and so you cannot blame me for accepting the challenge. Henceforward I shall do what I can to conquer. I shall take to the road again."

"I regret to hear you say that."

"What then would you have me do, Markham? What is there left for me but the road? I have once taken to that pursuit, and it is evidently the determination that society has come to, to keep me in it. I am as one to so many, that it is impossible for me to resist its behests. So, to the road again go I."

"Alas! alas!"

"Do not pity me. Some friendly hand will lay me low; and he who sends a hatchet now through the brains of Gentleman Jack, as they will call me, will not incur any great penalty. With my last breath I will forgive him."

Markham Brereton saw that there was nothing further he could say that would be at all likely to influence Claude, at all events at present, so he gave up the matter in utter despair. Claude seemed to see exactly the state of feelings of Markham, and after a few moments' pause he said to him—

"Remember that I have no tie now to bind me to the world. If you had not loved my sister as you do, I should, perhaps, have thought it necessary to live for her, but as it is——"

Markham Brereton held up his hand and said—

"Hush."

"What is it?" said Claude.

"I hope nothing that concerns you, but I heard just now a small bell ring violently—there it is again."

"It does concern me."

Scarcely had Claude pronounced these words, than the door at the head of the landlord's bed opened, and Anthony made his appearance.

"No hurry," he said. "Slow and sure, but the grabs are upon us."

"Ah!"

Claude started up and laid his hands upon his pistols.

"No, no," said Anthony, "they will do sometimes, but not now. We must play the fox's game, not the lion's. Come along, Claude, and you, Mr. Brereton, if you will lend me a hand we may manage matters."

"Anything that I can do," said Brereton.

"This way. Now, what I want you to be at is to help me to move my bedstead to another part of the room, so as to leave the door opening to Claude's chamber quite clear to be seen. I will bestow him somewhere else, and if you will then occupy his bed for half an hour, all will be right."

There was no time for anything in the shape of delay. Brereton and Claude both exerted themselves to do what was necessary, and the arrangements of the landlord were completed in a few moments. Claude dressed himself hurriedly, and while Brereton undressed and got into the bed, he followed the landlord from the room. The small bell rung again sharply.

"Ah, there is no time to lose," said Anthony. "Come on, Claude, I will place you where the devil himself would find it no easy matter to find you. This way—this way, Claude. After me."

CHAPTER CIX.

A SEARCH AND A VISIT.

We may mention that the scout who was placed by Anthony upon the watch in Drury Lane, had soon seen good reason to believe that the seeming old woman who had passed the "Old Moon" so repeatedly, was none other than an officer of the police in disguise, and such being the fact, he, of course, was not slow in giving Anthony notice of it. He rung the small bell, which was a warning of danger in the "Old Moon," and then going to the street again, he saw enough to fully confirm his suspicions. The pretended female, upon reaching the corner of a court in Drury Lane, was joined by six men, and after a brief consultation they all came at a brisk pace towards the public house. Now, in those days, and in these likewise, for all we know to the contrary, officers of the police prided themselves very much upon the manner in which they were able at a glance to know a thief from a true man, and it is probable enough that practice and experience may have supplied them with a kind of tact in that way; but admitting so much, there is another fact in connection with the subject that deserves notice, and that is the extraordinary skill and cunning with which thieves will scent out an officer. Let the police functionary conceal himself how he will, he is sure to have a something about him that proclaims his calling, and if this was the case long ago, when officers really took pains to conceal their profession, and put on good disguises, what must it be now, when a policeman, if he disguises himself ever so cunningly, always takes care to keep on the police boots, and generally police inexpressibles. These Solons of the "force" must be of the opinion of those wild animals, who, when they are chased, hide their heads in some hole and fancy themselves out of sight because they cannot themselves see, forgetting that they leave out their tails to tell the secret of their whereabouts. But to return to the scout. That individual no sooner saw that assurance was doubly sure, than he made his way to the private bell again, and gave it a vigorous pull. This was the peal that had convinced Anthony that the danger was getting really imminent. We shall now, therefore, again accompany the landlord and Claude. Duval thought that he was to be secreted in some of the underground regions of the house, and he was surprised when the landlord did not take him down stairs at all, but only traversed with him a long landing on the upper floor until he came to a room that was used as a kind of store for keeping all sorts of out-of-the-way goods. Old butter firkins, jars, bottles, baskets, broken furniture, cheeses, and such a *melange* of matters as might be supposed to be partly the refuse and partly the stock of a public-house, was there to be found. The Old Moon was one of those ancient wooden houses of which now so few remain in London. It occupied the space of at least two modern residences, in which everything is done that can be done to save a foot of land, and the consequence was, that it had in it such a number of intricate passages, that it would have taken a month's residence within its precincts thoroughly to comprehend it. Then, in the construction of the old house, about as much timber was used as would now-a-days suffice for an ordinary street of "eligible dwelling houses." In almost all the rooms there were huge beams, standing up like giants, to support the walls and the roofing, while across many of the roofs, just about a foot or so from the ceiling, would run a beam of extraordinary thickness, which was supposed to hold the walls together in some way, and by adding weight to add solidity and security to the structure. It is with one of these horizontal beams that we have now to do in the attic full of miscellaneous property to which we have already alluded. This tremendous beam of wood, which was about three feet square, did duty as a shelf as well as a stay to the house, for on the upper side of it were placed a number of small articles, and several hooks and nails driven into the side of it, served to suspend some hams and bottles of odd-looking liquids with greasy cords round their necks. To the surprise of Claude, the landlord commenced stripping this beam of all its various encumbrances.

"What are you about?" said Claude.

"You must hide here."

"Hide here?"

Claude looked around him and shook his head.

"You don't see any likely place at all here, do you now?" said Anthony.

"I confess I do not."

"Well, I'm glad of that, for if you don't see it others may not. Come, look at this beam of wood, it has a solid look about it."

"Ah, it is hollow."

"Yes, when I said solid, of course, that did the business. Behold, Claude. I don't think you will have much chance of being found out here."

Anthony had cleared the beam of all obstructions, and then, by the aid of a small chisel that he picked up from the floor of the attic, he took out the side of the beam, showing that, in lieu of being solid, it was only composed of four pieces of wood, not thicker, each of them, than floor boarding. The space in the inside was quite large enough for a man of a size beyond Claude's, and he saw in a moment that he could lie down within it, and suffer no personal inconvenience.

"Will that do?" said Anthony.

"Yes—yes. I have my pistols with me, though, so that, if by any chance they should find me out, they shall not obtain a bloodless victory."

"I don't think you will have occasion for them. No less than five of the best men on the road have found shelter and safety here at different times, and it will be odd if it don't serve your turn for once. Now for it. Clamber up.—Don't mind me."

Anthony stooped down with his hands upon his knees, so as to form a bank for Claude to clamber up by, and he did so in a moment.

"All's right," said Anthony, when he saw him lying down within the seeming beam. "Now I'll cover you up, and don't stir until you hear me say 'All's right, Claude.'"

"I will not."

Anthony immediately replaced the side of the beam, and then silently, but rapidly, proceeded to load it again with all the articles he had displaced from it. He carefully placed dust in the seam where the boards joined, and in the space of about two minutes he had completed his arrangements, and instantly left the attic.

"Master!—Master!" cried a voice from below. "Master!"

"Aye!—Aye!"

"Here's some gentlemen want to see you."

"To see me? I'm coming."

When Anthony reached the lower part of the house, he was met by Jack in the costume of a waiter, for he had put on such a disguise for the express purpose of preventing his recognition by any one. He was even now afraid that the officers, who were not far off, would hear him if he said anything confidentially, so he kept up his assumed character in speaking to Anthony.

"Master," he said. "You are wanted directly."

"Indeed, Sam. Who is it?"

"Some gentlemen, sir; and they have shut up the front door."

"The deuce they have."

As Anthony passed Jack, the latter said in an earnest whisper—

"Is he safe?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven! I am easy, then."

"Hush!"

Anthony passed on, and soon encountered the officers, one of whom said to him—

"Well, Master Anthony, this is rather a serious affair. We have positive information that some one uncommonly like Claude Duval came here last night. You know he is no common criminal. and his capture no common object. The consequences to you of hiding him here would be absolutely ruinous, for the magistracy will take it u

"Well," said Anthony; "what's the end of all this?"

"Why, good advice, if you will take it, Anthony. It is to give up him whom we seek at once, and spare yourself the consequences of having him found here, hidden by you. Come: a hundred pound note is worth having. No one will be a bit the wiser, while you will be something the richer."

"That's true."

"Will you take it, then? Only say the word."

"Now do I look like such a goose as to refuse a hundred pound note when it is offered to me in this sort of way, for nothing?"

"Not exactly for nothing. Next to nothing, you may call it. You have only to give up to us, without further trouble, Claude Duval, and his associate, a man whom we don't know by name, but should know by sight."

"Without further trouble!" exclaimed Anthony, opening his eyes to their utmost width. "Well, that is a good idea. How am I to know what amount of trouble it may be to catch a man, who, for all I know, may be in the moon?"

"That is sufficient," said the officer, with an air of vexation. "If we find him, the consequences of hiding him be upon your own head, Mr. Landlord. Now, my friends, we will not leave a hole or corner unsearched in this house."

"I might," said Anthony, "ask you for your warrant, only that I really would much rather you should satisfy yourselves than not: so search away as long as you like, only I don't see why you should shut up my door and stop my business. That I won't put up with, for your warrant, if you have one, won't carry you so far."

"We will try that," said the officer. "Your house is pretty well surrounded by this time. There are twenty-five officers on this expedition, so that you see we feel tolerably confident of our man here, whatever sort of face you may put upon the matter."

"As you will.—As you will. I cannot resist so many; but I will take proceedings if I find I have the power to do so."

Two of the officers now remained to keep guard at the door, while the remainder of the force commenced a search, such as the "Old Moon" had not witnessed for a very long time indeed. Each of the officers had a holster pistol in his right hand while he made this search for Claude Duval; and there can be very little question but that, had he been seen, the intention was to shoot him at once, rather than run any further risks with him, especially as the government proclamation promised the same reward for him, alive or dead. The cellars, which were very capacious, were thoroughly searched, but, of course, without any result but disappointment. Anthony accompanied the officers, and it was amusing to see how they watched his looks upon coming into any room to commence a rigorous investigation of it. When minute after minute passed, and room after room was searched without any one being found, the officers began to get desperate, and muttered oaths and threats of what they would do if they did catch Claude, escaped from their lips. At length the landlord's bed-room was entered, and one of the officers walked into that very apartment which had been so recently occupied by Claude Duval.

"Hilloa!" he cried. "Here's some one in bed."

Two others immediately joined him, and dragging the bed clothes from the lower part of Markham Brereton's face, one cried—

"Who are you?"

"Pray what is that to you?" said Markham.

"Oh! I know him," said another of the officers. "Don't you recollect he was tried at the Bailey for highway robbery?"

"And proved to be innocent," said Brereton.

"Well, yes; but—but a man who has once been tried——"

"Whether innocent or guilty, has the odium attached to him for ever, I am quite aware that such is the case in this free, enlightened, and religious country. It is as well established a fact in England, as that he who is poor, must necessarily be dishonest. Well, what do you want with me?"

"Nothing with you, sir."

"Then get out of my bed-room."

"It's rather odd for a man to be in bed so late."

"Very likely."

The officer found that there was nothing to be got by prolonging a conversation with Mr. Brereton, so, after an active scrutiny of the chamber in which he lay, they took their leave of him, and proceeded to the examination of the rest of the rooms upon that floor. One of these rooms was the one with the beam. That apartment was the last but one that was searched. The officers turned aside an old door frame that was in one corner, and then, with a hearty curse of their own non-success, they left the room. Anthony breathed more freely, for admirable as the hiding-place of Claude was, yet human means are not infallible, and he might have been discovered, notwithstanding all that had been done to keep him secret. In another half-hour the search was over, and the principal officer turning to Anthony, said—

"We are foiled, but not satisfied."

"Very good. I can't help it, whether you are satisfied or not."

Without another word they left the house; but a quarter of an hour after that, two men, habited like graziers, came into the public-house, and asked if they could be accommodated for a day and a night. Anthony knew both of them.

CHAPTER CX.

A GREAT PERSONAGE.

Jack was in the bar of the "Old Moon" when these two men came in.

"Oh, yes," said the landlord. "I shall be glad to accommodate you."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said one. "We be strange to Lunnon."

"Ah, you look like it. I suppose you will stay now?—or do you propose looking about you a little, and coming here to sleep?"

"Oh, we have been looking about us a bit, and we have seen St. Paul's, and the Tower, and the Exeter Change besides; so we wool stay now belike."

"Very good. Just step this way, and I'll show you the parlour, gentlemen. What would you like to have for dinner?"

"Anything as you have, landlord. We be main peckish."

Anthony showed them into the parlour, and handed them a couple of newspapers. Then telling them that he would send them in some steaks and pickles in a quarter of an hour, he left them to themselves. When he reached the bar again, he said—

"Jack, do you know them?"

"No."

"One is Foster, the officer, and the other is Lee, the police spy."

Jack changed colour.

"Pho! there is no danger now they are known. No doubt they think that they are doing the thing rather cleanly, but as soon as I knew really who they were, the danger ceased. Look here, Jack. You see this little bit of red cord projecting from the wall?"

"I do."

"Well, Jack, keep your eye on the parlour-door, and if you see one of them come out, just give this cord a touch. It rings my little alarm bell."

"I understand. You are going to prepare Claude?"

"I am. But we must not seem to know anything; I will order them their steaks and pickles, and you draw them a pot of porter, Jack, and take it in to them. You can manage to do that?"

"Oh, yes, yes."

Jack did do it to perfection, and with the porter in his hand, and an apron and pair of sleeves on him, he looked the very beau ideal of a respectable middle-aged waiter. A wig and some colour very different from the natural one of his skin, pretty effectually disguised his face, so that he had no fears that either of the men in the parlour would know him. Jack entered the room quite briskly.



CLAUDE'S REVENGE ON LORD ABINGDON, THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

"Porter, gentlemen. The steak will soon be ready."

"We be main obliged to you," said one, and then with a wink at the other he added, "what do you think?"

', No, no," said the other, "don't risk it."

Jack quite understood that one of them was for trying to suborn him, but that the other thought it would be decidedly unsafe to do so. He did not wishthem to

try it, for now that he knew who they were, he had nothing to gain by any confidence they might be indiscreet enough to place in him.

"Any further orders, gentlemen?" he said.

"No, no, only the steak and pickles."

While this was going on, Anthony slipped up to the attic, in the cross-beam of which Claue was concealed, and said to him—

"All's right, Claude. How are you?"

"Quite well," said Claude, "can you let me out?"

"Yes, in a minute."

It took some time to unhook the hams, candles, and other matters that hung on the side of the beam, but at length Claude was liberated from his curious place of concealment, and the moment he reached the floor, Anthony said to him—

"The Old Moon is too hot to hold you, Claude."

"Ah, I thought it would be." Your opinion only tallies with mine. You think I ought to leave directly?"

"I do indeed."

"How, Anthony?—that is the only question."

"Why, look you, Claude; I am quite convinced that a strong push is being made to take you here; therefore, to leave by the door is out of the question. The old house is pretty well watched in all places. But where there is a will there is a way. I will have your horse waiting for you at the corner of Denmark-street, and there is an empty house in the court at the back of here, and one of the windows of which is only about fifteen feet from the corner of a part of the roof of this house. If you can leave by that window, you can get out at the back of the empty house, over a yard or two, and so make good your escape. Will you try it?"

"Will I? Can you doubt?"

"Very well. Come on at once. Only leave word where Jack shall join you, for, after you are gone, I know that wild horses would not keep him here."

"Let him meet me by the One Tun on Hampstead Heath, one hour after sunset to-night."

"Good. You may take your oath that he will be there, Claude; so now come at once, and be off, for I shall not feel comfortable while you are in the house."

"Is it safe at daylight?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly. The court has not the sort of inhabitants to betray you, and if any one wished to do so, who might by accident see you, they won't have time till you are off and away. What costume will you wear?"

"I will fit myself out from Jack's portmanteau. By the bye, did you remove it from the bedroom?"

"Not I."

"It would have told tales if the officers had looked into it, but we ought to owe something to good fortune as well as to ill. Show me the way, Anthony, to my room again, for amid the intricacies of your old house I might lose my way.

Anthony conducted him to the chamber, where they found Brereton up and dressed, waiting for some intelligence. He was well pleased to see Claude, who soon made a most remarkable change in his appearance, for he looked like some respectable clergyman when he had made himself fully up.

"Now," said Anthony, "we shall need all the strength we three can muster, in order to place a plank that I have got ready over the chasm between the gable end of this house and the window of the empty one in the court."

"I can jump it," said Claude.

Anthony shook his head.

"No, Claude. If the space that is filled up by the window were open, I should say, jump away, but it is an awkward thing to jump against a closed window, with the chance only of your weight carrying you through it. The least thing might send you a depth of sixty feet upon the cold stones below."

"I don't want to die yet," said Claude; "I must have my revenge yet. I will

preserve my life and my strength more religiously now than I have ever done before. I consider that I have a mission to perform."

Brereton would fain have made some remark upon this subject, but he did not like to do so, for he knew enough of Claude to feel convinced that if anything turned him from his purpose of taking vengeance upon all who were in any way accessory to the death of Cicely, it would be time—Time, that great agent of all mental changes! He and the landlord, with Claude closely following, went to one of the attics, in the roof of which was a trap door opening to the top of the house. In that attic, too, was a long piece of planking, quite of sufficient dimensions to reach the fifteen feet required, and as light as was consistent with strength. It had before done the same service that it was now called upon to perform. After they had all three scrambled on to the roof, and dragged the plank after them, Anthony pointed to the gable end which faced the window, and said—

"It will take us all three to hold the plank by the small end of it here, while we push it across the chasm."

It was an awkward job, for there was but a frail place for them to stand upon, but they did, after two or three abortive efforts, succeed in getting the further end of the plank fairly rested upon the window sill of the empty house, and what was more, they were pretty well satisfied that two children, at an attic window close at hand, were the only auditors of the transaction, so that one part of the danger that had been apprehended from the affair, was got rid of.

"Good bye, Claude," said Brereton.

"Good bye, and good luck to you," said Anthony.

They both shook hands with him, but Claude's feelings were too much upon the strain for him to say anything, and only looking an adieu, he commenced the passage of that frail and perilous bridge. To walk across the bridge would have been next to impossible, for the vibration of so frail a structure would have been sufficient to throw any one off it. He did not therefore venture upon such a course, but upon his hands and knees he set out upon the expedition. Even then it was a perilous affair, and the more especially as he had to make his way through the window when he got across the plank. The window was close shut, but Claude, as soon as he reached it, having previously provided himself with a glove, dashed his hand through the first pane of glass he came to, and unfastened the window. It was then but the work of a moment to fling up the sash.

"All's right," said Anthony.

"Thank God—yes," said Brereton.

Claude did not stand upon ceremony in getting into the empty house, but head foremost, in the best way he was able, he plunged through the open window, and so for a moment disappeared from the sight of his friends. This disappearance, however, was but for a moment—they saw him again, waving his hand, and then he was gone and the window closed.

"Now for the horse," said Anthony. "Ah, the bell!—Jack has something to tell me, I suppose. Come on, Mr. Brereton. We must get down stairs as quickly as we can, now, for something is amiss."

They both ran along a narrow passage, and got to the head of the attic stairs in a few moments. Anthony went first. The stairs were very dark, and he had not got down above half-a-dozen of them, when a voice a short distance below him cried—

"Who are you?"

"The devil in a gale of wind," said Anthony. "Who are you?"

"Never you mind. Surrender, or I fire. I am an officer."

"Blaze away."

Bang! went a pistol shot.

"All's fair at fair time," cried Anthony, as he sprung upon one of the pretended graziers, who by the flash of the pistol upon the dark staircase had been revealed to him. He got hold of the barrel of the discharged pistol, and wrenched it from the officer's hand, and then, as he dealt him a blow upon the head with the butt end of it, he said—

"My friend, if you play at bowls you must expect rubs!"

They heard the officer fall backwards and go bumping down the attic stairs until he reached the landing place, and then all was still."

"Have you killed him?" said Brereton.

"On my faith I don't know, but he tried to kill me."

"He did."

"Then let him take his chance. I will run down and open a shutter of the staircase, for I can enlighten the route to my attics when I like. You stay where you are for a minute or two, Mr. Brereton."

Anthony ran down stairs and opened a shutter. A stream of light came in, and there lay the officer perfectly insensible. At that moment a voice from below called out—

"Mr. Lee—Mr. Lee—where are you?"

"Who's that?" said Anthony. Below there! If you are a friend of a gentleman who lies here upon my landing, you had better come up, for something seems to be rather the matter with him."

"Beware all of you," added the voice; "I am an officer, and I'll blow out the brains of the first man who raises a finger against me. I am Foster, the officer."

Accompanied by these words up came the other mock grazier, with a loaded pistol in each hand.

"Holloa!" said Anthony. "Ain't you a grazier either?"

"You are all my prisoners."

"Certainly, if you wish it. The 'all' is only me and this gentleman, and the whole of our crime is that we were coming down stairs and heard a row, which has apparently ended in the upset of your friend here."

"Who has done this deed?"

"Ah, that's the question. Somebody ran down stairs very fast, and must have passed you, I should think."

"No. No one passed me that I was aware of, unless they stood up in the dark, for your staircase, at places, is like night. This sort of thing won't do though for me. It was a fool's trick of Mr. Lee to proclaim himself so soon, but he thought he would do wonders by popping up-stairs at unawares."

As he said this, the officer made his way into a front room, and throwing up the window, he sprung a rattle that he took from his pocket, which, in a few moments, brought half a dozen more police to the house.

CHAPTER CX.

CLAUDE'S PROGRESS IN REVENGE.

We must leave Anthony to get on with the police in the best way he is able, not for a moment doubting but that his sagacity and courage will be more than a match for them, while we follow Claude, with whose fortunes we have more immediately to do. When he had waved his hand in token of adieu to Brereton and Anthony, he closed the window of the empty house, and began to make the best of his way out of it. He ran down stairs, and opening the back-door, got into the yard; from which, the only mode of escaping was by crossing two other yards, and then dropping from the wall of the last one into the small paved court. It was not a time for hesitation, so Claude clambered the first wall in a moment, and crossed the first of the two yards between him and the court. No one appeared to offer him the least obstruction, but when he got into the second yard he almost jumped upon a man who was walking in it smoking a pipe.

"Holloa!" cried the man; "old friends generally come in at the street door. Who are you?"

"A fugitive," said Claude.

"Oh, from the 'Old Moon?' The grabs are after you?"

"Yes."

"All's right, then. Don't you cross into the court. They have got a couple of runners at the mouth of it. I'll let you out at my door."

"I am much beholden to you."

"Oh, don't mention it. The family, of course, must help each other. How is old Anthony?"

"Quite well. You are then, I presume——"

"A cracksman, at your service. I don't ask who you are, because I suspect."

"Suspect what?"

"You are young Guy, called the 'Yorkshire Knight,' ain't you?"

"No. I am Claude Duval."

The man with the pipe started back in surprise. Dashing the pipe then to the ground, he cried—

"Here's a honour. Have I *actiwally* got Gentleman Jack in my crib? Lord love you, haven't I often wished to say something to yer!"

"What was it?"

"Oh, nothink; but how is yer, my tulip? That's all. Come on. I'll walk along of yer, if yer like, a little way. The idear that I should be having a quiet go in at a pipe quite promiscous, and come across Gentleman Jack. Well, if I don't tell this here story to the old woman and the kids, may I be —— Oh, dear—oh, dear, what a world we live in, to be sure. This way. What will you have now?"

"Nothing, my good friend. Nothing! Believe me my situation is a very urgent one, or I should not leave you so suddenly, but I have an appointment, which it is of the utmost importance I should keep. I won't come to the 'Old, Moon 'again though without paying you a visit, you may depend upon it. I shall know your house again. Good bye."

Claude shook hands with the cracksman, and was safely let out by the front door of his house. The sun was shining fitfully as he made the best of his way along a street that led him into St. Andrew's-street, and then proceeding along High-street, St. Giles's, he soon reached Denmark-street, and cutting off the distance as much as possible, while he did not walk so fast as to attract attention by seeming to be in any extraordinary hurry, he soon reached St. Ann's Church. Close to the curbstone was a boy, holding Claude's horse.

"All's right," whispered Claude, as he took hold of the bridle. "Do you know me?"

"Yes, sir. Oh, yes."

Claude mounted, and then he added—

"Who am I, then?"

"Claude Duval," said the boy in a whisper, while his eyes sparkled with animation.

"And do you know what a large reward is offered for me dead or alive?"

"Yes. It comes to £2000, they tell me, now."

"You might soon earn it, by giving the hue and cry after me in the streets of Soho."

An angry flush came over the boy's face.

"You don't know me half so well as I know you," he said, as he turned away.

"Hold," said Claude, taking a handful of guineas from his pocket. "Buy yourself something in remembrance of Claude Duval, my lad, and remember that we are friends. Shake hands with me."

The boy did so, looking quite radiant with satisfaction. He would have refused the gold, but Claude pressed it upon him, and then galloped away, leaving him standing by the church door gazing after him. It was odd that Claude Duval, since he had made up his mind to meet Jack at the 'One Tun' at Hampstead, should not travel northward, but he did not do so, for, on the con-

trary, he made his way into St. Martin's Lane, and then at a very steady pace he crossed Charing Cross, and betook himself towards Downing-street, which all the world knows is a little past the Treasury. The clock at the Horse Guards struck twelve as he passed it—he was rather surprised to find that it was so late.

"Well, well," he muttered. Perhaps that is all the better, as I am going to set my life upon a cast this morning. I will do something that will surprise Europe."

He turned his horse's head up Downing-street, and stopped at the official residence of the Secretary of State for the Home Department. Several servants were lounging about the place, and one went towards Claude, seeing him draw rein at the door. Now Claude's appearance was, under all circumstances, strikingly in his favour. There was about him an air of aristocratic grandeur of aspect, which he would have found it as difficult to conceal, as any one not so gifted by nature, would have found it difficult to assume, and now, attired as he was in the ecclesiastical habit, and so superbly mounted as he was, it was not to be wondered at, that the servants should treat him with marked respect. To the footman, who approached, Claude said—

"Is Lord Abingdon here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Hold, or get somebody to hold my horse, and when my groom comes, tell him I shall walk across the park, and meet him with the horse at Buckingham House."

"Yes, sir."

Claude dismounted, and ascended the steps of the Home Office. He was at once ushered into a room upon the ground floor, and a servant out of livery respectfully requested to know his business.

"I wish to see my Lord Abingdon for a few moments upon a private matter of some importance—I am Dr. Bleadon."

The servant bowed, and made an exit. In the course of about five minutes, there came into the room a gentleman, who in the most polite manner said—

"Lord Abingdon very much regrets that he cannot have the pleasure of seeing you personally, as he is very particularly engaged, but he desires his compliments, and that you will be so good as to tell me your business. I am his lordship's private secretary."

"Sir," said Claude, "if the business that has brought me here was anything but what it is, I should not have solicited an interview with his lordship, but have asked for you at once. I am sorry he cannot see me, as in that case I must go as I came. I should have thought that my position in society would have put an end to any supposition that this call could be a matter of idleness or impertinence."

The secretary looked puzzled.

"Pray, sir," he said, "wait a moment or two, and I will speak to his lordship again. Is it a matter of public importance?"

"It is indeed."

Away went the secretary, and down sat Claude. In the course of five minutes more a gentleman entered the room, and slightly bowed.

"Have I the honour of speaking to Lord Abingdon?" said Claude.

"Yes, sir. I am Lord Abingdon. Pray be seated. I regret to have kept you waiting. Dr.—Dr. Bleadon, I think?"

"Yes. Seat yourself, my lord, and tell me before I begin. Are we strictly private here?"

"Well, I—I really! Suppose we make certain by stepping into the next room, Dr. Bleadon. This way, if you please. I suppose you have some plot to tell us of, and I can assure you that his majesty's government will feel sincerely obliged for any communication that may tend to the preservation of the peace of the nation."

Lord Abingdon led Claude from the large reception-room into a much smaller

apartment, and Claude himself closed the door, and took care to keep between it and his lordship, as he said—

"My lord, there is a highwayman named Claude Duval."

"Oh, is it about him. I wish you would see Mr. Hope."

"No, my lord, I must see you. It was known to you and to the police that he wished to leave England for ever, but large sums were issued for his capture, and what was worse, a sum was set upon his destruction. He was hunted like a wild beast, and that, too, at the very time that you knew he wished to leave England, having found ties that would perhaps have made him in some other country a happy and useful member of society. My lord, why did you do all this?"

"Upon my word," said Lord Abingdon, "this serves me right for departing from my rule of never granting an interview to a stranger. Good morning, sir, good morning."

"Not so fast. Do you fancy I have taken all this trouble just to say to you what I have said?"

"What else for, sir?"

"Blood for blood. I have come to blow out your brains. The consequence of the orders emanating from you to hunt Claude Duval, has been the murder of one so dear to me that I cannot trust myself to say more upon that head."

"Pray, sir, let me pass."

"No. You are a dead man if you raise the least alarm."

"Who are you, that dare——"

"I am Claude Duval!"

The face of Lord Abingdon turned of an ashy paleness, and he sunk back into a seat, as he gasped—

"You are Claude Duval."

"Yes, you have, no doubt, heard of many of my extraordinary disguises, and this is one of them—I only live for vengeance now. Well I know that at the sound of the pistol shot that will deprive you of life, and make a vacany in the Ministry, your domestics and others here will rush upon me, but I have another pistol for myself. You and I will descend, my lord, to posterity in the same page of history."

"Good God!"

"God is good, no doubt."

Lord Abingdon slid from his chair on to his knees, as he said—

"Oh spare me!—spare me. Why should your revenge fall upon me? Oh! spare my life, and I will get a free pardon from the crown, and an unmolested passage where you please. I am a man with a family."

"Oh, your family will be well provided for out of the public purse. You know that well enough, my lord. I could have, for myself, freely forgiven the man-hunt in which you and your myrmidons engaged—you as paymaster, and they as the executive—but death followed in their bloody footsteps, and one of the fairest and the best of human beings was the victim. I will sacrifice you to her memory."

The Secretary of State fell at Claude's feet, and with tearful accents pleaded for existence.

"Spare me, oh, spare me!" he said. "Indeed it was not I, half so much as my Lord North, who issued the offers of reward for you. It was not, indeed. Oh, do not kill me here in cold blood. If I have, in my mistaken zeal for the public service done you personal wrong, I ask you to forgive me as you hope to be forgiven, and when you are before your God, and it shall be said, 'This man has taken life,' you can say, 'that, although full of your wrongs, and with me in your power, you spared me and left me to Heaven.' What is a life? I must die at some time—perhaps of a lingering disease, during the agony of which I may many a time wish for your pistols to end my sufferings. Is killing, vengeance? Alas, no. I have already in my fears suffered twenty deaths. Spare me—pardon me!"

"Abject wretch!"

"Yes. I am abject. Only spare me. In all your career you have never done

a deed like this. You have often spared a fallen foe, but you have never yet sacrificed one. I repent of what I have done. God asks no more."

Claude paced the room twice with perturbed steps, and each time that he passed the kneeling secretary, that exalted individual made a catch at his legs to implore his clemency. At length Claude paused.

"I cannot do it," he said. "It is contrary to my nature. I cannot do it.—Rise, sir, you are saved: and now, I suppose, you will do your best to have me killed or apprehended."

"No. Indeed I will not. Go in peace."

"It will look better if you see me to the door, my lord. Beware of treachery."

"Upon my sacred word I mean none. You shall go as you came, and I only wish that this visit may be buried in oblivion. I will withdraw the reward for your death; and if at any time I can do you a favour, I will."

"Very well. We shall see."

Lord Abingdon walked with Claude to the outer door, and the servants were amazed to see the disordered condition of his lordship.

"Remember!" said Claude, when he had mounted.

Lord Abingdon bowed, and then, as soon as Claude had ridden off, he turned round and fainted in the hall of the house. A scene of confusion instantly ensued, and it was a full hour before he was restored to consciousness.

CHAPTER CXI.

THE RETRIBUTION AT HAMPSTEAD.

Claude said not a word until he was two miles from Downing-street, a distance that took him fairly on to the North-road, and then drawing a long breath, he uttered the ejaculation of—

"Thank God!"

After thus breaking silence with himself, he added—

"Yes: I thank God that I did not take that man's life. I might have done it—I meant to do it; but it is not done, and I am the happier. I would not have the weight of his blood upon my soul. Alas! what common every-day materials, after all, go to the composition of a great man!"

As he uttered these words, he came to the junction of roads that divide to go to Highgate and Hampstead respectively, and he took the left-hand one, which would lead him to the latter village, though a verdant lane rather than a road, for such at that time, with its tall elm trees, was the route to Hampstead. As he went on, he asked himself if the Secretary of State would keep his word with him or not. If he did not, an immediate change in his (Claude's) equipments would be very necessary; while, if he did, the disguise he was at present in, was in all probability the one most likely to suit his purpose of personal concealment.

"I will risk it," he said; "for once I will trust to the word of a great man. He surely cannot be so base as to betray me now."

With this comfortable assurance, Claude Duval jogged on, and soon passed the Load of Hay, then a long, low, rambling-looking wooden house by the wayside, and considered to be a considerable distance out of London. Without pausing for a moment Claude rode up Haverstock Hill, and passing the Grange, he soon scampered through the straggling High-street of Hampstead, and arrived on the Heath. Claude, who knew every tree, and hill, and dale in that charming spot, was always much affected upon coming within its precincts. It reminded him forcibly of his boyish days—of his mother, and her long sufferings—of his father, and his unjust death—and it reminded him likewise of the vengeance he had taken upon the man who had hunted and persecuted his father to death—the death of a felon! But the day was yet young, and although well disguised,

Claude felt the impolicy of passing much time upon the Heath, exposed to the gaze and curiosity of chance passengers, as well as of the residents upon that favoured spot, so he made his way at once to the One Tun public house, where he had agreed to meet with his old friend Jack. Then pulling up his horse, he ordered the best dinner the house could afford to him for money, and taking his seat by



CLAUDE AGAIN ON THE ROAD—ROBBERY OF THE YORK MAIL.

an open window that commanded a view of the beautiful heath, he gave himself up very much to the thoughts of the busy past. And oh! how like a dream of romance did much of his life appear to him, when now looked back upon from his present vantage ground of safety. He wondered how he could have gone through what had happened to him, and now he shuddered much more at past risks, than he had done when they had been present ones. But soon to Cicely

his thoughts ran, and as she had been, and as she was, he pictured her to his fancy. So beautiful, so gentle, so pure, and so good as she had been, to think that she was now a corpse. That that silvery voice was hushed for ever—that those sparkling eyes had lost their lustre—that the soft skin had upon it the pestiferous damps of the grave, and that worms could riot within the chambers of that brain which for holy and beautiful emotions had known no superior, and but few equals. Oh, it was maddening to his very soul. Resting his head upon his hands he wept convulsively. During the continuance of this accession of grief, the waiter came into the room, but he stopped short when he saw the respectable parson-like looking gentleman in such dolour. Claude did not hear him until he made some noise purposely in placing some things upon the table for the dinner. Then Duval looked up.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the waiter, "only come to lay cloth, sir."

"It's of no consequence. A gentleman of my profession must see much to weep for in the depravity of human nature."

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. Any pickles, sir?"

"No—no——"

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir."

All this man's feelings and capabilities seemed comprised in "Yes, sir. Certainly, sir."

"Will, then, dinner be ready soon?" said Claude.

"Yes, sir. Hilloa! another gent on oss back, as I'm alive. Coming directly, sir."

The sound of a horse's feet coming directly up to the inn-door were now plainly to be heard, and Claude looked from the window. What was his satisfaction to see that it was Jack himself, so much sooner than he had expected him.

"Jack!" he called, from the window, "Jack, I am here."

Claude's name was upon Jack's lips upon the impulse of the moment, but he prudently suppressed it, merely calling out in return, "Ah, sir, I am glad to see you;" so that Claude might act as he pleased, either to admit him as an equal or keep him out as a subordinate, whichever he might think would look best, and be the safest to do as regarded the people of the inn. Claude, however, did not think that there was any reason for keeping up any distinction between himself and Jack, and he beckoned to him to come in at once to the room, where the dinner would soon be laid.

"Jack," he said, "I did not expect you for some hours."

"Nor I you," said Jack. "But I thought, as I had nothing better to do, I might as well come here and wait."

"That was my precise idea."

"So I surmised when I saw you. I am very anxious, Claude, to know what course of conduct you intend to pursue."

"After dinner we will talk that over. Call me Mr. Brown before the waiter, and I will call you Smith."

The dinner was soon placed upon the table, and both Jack and Claude managed to do tolerable justice to it; so that by the time it was removed it was past five o'clock, and the evening was creeping on apace. Then Claude, drawing near to Jack, and helping himself to a glass of wine, said—

"Jack, I have failed."

"Failed in what?"

"In carrying out my scheme of revenge. Listen to me, and you will hear of one of my most hazardous adventures."

Jack listened with all attention, while Claude told him what had happened at the office of the Secretary of State; and when he had concluded, Jack shook him by the hand, as he said—

"Then really, Claude, you thought there was but little chance of us ever meeting again."

"I scarcely can say what I thought, Jack. My whole soul was bent upon revenge, until the moment it was in my power, and then a total revulsion of

feeling took place, and the affair looked too like murder to please me. I am very glad it went off as it did, Jack."

"And I, Claude. So much, then, for the past; now for the future."

"The road!"

"Really and truly?"

"Yes, Jack, the road for me. I am fit for nothing else, and nothing else is fit for me, Jack. It is my opinion. I know that it will be my death, but I likewise know that while I live, it is my life. Besides, Jack, what are you to do?"

"Never mind me."

"Yes, but I do though, mind you. The road will be a subsistence to both of us; and, according to our old plan, we will take from the rich and give to the poor, Jack, so that we shall be quite orthodox in our mode of life. I will endeavour to forget the past, or to think of it merely as a dream."

"That is wise," said Jack; "I only wish——"

"Wish what, Jack?"

"That I could forget all the past. But it is easier to wish for oblivion than to find it, yet time will do much."

"It will. But now, Jack, I have an account to settle here, as well as the money one for our dinner here."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; don't you recollect a public-house called 'The Antlers,' on the north side of the Heath, that is kept by a certain Mr. Matthew?"

"I do indeed. And you made the aforesaid Mr. Matthew a promise which, I guess, you will now fulfil, Claude."

"I will. Such revenges as do not take life or injure limbs I will take, for the sake of even-handed justice at large; so, in about an hour, Jack, we will pay a visit to Mr. Matthew, if you are inclined that way."

"Most willingly—most willingly, Claude. Now that you no longer talk of killing, you take a load from off my heart, such as I scarcely knew it sustained until now, when I feel relieved from it."

"They both rose, but before they could take a step towards the door, the noise and confusion incidental to the arrival of a carriage at the little suburban inn came upon their ears, and they, in a few moments, heard some people ascending the staircase.

"This way, madam;—this way, sir," they heard the innkeeper say. "A private room—oh yes, sir, there could not be a more private room than our best one, overlooking the garden, with a view all over the Heath. This way, sir, if you please, and the blacksmith shall attend to the tire of the carriage wheel directly."

"Oh—ah!" said a voice. "All's right—demme! Ah! come on, my Lady Bab, these things will happen—demme!"

"Surely," said Claude, "I have heard that voice before."

"And I, too," added Jack. "It is no other than Tom Brereton who speaks. The cousin of Mr. Markham Brereton; who accused you and Mr. Markham both of robbing him."

"It is—it is. Hush!"

"I do think I shall faint right away, Colonel Tomlins," said a lisping affected female voice. "Oh, dear!—oh, dear! The idea of coming to a common inn, where there may be common people."

"Why, my Lady Bab," said Tom Brereton, for it was indeed no other, "it is rather horrid. But sometimes people of quality have to put up with such things—demme!"

"What the deuce can be the meaning of all this?" said Claude.

The couple, who called each other respectively Lady Bab and Colonel Tomlins, were shown into the room adjoining that occupied by Claude and Jack, and as there was only a very thin partition between the two apartments, our friends had no difficulty in quite clearly overhearing what passed.

"This promises some sport," whispered Claude to Jack. "I will forego my visit to 'The Antlers' for an hour or so."

"My dear," said Tom," I will just pop down stairs—demme!—and see what sort of accommodation this beggarly place has, and then come back to you in a jiffy."

"Oh do, Colonel. Come, quick."

"Yes, my ducksey."

"Oh—oh!"

The sound of a very amorous salute followed, and then Tom left the room. He had not been gone a minute when, after a deep sigh, the lady said—.

"Oh, dear! if I can but go through it, of course, it will be the making of me; but I sometimes do think that something will happen to prevent me. Oh—oh—how my heart beats, to be sure. If, now, I was to meet anybody who happened to know me, and say—'Lor! that is only Lady Bab Percival's waiting maid.' What should I say to the colonel, to be sure?" But I think the one hundred pounds I placed in his hands has quieted him. It was lucky I found so much in my lady's escritoir. But to marry a colonel with a fine estate in Oxfordshire is worth some trouble, and when he finds it out, what can he do? Nothing but give me a fine maintenance, to be sure, and that will be right enough I'll be bound. I shall be some honest man's money after that, I rather think.

"This is rich," said Claude.

"Very," said Jack. "What will you do?"

"Certainly nothing to interfere with the denouement of this comedy."

"Denouement! How do you mean?"

"Why the marriage. Are they not well mated? The mock colonel with the mock lady? In truth, it would be a thousand pities to separate them."

"It would."

"And yet I will have some sport. I owe Tom Brereton a grudge. I can't think how he came to evade the indictment for perjury which was brought against him at the Old Bailey. However, we will have that hundred pounds, Jack, for pocket-money, that Lady Bab speaks of."

"Very well, Claude. If we make up our minds to rob true men, surely we may rob thieves, so have it, in the name of all that's lucky, for cash we want, and cash we must get somewhere, you know."

"Precisely, Jack. I want to distribute a few hundreds among those who have befriended us lately."

CHAPTER CXII.

A COMIC ADVENTURE.

At this juncture Tom Brereton returned.

"My charmer," he said, "the carriage will soon be ready."

"Ah! colonel, what a man you are."

"Yes: I believe you, my love. My estate in Oxfordshire made a man of me. I believe your ladyship has some large properties in Wilts?"

"Oh! dear, yes. Quite a castle."

"Really. Well, my love, this secret marriage of ours at Hendon church will, I rather think, astonish your noble family a little."

"Yes, dear; but what care I, as long as I have the man of my heart?"

A tap at the door, and then the opening of it, announced a visitor to the enamoured pair. It was the landlady, who came to offer her services to the lady: and the mock sprig of nobility tripped off, leaving Tom Brereton in a very happy frame of mind.

"Well,"-he said; "so I shall make my fortune by marriage after all. What a lucky thing that I should attract this lady at the masquerade, and that she should so soon consent to a run-away match. The stupid pump, to believe that I am a colonel with large estates. Egad, I never had any estate but a very small

one at Guildford, and that the confounded lawyer has got possession of, for freeing me from that bothering affair at the Old Bailey. I wonder now what has become of that Claude Duval. What a desperate fellow, to be sure. How I have watched the newspapers to see if there was any news of his being killed or taken. Ah! well. I dare say I shall never again encounter him. Let me see. Lady Bab's hundred pounds, and my own eighty pounds, make a hundred and eighty pounds; and that's about all I have: but her ladyship will pretty soon put me in funds, and after we are married, as long as she makes me a handsome allowance, what do I care what she says or what she thinks? She is not so young. An old maid, or she would not have snapped at me so easy."

Tom now walked to and fro in the room for a few moments, and then stopping suddenly, he said—

"I wish I could get those jewels she has from her. They are worth something. Besides, I feel confident she has got more money. Bother her, why didn't she give it all to me? Well—well; I'll get it, and a pretty lot beside. I'll go and see how that fellow is getting on with the horses now."

Down stairs went Tom; and Claude, after whispering to Jack that he would be back again in a few minutes, popped down after him. Tom—after speaking to a coach-smith, who was putting the tire on one of the wheels of the hired carriage which had conveyed him and the sham lady back to Hampstead—walked through the inn, and took a stroll in the garden at the back. It was there that Claude joined him, and walking up to him when he was at the furthest distance from the house, he suddenly said—

"Good day, Mr. Tom Brereton."

The start that Tom gave was quite ludicrous.

"I—I—I ain't Tom Brereton.—I am Colonel Tomlins."

"Oh! nonsense. I know you. I am Claude Duval."

Tom staggered back until he was stopped by a tree; and there he stood, with his mouth and eyes wide open, looking the very picture of consternation and amazement.

"Hark ye," said Claude Duval, "this house is completely in my power, and all the people in it are in my pay. Now, I tell you, that if you don't quickly give up all the money you have about you, I will tell Lady Bab who and what you are."

"Oh! don't—don't!"

"Come—the cash."

"I—I—have only twenty pounds: that's all."

"Stuff: you have a hundred and eighty."

Tom uttered a deep groan, and would have fallen on his knees; but Claude stopped him by saying—

"You had better appear as much at your ease as possible, for Lady Bab can see you from one of the windows, and she might put some awkward questions to you if she sees any fear exhibited on the part of the gallant Colonel Tomlins. Produce the money, and remember I shall give orders to whoever you may speak to upon the subject here to blow your brains out at once."

With tears in his eyes Tom produced a pocket-book, from which he handed Claude the money.

"Oh! dear—oh! dear," he said. "I can't now pay for the marriage ceremony or the mending the tire of the wheel."

"I don't want to stop the marriage," said Claude. "Here are a couple of guineas for you, which will suffice for your expenses. When you are married, you know, you can draw upon the lady for some cash; and now, if ever you breathe to any living creature the fact that I have robbed you, I give you notice that I will find you out, if I have to travel five hundred miles to do so, and smash your skull."

"Oh dear!—oh dear."

Claude turned round, and with all the unconcern in the world made his way back to the house again, where Jack was, as may be supposed, rather anxiously expecting him.

"Take the money, Jack," said Claude. "You had better be cash keeper. I should like to send a couple of hundred pounds as soon as we are worth as much to Anthony, for I am sure he is not doing quite so well as I could wish him."

"You have relieved Tom Brereton, then, of his cash?"

"I have, and now for the lady whom I hear coming in good time. Hush!"

"Colonel," said the mock Lady Bab. "Colonel. Oh, he is not here."

"This way, madam," said Claude, in his most insinuating tones as he opened the door of the room in which he and Jack were. "This way, madam, if you please. Mind the mat."

"Thank you, sir. Is the colonel here?"

"No," said Claude as he closed the door, and put his back against it.

The lady, we beg pardon, the lady's maid, gave a faint scream.

"Another such cry," said Claude, "and it is your last in this world. Listen to me, madam, and act prudently."

A terror came over Tom's female companion. Nothing short of discovery of who and what he was, stared her in the face.

"You are," added Claude, "Lady Bab Percival's maid, and you have robbed her of a hundred pounds, with which to blind the eyes of Colonel Tomlins, whom you intend to marry if you can do so?"

Down went the mock lady upon her knees.

"Oh, Mr. Officer, for such of course you are, spare me!"

"Upon one condition. We officers, after all, are only men."

"Oh, anything—anything."

"You have some jewels of your lady's."

"Yes. A necklace, earrings, brooch, and bracelets."

"Hand them to me."

After some rummaging in rather a capacious pocket, a small pocket-book of red morocco was produced, which contained the articles mentioned. After assuring herself that they were them, and that they were of considerable value, Claude handed them to Jack, and then he said—

"Now, madam, money."

"Money!"

"Yes, I will, and must be paid well, if I permit you to proceed without interruption, and marry the colonel without exposing you."

"And you will?"

"Yes, if you pay me. As I said, we are but men."

"Then take all. There are thirty-four pounds, and it is all I have, but I'd give double the sum rather than the colonel should find out that I am not what I seem to be—that is, before the marriage—after it, I don't care, for he must allow me a handsome maintenance out of his estates, and then he may do with himself what he likes."

"Very well," said Claude, as he handed the money to Jack. "Now mark me, if you by look, hint, or word, let any living being know of this transaction between us, I will take care that you shall be hung, for I will never rest until I have accomplished that object. You are warned, so you had better make the best of it."

"Do you think I would mention it. Oh, dear no. I was never in such a fright in all my life, and I'm only too happy to get off so well. If I meet you again, and have the means, which no doubt I shall, I will give you a further reward."

"Very good. Now, madam, the best thing you can do is to get off from here, and be married to your colonel as soon as possible."

Claude moved aside from the door, and with some more profuse expressions of gratitude to him for his leniency, the mock lady reached her own apartment just as Tom Brereton, who, till then, had been composing his nerves below with a glass of something, made his appearance. There was a slight air of composure now in the manner of each of them, for they felt conscious of having a new secret to keep; but that soon vanished, and the carriage being reported as ready, off they whirled to the picturesque old church of Hendon, where the ceremony that was to make

them man and wife was to take place. In a little time after, Jack and Claude mounted and left the One Tun.

"Now for the Antlers," said Claude.

"But what do you mean to do?" said Jack.

"That I hardly know; I must be guided entirely by circumstances. I will do nothing very bad, but I will certainly frighten mine host of the Antlers a little, or I will know some very special reason for allowing him to escape. He wont know me in this disguise, and moreover, I fancy nothing is further from his thoughts now, after what has been heard of me, than finding me in this part of the country."

They stopped at a cottage about two hundred yards from the Antlers, and Jack and Claude both dismounted. A woman came to the door, and as Claude threw her a shilling, he said—

"Will you allow us to tie our horses for about ten minutes to your gate? We have a call to make in the neighbourhood."

The woman was quite poor enough to grasp at the shilling, and the two horses were tied up accordingly. Claude and Jack then went on foot to the Antlers, and strutted in with a careless air and manner. The landlord himself was in the bar.

"To the left for the parlour, gentlemen," he said.

"Thank you," said Claude, with an assumed lisp; "bring *uth* a bottle of wine—port if you *pleathe*."

"I have the finest port, though I say it, in all the country."

"They went into the parlour, and in about five minutes the landlord came in with a bottle of port and two glasses. The moment he got as far as the table, Claude adroitly stepped behind him, and kept guard at the door; then, when the landlord turned round, he said in his natural voice—

"Matthew, do you know me?"

"Good God!" cried Matthews, "it's Duval."

"Yes; you sincere, excellent, old friend, it is Duval. Why, man, you look as if you did not expect me; I promised to come, but a variety of engagements have kept me hitherto from performing my promise, but, however, here I am at last, you see."

"Oh, I am lost! I am a dead man!"

"Not yet, Matthew. If you call out, or make any alarm, you are, but if it is any consolation for you to know, that I mean to stop short of killing you, I tell you as much; but I promised that I would repay you for the trick you served me when I was last here, and by all that's holy I will keep my word."

As he spoke, Claude took a pistol from his pocket, at the sight of which the landlord gave a hideous groan.

"You are going to wound me," he said. "Oh, spare me!"

"Did you spare me? Come, Master Matthew, has your chimney here been swept lately?"

"Chimney?"

"Yes," added Claude, as he took out his watch and laid it upon the table. "I give you ten minutes to get up this chimney and out at the top. Jack, you stand outside and see him do it. If by the time ten minutes are expired, my friend here don't call to me that he sees you, I will fire a brace of pistols up the chimney after you, so now you know what you have to do."

"Oh—oh!"

"Come, be quick; nine minutes only now."

"I—I can't. I—I don't—know——"

"Eight minutes and a half."

In a fit of positive desperation, Matthew ran to the chimney and put his head up.

"Eight minutes," cried Claude.

The struggle that he made to get up was prodigious. His feet rested upon the hobs for a moment or two, and then disappeared. Huge flakes of soot came

rolling down into the room, and the struggles of the landlord in the flue came distinctly upon Claude's ears.

"Six minutes!" bawled Claude up the chimney.

Down poured the soot, and up struggled the landlord. Jack, who had only gone outside, came into the room again; and, unusual of late as that operation had been to him, he faintly laughed—

"He can't do it, Claude."

"No, I don't expect he can," said Claude, as he drew the bullet out of one of his pistols. "Nor can we stay here, for we shall be smothered with soot."

Approaching, then, the chimney, Claude bawled out—

"Time's up!"

"No—no!" shouted Matthew, in stifled accents.

"Yes."

Bang went the pistol up the chimney, and down rolled Matthew, making sure he was shot, and bringing such a volley of soot down with him that Claude and Jack were glad to leave the man and the inn. On the door step nearly they met Matthew's wife, and she said—

"Lord bless me, gentlemen, what noise was that? Have you seen my husband?"

"Yes, mum," said Claude; "you will find him cleaning himself in the parlour."

They then hurried to the cottage where they had left their horses, and untying their bridles from the gate, they mounted at once.

"Where to?" said Jack.

"The road!—the road!"

CHAPTER CXIV.

THE OLD CATHEDRAL AGAIN.

What a riot and confusion there was in Winchester, upon that evening when Claude Duval escaped from the old cathedral. How the alarm bell was rung. How the vergers ran about hither and thither; and how the old superannuated canons, who possessed stalls—and uncommonly snug stalls they are too—in the cathedral, looked aghast. How the soldiers swore, too; and how the drums beat, and a strong guard came from the barracks to do wonders, when the birds were fairly flown. The death of the soldier, whose brains had been dashed out by Claude upon the threshold of the sacred edifice, was quite an event, and the news of it spread over the city like wildfire, or like scandal, which is about the fastest spreading thing that we know of. The principal authorities of the cathedral, had been before that, duly informed that something very serious was going on within it, and the two acting canons—resident fellows, as they were called—were quite in a ferment. One of them was purblind, and the other was deaf, so that they were not such wonderful great guns, those canons, but yet in the cathedral, to the vergers, the beadles, the singing men, they were great men indeed. Now, in the good city of Winchester at that time there was an extremely uncomfortable-looking building to the eyes of these canons, and all the men and all the boys belonging to the cathedral—that building was an Unitarian chapel; and as the Unitarians are considered to be the radicals of religion, and shrewdly suspected to entertain various unorthodox views regarding established churches and pluralities, and rich endowments, and so on, no wonder that the canons condemned the aforesaid Unitarians to all the pains and penalties of burning brimstone, and lakes of boiling asphaltum, in another world! Didn't they wish they could have given them a taste of it in this? We should have said literally nothing about these sad Unitarians, but that the Rev. John Harper, the preacher at the chapel, walked down to the cathedral to see what was the matter, and the senior verger having announced as much to one of the canons—the blind one—he sent for the

deaf one, and bawled into his ear-trumpet the propriety of going themselves, les the said Rev. John Harper should get all the credit of doing the right thing, while they did nothing.

"Oh, yes," said the deaf canon. "D—n him—I—I melan bless us! —a-hem!"



CLAUDE, IN A MILITARY CHARACTER, AT OAKLEY HALL—THE EVELYNS.

"Come along then," said the blind canon. "You show us the way, Mr. Verger, and take care there is plenty of force."

"Ah!" remarked the deaf one. "We will let them hear what we have to say. To think of the cathedral being desecrated by a brawl about catching a thief! I hope nobody has disturbed the curtain of my stall."

Off they both went, and with them the two vergers and the two beadles, and

four singing men, and the scripture reader, and the chaunter, and heaven knows how many persons besides, who nibbled a good fat subsistence out of the old church. The distance was short, and by the time this *posse ecclesiasticus* reached the door of the cathedral, the constables, and a fresh detachment of military, arrived likewise. Torches were lit, and a general muster, as though they were an invading force, took place.

"Hilloa! hilloa!" cried the blind canon, "we must not have the cathedral desecrated. Come, come, come!"

"But if you please, doctor," whispered a verger, "it's thought there is danger."

"Who's Grainger?" cried the deaf canon, who had by dint of hard listening thought he heard something at last.

"I can see no danger."

"I should be surprised if you could *see* anything," muttered one of the singing men.

"Gentlemen," said the officer of the military party, "my men are ready. We have suffered some loss, and the guilty parties are suspected to be in the cathedral, so it is my duty to take them. If you will accompany me, well and good, but if not I go without you."

"I doubt, sir," said the blind canon, "if the Ecclesiastical Court would justify you in what you say. What do you think, brother canon?"

"Eh?"

"Oh, it's useless to talk to you. Well, sir, upon consideration, we will wait here while you go in and look about, and if there is really no danger, we will follow you."

At this moment the door opened from within, and a man appeared.

"Seize him!" cried the officer.

In an instant a file of men surrounded the new comer, who said—

"Dear me, what's the matter? My name is Harper."

"Oh, it's the Unitarian parson," said a verger, spitting as he spoke, as though he were in the presence of some unclean thing.

"Never mind," said the blind canon. "We don't know who it is. We find him here, and we know nothing. Lodge him in jail, that is sufficient."

"Sir," said the Unitarian preacher, "that you know nothing I will take for true upon your own word; but as for committing me to prison because I came to the cathedral to see what was the matter within its time-worn and venerable walls, that is more than you dare do. As for you, sir," to the officer, "I wish you would come with me, for I think there is some one lying dead in the body of the building."

"Lead on, sir," said the officer, who had rather a poor opinion of canons and vergers, and such like. "Lead on, sir. Forward! March!"

In filed twenty-five soldiers after the Reverend John Harper and the officer into the cathedral. They went on, guided by Mr. Harper, until they came to the communion-table, at the far end through the chapel, and upon it lay a body dabbled in blood. The soldiers held up their torches, and the officer, with Mr. Harper, advanced close to the communion-table, and looked into the calm still pale face of Cicely, as she lay there in man's apparel, as Claude had left her.

"Who is this?" said the officer.

"I know not."

Mr. Harper had some medical skill, and he at once tore open the vest of the body, and placed his ear upon the region of the heart.

"Not dead," he said, "and a woman!"

"A woman!"

"Yes, sir. Do you not see the breast? This is a most singular affair truly. It is not only a woman, but a young and singularly beautiful one, too."

"What—what—what?" cried the blind canon, suddenly advancing, closely followed by the deaf one and the whole of the ecclesiastical throng, for they had gathered courage to follow the soldiers into the building, after hearing that they encountered no opposition, and that all was still.

"A young female, sir," said Mr. Harper.

"Send her to prison."

"No, no; she is wounded."

"Eh? eh?" said the deaf canon, stepping forward and looking at Cicely. "Why—why—it's a young girl. Send her to my house. Oh, the hussey!"

"A hospital," said the Unitarian preacher, "is the proper place for her. Who will assist me to carry her?"

"No, no—to prison. Let them look after her in prison," persisted the blind canon.

Mr. Harper at once raised the insensible form of Cicely in his arms, and said—

"Let who will molest me. This young creature is badly hurt. Be she whom or what she may, there is but one duty to be fulfilled concerning her, and that is the duty of hospitality and Christian kindness. You, sir," to the officer, "I presume, have no wish to interfere with my taking this young creature to my family?"

"None in the least. It is not delicate women we seek, but strong men."

"What are they doing?" said the deaf canon. "Tell me, somebody."

"Please, sir," bawled one of the beadles into his ear-trumpet, "the gentleman as you often says you wishes was fired is a going to take the young woman home."

"Stop the devil. I said I'd take her."

"But you shan't have her," said Mr. Harper. "I am a married man, and can give her to the care of my wife; while your three wives are dead, and your housekeeper does not bear the best of characters; so get out of the way."

Mr. Harper brushed past the canons, and bore Cicely from the cathedral to his own house, which was not far off.

"What does he say?" cried the deaf canon.

"He says, sir, if you please, that he'd rather have her than you, for you have had three wives already, and have got a housekeeper now."

"Search the whole building," said the officer to his men. "I will wait with a file of men here. Take any one you meet with, dead or alive."

Our readers are well aware that Claude and his friends had escaped, so that the search was productive of no results; and, therefore, we need not follow it, but proceed at once to the residence of the Unitarian preacher, whither Cicely had been taken so rigorously and so promptly. A very few words from Mr. Harper sufficed to explain to his wife and daughter how he came by his new acquaintance, and leaving her in their care, he went for a Doctor Macqueen, who was in the city, and an intimate friend of his, as well as a man of extraordinary skill in his profession. The doctor returned immediately with Mr. Harper, and by the time they reached the house of the latter, Cicely was in bed, and had given some signs of consciousness. The medical man at once instituted an examination of the condition of his patient. In half an hour a bullet was extracted from a spot near the arm pit.

"It's well," said Macqueen, "that I had some experience in gun-shot wounds when I was with the army. There she goes!"

"Dead!" exclaimed Mrs. Harper.

"No, madam. This is only a state of syncope, from which she will recover. If no very serious injury has been done by the bullet, and if no inflammation supervene, the patient may recover.—Who is she?"

"That we know nothing about."

A loud knocking at the front door of the house now arrested the attention of Mr. Harper, who was in the adjoining room.

"Good gracious!" cried Macqueen, "what chance has a patient in such a house as this?—Just knock down whoever it is at the door."

Mr. Harper went down stairs, and found a couple of constables, who said to him—

"Sir, we are directed by Hamilton, to take into custody the person you brought from the cathedral."

"What, a wounded girl!"

"We cannot help it. Such are our orders, sir. She will be attended to if she requires any attendance, in the infirmary of the jail. Have her we must, and have her we will."

"Not while I am here," exclaimed Mr. Harper. "You can go and tell Mr. Hamilton that he is a disgrace to the bench upon more accounts than one, and that——"

The officers made a rush into the house, and a dangerous riot between them and Mr. Harper would have taken place, had not the doctor suddenly called from above, in a loud voice—

"Let them come up, Harper—let them come up. It is all the better. Don't hinder them."

Mr. Harper was astonished, and the officers rushed past him, and up the stairs. He quickly followed them, and when he reached the room in which was the wounded person, he found them standing thunderstricken. The body was covered over, face included, by a sheet, and Dr. Marqueen was standing by the toilette table washing his hands.

"Take her," he said. "You are too late, that's all. A stronger warrant than yours has been here already, my men."

"Dead!" said one.

"Look for yourself. Don't say I told you."

"Oh, no—no. We know you, sir. We—we don't want to meddle with any corpses. They ain't at all in our line. Come along, Jem, this won't do. Come on. Beg pardon, sir, for giving trouble, but we had our orders."

"It don't matter a straw to me," said the doctor, "one way or another."

The officers, looking rather crest-fallen, descended the staircase, and without another word left the house.

"Alas!" said Mr. Harper, "and so all our care has gone for nothing?'

"Humph!"

"When did she expire, poor thing? Just as I was below, I suppose. Why do you laugh?"

"Humph!" said the doctor.

CHAPTER CXV.

CLAUDE'S RETURN TO THE ROAD.

"The road!" said Claude, when Jack asked him what he was going to do. "The road."

It would seem as if he wished to stop Jack from making any reply to this, for at the moment he put his horse to speed, and Hampstead Heath was soon left behind a considerable distance. Jack was well mounted, and kept up with Claude without any difficulty, and thus they rode on for two miles without encountering any one, or exchanging a single word. At length Claude pulled up.

"Jack," he said, "we are on the wrong road."

"How do you mean, Claude?"

"Why, that there will be nothing worth having here. We must find a way across the country to the great North Road, Jack. If I mistake not, there is a lane here that will take us to the right."

"Yes," said Jack, "I know it will. It is not fifty paces on."

"Come, then."

The lane was reached in a few moments, and Jack, as he pointed down it amid the darkness, said—

"It is three miles across the country to the Barnet Road, Claude, and when there, of course anything that goes or comes on the high North Road must pass us. But there have been so many robberies on that road lately, that no one is better watched or protected."

"That don't make much difference, I think, to us, Jack. Since you left the road, though, I should have thought they had got quit of their apprehensions, for time was, when for fifty miles upon the North Road travellers used to ask each other—'Have you seen Sixteen-String Jack?'"

"Ah, yes. They did. I have been asked the question myself, and I have often replied, 'Yes, in a glass, but you may see him without one. Look at me.' Come on, come on, Claude. I don't want to think of the past. It is too horrible for me, and contains far too many sad reminiscences."

"And what," said Claude, in a voice of gloom, "must be the past to me?"

"Think no more of it, Claude—think no more of it. Come, a sharp trot will take us to the North Road in twenty minutes. On—on."

Off they went down the lane. The dark, and by that dim light of the night, strange, mystic-looking hedges and trees flashed past them. Occasionally they would pass some garden wall, and a watch-dog would bay out his alarm. A gloomy mansion or two would loom upon their vision for a few moments, and then all would be trees and hedges again, from which now and then some startled bird would fly, with a shrill cry of fear, as the tramping of the horses' hoofs upon the hard ground startled it from its slumber. The air was keen and damp, and loaded with vegetable odours, mingled with which now and then would come the scent of the climatis; and so on they went until they suddenly emerged from the lane, and saw the lights twinkling in the high street of Barnet. Claude drew up, and so did Jack.

"How do you feel now?" said the latter.

"Better, better. Ah! some one comes. A toll—a toll."

They heard the tramp of a horse, at a canter.

"Stay for me, Jack," said Claude, and into the middle of the road he went. "Halt!" he cried, and the passenger drew bridle.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing particular," said Claude. "Are you a gentleman?"

"Who dares question my title?"

"Oh, that will do. Are you aware that there is a toll levied upon this road, and that I am the new collector? Your money, watch, rings, and so on, sir, if you please."

"Ah! A highwayman."

"Exactly. Come, sir. Delays are dangerous, and my best friends say I am short tempered."

"Both friends and enemies say I am," retorted the traveller. "If you come near me, I'll knock you down with my riding whip."

"Indeed. Are riding whips to decide it? Here goes then."

Claude darted up to the stranger, who made a blow at him, which was dexterously avoided, but the heavy silver handle of Claude's whip fell upon the shoulder of the stranger, who gave a cry of pain, and shrunk down upon his horse.

"Is it enough?" said Claude.

"Curses on you, whoever you are. If I had but my pistols."

"What a pity. Now, sir, your money, watch, &c., &c."

"Well, well, you must have them."

He put his hand in his pocket, and rapidly pulling out a small pistol, he fired it in Claude's face. The bullet made a furrow along Claude's cheek, which at the moment he was perfectly unconscious of. The smoke and the charge so close to him, had no confusing effect upon him. Before the traveller could get away, he grasped the bridle of his horse, and said—

"Now, sir, your money, watch, &c., &c."

"Have you a charmed life?"

"Yes—quick, quick!"

The traveller handed to Claude a purse and his watch, saying as he did so—

"I'll have you yet, as sure as my name is Faversham."

"Faversham? Is that your name? You could not have one more hateful to me."

"What exception can you take to it? I am Sir John Faversham."

"The eldest son of Sir Lionel, of the Old Grange?"

"Yes—the same."

"Well; your father falsely swore away the life of my father, and so some years ago I shot your father upon Hampstead Heath; I have heard of you as his fiend-tempered, hard-hearted, generally disliked son."

"Villain! you are then——"

"Claude Duval. I thank you for calling me villain, for by so doing you have made a new quarrel with me; I had forgiven your pistol shot, but now we begin again. Dismount, sir, this instant."

Claude sprung from his own horse, and seizing Sir John Faversham by the leg, he tilted him off his horse, after which he began lashing him with the riding whip, until he was tired of the exercise, when he seized him by the back of the neck and tossed him into a pond by the way-side. The horse of Sir John galloped off, and Claude, as he mounted his own, cried—

"The next time we meet you will be more civil. Jack! This way! the road! the road! Life on the road for me!"

Jack and Claude galloped off towards Barnet.

"Did you hear all that?" said Claude, when they were about two miles on.

"Yes, all. You served him right. He is so generally detested for his vicious temper, that if he tell the story, it will rejoice everybody who hears it. My opinion is, however, that he will keep it a profound secret, and seek by some underhand means to have his revenge upon you."

"Let him, let him. Where are we now, Jack?"

"Near a public-house, called the Half Way." We are a good twenty miles from London now—just listen a moment; Claude, don't you hear wheels on the road?"

"Yes, yes. Let us step aside."

In a few moments, a man driving a small cart came by Claude. Fancying that he heard the sound of other wheels in the distance, as well as those of the cart, he called to the man, saying—

"Is anything on the road?"

"Nothing as I knows on," said the man, "but the York mail, that will be up soon, I take it."

"Thank you."

The man passed on, and Claude turning to Jack, said—

"I don't think I ever stopped the York mail yet; I will try my hand at that to-night. It will be something for the newspapers to talk about to-morrow, at all events, not that I expect much booty from mail-coach passengers. But there is always some fun in such an affair."

"And no small amount of hazard," said Jack.

"I think the hazard is less than it appears. People don't carry much money when they travel by public conveyances, and as it is, of course, everybody's business to repel an attack, it becomes no body's."

"There is something in that, Claude. But shall I not accompany you?"

"If I want you, I will whistle. But until then, Jack—pardon me for having the vanity to suppose I can rob the York Mail by myself."

"Very well."

Jack trotted his horse to the road side, and Claude stopped in the middle of the highway, to commit the audacity of stopping a mail coach, in which were four good horses, and upon the outside of which was a guard, with a loaded blunderbuss. He had not to wait long, for the mail was well horsed, and on it came, a great lumbering machine as it was, at a capital pace. The lights flashed upon the roadway, illumining the trees and hedges with transient beams.

"Hold!" cried Claude, in a voice that was plainly heard above all the rattle of the wheels, and all the tramp of the cattle. "Hold hard!"

The coachman half pulled up. With annoying quickness Claude rode up to the pair of horses nearest to the coach; and cut the traces upon the side next to

him. This was done before the coachman could think of what it was better to do. But the guard dragged his blunderbuss from the case, and presenting it at Claude, just as he had finished cutting the trace, cried—

"Take that, Mr. Highwayman."

Click!—pluff! went the lock and the priming.

"Why, what a fool you must be," said Claude, "who ever heard of a guard's blunderbuss going off properly. Come down. Come down!"

"Oh, no—no—no."

"Come down!"

Claude presented a pistol at him, and down rolled the guard. In an instant Claude seized him by the collar with his left hand, and fired his pistol into his ear with his right. Down went the guard, and then replacing his discharged pistol in his breast, and drawing out another, Claude cried—

"Coachman, sit still, and no harm shall come to you. Move, and you will be shot through the head." Then bolting up to the coach door, he let down the window, and looking in, he said—

"Ladies and gentlemen, I will trouble you for your purses and watches. Quick—Quick!"

Two ladies who were there screamed, and two gentlemen gave up their purses with surprising alacrity. The ladies likewise handed theirs, and one her watch.

"More watches," said Claude.

The gentlemen handed theirs, and the one lady, who had not produced such an article, said—

"Oh, Mr. Highwayman, forgive me for not having a watch. You shall have my rings."

"Certainly not, madam. Do not distress yourself, I beg. I never like ladies' rings. Gentlemen, if you have any, will you have the goodness to hand them to me."

"I have none," said one. "I, said the other, have one, but it is a mourning ring, which I wish very much to keep, if you will permit me."

"Certain'y—certainly, I make war against folk's pockets, but not against their affections."

"You are singularly polite. May we know who you are?"

"Claude Duval!"

There was a sensation among the passengers at the mention of this name, and one of the ladies said—

"Well, I don't mind being robbed by Claude Duval, for it will be something to talk about as long as one lives."

"Madam, you do me honour!"

"Come out of that!" cried a voice behind Claude, "I won't stand nothin'. Come off thy horse, man, and I'll show thee what I can do."

"What can you do?" said Claude, turning round rapidly and surveying a brawny-looking countryman, who had descended from the roof of the coach. "What can you do, my friend?"

"I bean't no friend o' your'n. Don't make any use of thy popguns, and I'll polish thee off in no time. Come, I'll give it to thee."

Claude whistled, and up came Jack.

"Hold my horse half a moment, Jack. Here's a north-countryman going to polish me off, he says, if I won't shoot him."

Claude hastily dismounted, and the countryman sprung upon and laid hold of him round the waist with the grasp of a wrestler. Tug—tug—tug!

"Will that do?" said Claude coolly. "Try again."

The fellow made a stupendous effort, and nearly bent Claude double, but the moment he let his breath go, Claude slipped his hands to the small of his antagonist's back, and by a dexterous movement he canted him fairly over his head, and there he lay quite senseless upon the road.

"Will that do?" said Claude.

There was no reply, and Duval immediately mounted.

"Farewell," he said. "You will easily mend your traces, and you can say that you were stopped on the road by Claude Duval while there was a reward of two thousand pounds hanging over him for his death or capture. Good night."

Away he galloped and Jack with him, but the latter said—

"Ah, Claude, I'm sorry you killed the guard."

"Killed the guard? I did no such thing, Jack, I only frightened him. There was nothing but powder in the pistol; I dare say it scorched his whiskers a little."

"What a relief," said Jack. "Now, indeed, I see nothing, but a good scope for mirth in the stopping of the York mail. It will make some noise in London, Claude, to-morrow morning, I rather think."

CHAPTER CXVI.

OAKLEY LODGE.

"We must bait now, Jack," said Claude. "Look out for some resting place."

"There is a light on in advance a little way. Do you not see it? There, among the trees—there."

"Yes—yes. It is an inn."

"By the ruddy character of the light I should think it was, Claude. Let us drive on and take a look at it. Don't you think the country will be up in arms against us by the morning?"

"It may be, Jack. But it won't do for us to wait until then. We must make an appearance here again in about three weeks; the principle upon which we must go must be to visit one district only, occasionally. We must strike a blow and then be off."

"Then you have done for to-night, Claude?"

"I hope so, for I am tired, Jack. Ah, this is not an inn. Why, something is going on here, surely"

As he spoke, Claude drew rein at the lodge entrance to some estate. A large bright lamp was burning there, and the moment he and Jack appeared, a servant rushed out, and cried—

"Oh, sir, how glad we are to see you. Come in, sir. My young mistress, I am sure, will be quite delighted, and so will the old lady. This way, sir—this way. Is this your friend, sir?"

"My friend."

"Very good, gentlemen; any friend of yours, of course, sir, must be welcome indeed."

"The deuce he must," thought Claude. "Who am I taken for now, I wonder? Come on—come on, Jack. Let us see the end of this adventure."

The servant went on officiously enough before, and Claude and Jack paced their rather tired horses up a beautiful avenue of chesnuts, that led to what, as far as they could judge of it by the darkness, was a large and handsome house. They were met at the door by several servants, one of whom, an old grey bearded domestic, said—

"Is this the gentleman?"

"Yes," said the servant, who had met Claude at the gate; "and this is his friend."

"Nay;" interposed Jack, who always had rather a dread of being introduced to high people and drawing-rooms. "He is good enough to call me his friend, because I saved his life once, I believe, but I am only a servant."

"Oh, how good of him!" cried all the servants in a breath. "How good of the major. How my young lady will delight in such a trait of goodness."

"The devil," thought Claude. "I am a major, am I?"

"I will remain with all of you," said Jack, "upon one condition; and that is, that no question is asked me."

"Oh, we have our orders to say nothing," remarked the servants. "Not one word will we say—not a word. This way, if you please, sir—(to Claude)—this



OLD MATTHEW, OF THE ANTLERS, PREVENTS JOLIFFE FROM SHOOTING CLAUDE.

way. There is a capital fire in the library, and Mr. Fordyce will be quite delighted to see you."

"Mr. Fordyce," thought Claude; "now, how I should like to know who he is."

Jack remained in the servants' hall, and Claude, having divested himself of his riding cloak, appeared in the really handsome suit of clothes, of rather a clerical

cut, in which he had paid his visit to the Secretary of State. He was conducted along a passage, and then through two elegantly furnished rooms into a third, which was covered upon the walls with books in superb bindings. An elegant chandelier was suspended from the ceiling, and an elderly gentleman, with a bald head, upon which was sprinkled some hair powder, rose to meet him. The old gentleman stretched out both hands, as the servant announced Claude as—

"Major Young."

"My dear sir, I am delighted to see you, after all the sinister rumours to the contrary. Oh, what a world of anxiety Mrs. Evelyn has suffered upon your account. As for Belinda, I cannot say that she has really felt so sternly the affair about the property, for the loss of John has affected her too deeply."

"Indeed, sir," said Claude, who felt pleased, at all events, to find who he was taken for in the mystery.

"Yes, my dear sir. But the young folks will be young folks. The report of your death at St. Helena was confounding."

"Not a doubt of it, sir."

"But still, as the old family adviser, I stuck to it that the ladies should be allowed to remain in quiet possession of the estates until this day and night had passed away, for it was upon this date, you know, that you said you would be here, in your letter dated at Bombay."

"Exactly."

"Well, my dear sir, the Wights would not consent."

"D—n them!" said Claude.

"Hush! hush! you military gentlemen get such a sad habit of swearing. As I was saying, the Wights would not wait, but swore they would come with their solicitor at twelve o'clock to-night, and take possession if you were not here to prove the signature to the deed sent home by John, and which you alone witnessed, for if nothing could be proved on account of your death at St. Helena, you see, the demise would have been useless, and the Wights, according to the terms of Wilkinson's bequest, would have become possessed of the estate in fee simple."

"The devil they would," said Claude, who felt rather confused at this legal jargon.

"Yes, major, and rather than be engaged in troublesome litigation, which would be adverse to the Evelyns for a certainty, they would have given way, not that the Wights would have shown them the smallest consideration, for a more selfish—oh, dear, I don't know what to say they are."

"Really," said Claude.

"Have you not heard John speak of them?"

"Very likely."

"Ah, you did not pay much attention."

"No, not much."

"And yet, poor fellow, after you had taken care of him during a toilsome march of four hundred miles through the most hostile part of India, he actually expired in your arms. What must have been your feelings?"

"Ah, what, indeed. Confound the Wights, and the Wilkinsons, and the Evelyns," thought Claude. "I only wish I was out of this."

"So, sir, you see you perfectly understood our position. I dreaded the case of 'Doe on the demise of Wilkinson,' you see."

"So should I."

"Now, my dear sir, I will go and prepare the ladies for your reception. They will both be deeply affected upon seeing you."

"But, my dear sir, I am so little accustomed to business, that now I hardly know what I am to do, precisely."

"Dear me, it's as plain as possible. You see, John Evelyn, before he went to India, was not worth twopence, but old Wilkinson, who, to tell the truth, had robbed the Evelyns of a great amount of money, suddenly dies, and leaves John £100,000 and this estate, with a clause that he, John, might leave it to whom he

pleased, but that if he should die without issue, or without executing a deed of demise to any one, his, old Wilkinson's own family, in regular legal succession, were to inherit."

"Yes. Yes. To be sure."

"Well, John, when he heard all this, wrote back from Calcutta, that, as the army was going upon an expedition against the Jongmars, he could not, with honour, leave until the campaign was over, but that his sister, Belinda, and his mother were to take possession of Oakley Lodge."

"Where's that?"

"Here, my dear sir; here."

"Oh, ah; to be sure."

"Even to take possession of Oakley Lodge, and to have what cash they pleased. Lord bless you, sir, in the two years they have been here, they have not used a thousand pounds of the money at Coutts's. Well, major, then comes your letter about the death of poor John, and you enclosed a deed, which he made, while wounded, by the assistance of a civilian, who since died, putting Belinda in possession of the property.

"Oh yes, yes—I believe I was tolerably explicit."

"Very. Well, the Wights—old Wilkinson's heirs-at-law—laid claim to the whole, and commenced proceedings, saying—'If Major Young witnessed John Evelyn's signature to the deed, let him come and say so; but he does no such thing.' It was then, you see, that I heard of your death at St. Helena."

"But you see I'm worth half-a-dozen dead ones yet."

"To be sure. You said you would be here to-day, and I always doubted the news of your death, so I actually placed the servants on the look-out for you, and I am sure the pleasure I felt, as the old friend of the late Mr. Evelyn and all his dear good family, when I heard you had come, almost made me a young man again—that it did."

"Then," said Claude, who now had a clear comprehension of the whole affair, and of who he was mistaken for, "these Evelyns are amiable people?"

"Amiable? They are indeed."

"And what are the Wights really?"

"Why, old Wight, who married Wilkinson's sister, is a pawnbroker and money lender. His son Joseph is an attorney in Gray's-Inn——"

"That's enough," said Claude. "Damn them!"

"My dear sir!"

"Excuse me, but will you allow me to say a word to my man, whom I left in the hall; I should like to make a slight change in my dress. After riding many miles in one coat, one gets sick of it."

"Oh, certainly; I will have you shown to a chamber, while I prepare the ladies to see you, and your own man shall attend you. Dear me—dear me—I have been so remiss as not to ask you to take any refreshment."

"My good sir," I will take a cup of coffee with the ladies when I come down stairs again, if you please."

"Yes, yes. That will give them much pleasure, my dear sir."

The lawyer rang the bell and ordered a servant to show the major into a chamber, and to bring to him his own man. All this was done, and in the course of a few minutes Claude and Jack found themselves alone in a magnificent bed-chamber, with half-a-dozen wax lights burning upon the toilette table.

"Jack," said Claude, "shut the door."

Jack did so.

"Have you got our vallaise?"

"Yes, they told me you wanted to make some change in your dress, so I brought it in my hand."

"Good. Now listen to me, Jack, and I will astonish you."

Jack did listen to him, and that most attentively too, while Claude related to him at full length all that he had heard from the lawyer.

"So you see, Jack," he said, "they will make me a military man, whether

I like it or not; and as, from all I can hear, I like the Evelyns and detest the Wights—why, I feel much inclined to support the character."

"Do so, Claude. Let this be one of the good deeds that shall plead for you?"

"Humph! We won't talk of the goodness of my deeds. But have we anything in the vallaise that will help to make me up in a more military appearance than I now have."

"Yes. An undress officer's frock-coat, elegantly braided. Oh, you will do famously."

Claude put on the coat which, like all the apparel he had provided himself with, was of the first character, and with a rich new lace cravat he certainly looked a gentleman of extraordinary good breeding."

"That will do," he said.

"Do!" cried Jack. "They may look far and wide, Claude, before they find your equal. It is splendid."

"Well, Jack, all you have to remember is, that I am Major Young of the Indian Army, and you have been with me in several battles, and once saved my life. You have a recollection, too, of John Evelyn. Now I will go down stairs. I can't miss my way, for the staircase is sensibly lighted here."

CHAPTER CXVII.

A FAMILY SCENE.

Claude, thus attired, and certainly presenting a distinguished appearance, descended the staircase, but just as he got within six steps of the bottom he saw a door open and the lawyer appeared.

"Ah! major," he said. "I was coming to call you."

"I hope," said Claude, "I have not kept you waiting, sir, nor the ladies."

"Oh, no. They are both in the drawing-room and will do themselves the pleasure of seeing you at once. They will be affected, but you will do your best, I am sure, to re-assure them and to waive any very close remarks concerning poor John. The less that is said of him the better."

"I perfectly agree with you, sir."

"Well, well," muttered the old lawyer to himself as he preceded Claude. It is one comfort to find poor John's friend such a perfect gentleman. Oh dear—oh dear, if he really had died at St. Helena in coming home from India! It won't bear thinking of—it won't bear thinking of."

"Humph!" thought Claude. "I strongly suspect that there the real major does lie, but if by personating him I can do a great good to worthy people, I shall think the sin of doing so amply absolved."

Claude was right, we think. The drawing-room door was thrown open by the lawyer, who stepping aside to allow Claude to enter first, said—

"My dear ladies, this is Major Young, and I introduce him to you as a real gentleman as well as a real friend."

Claude walked into the room. A young, lady whose age could not be above seventeen, advanced to meet him. She held out her hand, but before he could reach her she stopped short, overcome by her emotions, and burst into tears. An old lady was seated in an arm chair weeping bitterly.

"Pray be composed," said Claude. "Accept such consolation as one who feels deeply for you, can offer. Remember, ladies, that we are all upon the shore of that unknown sea which washes the haven of immortality, and that the time will come when bright eyes that we loved upon earth will beam upon us for ever, and the smiles of lips we loved to kiss will be eternal."

These words were uttered in tones of earnest and of feeling sympathy. The

ladies ceased their tears, and the old lawyer, as he retreated to a window, muttered—

"Yes—yes, he is indeed a gentleman."

"Oh, sir," said the old lady. "How much we owe you."

"We can never be sufficiently grateful," said the young lady. "May God bless and reward you, sir."

Claude bowed, and with a smile said—

"I am sufficiently rewarded by having the good fortune to come in time, here. But I see you are about to take your coffee now. Allow me to feel myself quite at home, and at once to assume all the privileges of an old friend. Come, Miss Evelyn, pray be seated, and you, madam, will perhaps, allow me to take a place near to you."

"Ah!" sighed the old lawyer. "What a thing it is in this world to meet with a real right down gentleman."

It was yet some time before the old lady could recover her ordinary composure so as to be able to speak to Claude, and when she did, her first words were—

"Oh, sir, my poor John—my poor John."

"Think upon some other subject, my dear madam," said Claude.

"Alas! while I live I can never think upon anything else. Belinda, my dear, do you attend to the major, I am quite unequal to the task of doing so. God bless you, sir—God bless you; I do not so particularly say that because you came to save us from ruin as because you have been a friend to my poor John."

"Mother—mother," said the young lady, "say no more. Let us feel that, though John has gone from us, he is happier than if he were with us, and we shall see him again."

"You are right, Miss Evelyn," said Claude. "The more we bring our reason to bear upon the subject the more we shall be reconciled to death. In the first place, it is meritable and it is kind, but we leave some one behind to mourn for us. Then again, it is the end of pain and sorrow, whereas life is the beginning."

"True enough," said the lawyer, "life is like a long lawsuit, and death like a judgment in one's favour, which puts us into possession, without cavil or dispute about title of the most splendid property in value—the limitless heaven!"

The old lady looked from one to the other, and gradually she dried her tears. Her reason was getting decidedly the ascendancy over any morbid feelings that had previously occupied her brain, and from that time forth it was not likely she would again make her few remaining years, years of sorrow. Belinda, too, looked more happy, and by the time the coffee had gone round twice, the little party looked quite a different thing to what it had been. An old clock upon the chimney-piece struck eleven.

"Oh!" said the lawyer. "Eleven o'clock. Why—our friends, I was going to say, but I ought more properly to say our foes—the Wights, will be here soon, no doubt; but here is what will confound them."

As he spoke, he took a paper from his pocket, and handed it to Claude, who, upon opening it, found it was the deed which he was supposed to have witnessed. From the document he gathered the information that he was, for the time being, to be Cornelius Young, a major in the Bombay cavalry. At this moment, a servant came into the room and said—

"If you please, madam, there are some people coming to the house. They are talking very loud, and won't say what their business is."

"Let them come," said the lawyer. "Take no notice of them."

The servant retired.

"Now, my dear sir," added the lawyer to Claude, "there is a nice fire in the next drawing-room, and by having the door of communication ajar, you will hear what these people say, and so be able to form a correct judgment regarding them. When I want you I will open the door, and then you can walk in."

"Certainly," said Claude. "Arrange the matter in any way you think proper, sir. I am completely at your service."

Claude rose, and went into the next drawing-room, and he had not been there a

moment when he heard the old grey-headed butler arrive in the apartment he had left, and say—

"Ma'am, there are five or six men coming here, they say."

"Let them come," said the lawyer. "Let them come, Mr. Green. We are quite ready to receive them."

There was a bustle of feet, and then the drawing-room door was roughly thrown open, and six persons entered. The foremost was a thick-set, bald-headed man, with a white face, and a most sinister expression about the eyes. He was followed by a much younger man, who seemed a little frightened, for he kept in the rear of the older one. These were Wight, the money lender, and his son, the attorney. They were followed by four rather seedy-looking individuals, of the class that are to be seen any day hanging about the inns of court. Old Wight advanced to the middle of the room, and said—

"Well, ladies, you see I am a little before my time. Better that than too late."

"He!—he!—he!" chuckled the son, as he stole a furtive glance around him at the superb appointments of the room.

"Well, sir?" said the lawyer.

"And well, sir," cried Wight, swelling himself out like a turkey-cock. "Pray, sir, what have you got to say?"

"It is natural, as you have come here, that we should ask you what you have to say. What is your business here, Mr. Wight, as I believe your name is?"

"Oh, very well—very well. My business here, then, is to take possession of this property, which you and the ladies have agreed I might do, if your witness to the deed of gift did not make his appearance before twelve to-night, and as we feel tolerably sure the person named died at St. Helena, we think of sleeping here to-night. You will, sir, provide yourself with a lodging; I have no objection to the ladies sleeping here to-night, but in the morning they must tramp, bag and baggage. At least, when I say baggage, I shall take good care they move nothing belonging to the house, at all."

"He! he! he! father's a sharp 'un," said the son.

"But recollect, Mr. Wight, we might go to law to prove the deed by getting witnesses from India, on oath, to prove the major's signature, and Mr. John Evelyn's to the deed, you know."

"Then I'll throw the whole affair into Chancery, and there will be a receiver appointed to the estate, and you will all be dead and rotten before it's settled."

"Ah, dear me, yes. Well, if the major don't come to depose to the deed, I suppose you will, if we give up quiet possession, allow the ladies five hundred a-year, as a maintenance, Mr. Wight. Recollect the income you lay claim to is somewhere about five thousand pounds per annum, independent of this estate."

"Pho, pho! Don't tell me, sir, let 'em get a living as they can, I don't keep paupers. There's the parish for everybody; I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll forgive what they have spent since John Evelyn's death, if they go quietly, but if they will go to law, I'll arrest them for that, and I dare say it comes to something. You know I can claim it."

"Oh, yes; certainly. If you can claim the estate, you can claim arrears."

"Exactly, so you see we know all about it."

"He! he! he!" laughed the son.

"Well then," said the old lawyer, "since you have no feeling in this subject but for your own interests, and since it becomes absolutely necessary that these ladies should protect themselves, I have no resource but to introduce to your attention Major Young."

As he spoke, the lawyer moved to the door of the room, and opening it, Claude stepped forward at once, and confronted the party. The consternation excited by his appearance was as great as if a bomb-shell had fallen into the room. Claude had upon his face a stern look as he advanced upon the Wights. The son got fairly behind the father, and Claude coming to within two paces of the latter, said—

"Well, sir, what would you with me?"

Old Wight stepped back until he trod upon his son's toes; but he made no answer for about half a minute, then, however, he contrived to stammer out—

"Are you Major Young, really; and not dead?"

"Ask your own eyes, sir, for the latter part of your question, and this gentleman," indicating the lawyer, "for the former."

"The devil!"

The son groaned.

"Thomas!" roared the old lawyer, and a servant appeared.

"Go and fetch a constable to turn these people out of your mistress's house directly."

"Yes, sir."

"Curse you all," said Old Wight, as he buttoned his coat up to his chin—"curse you all, I—I—d—n it, I should like to see you all roasting, I should, I—I—Come along."

The son, as he left the drawing-room managed to lay hold of a small bronze and gold inkstand, but Claude saw him, and with two strides he came up to him, and took him by the collar, at the same time saluting him with a hearty kick.

"Stop thief!" said Claude.

"Oh, oh, murder!"

Down dropped the inkstand, and old Wight, turning to Claude, said, as he shook his fist at him—

"That's an assault; if I don't have you up for it at the quarter sessions my name ain't Wight, that's all."

"Not quite all," said Claude.

"What more then?"

"Why at the same quarter sessions I'll charge your son with robbing in a dwelling-house."

"Oh, come away, father—come away. Don't mind him—come away!"

"Jack!" cried Claude; "Jack, bring me my horsewhip directly."

With this, the father and son, and the four doubtful-looking characters they had brought with them, made a wild sort of rush from the drawing-room and down the grand staircase as though they had been mad. They did not stop until they had got fairly out of the house, nor did they think themselves safe in the grounds, for they heard, as they passed through the hall, one of the servants say something about tossing them in a blanket.

"Well," said Claude with a smile, "you have got rid of your enemies."

"Thanks to you," said Miss Evelyn.

"Oh no, I have but done my duty, and I assure you I have not enjoyed anything so much for a long time, as the discomfiture of those Wights."

"Nor I," said the lawyer. "Now, ladies, do not let this gentleman and I keep you up. Go to bed, and we will have a bottle of wine together and then retire. In the morning we can talk over affairs more fully."

The ladies upon this rose, and old Mrs. Evelyn would kiss Claude, upon which Claude tenderly but respectfully kissed Belinda; and when they had left the room the old lawyer looked hard at Claude, and said—

"You are a single man?"

"Yes."

"Ah—humph! Whoever marries Belinda Evelyn, will get a treasure, for she is one of the best of creatures. Bless her, the more one sees of her the more one loves her. She is a real, honest, good English girl."

CHAPTER CXVII.

THE WESTERN ROAD.

THE comforts of Jack were not forgotten in the progress of this extraordinary adventure, and Claude with the lawyer sat up until one o'clock in the morning, disposing of a bottle of wine. They then, with mutual expressions of esteem, retired for the night, and Claude slept like a prince in Oakley Lodge that night. It had several times occurred to him to make a confidant of the lawyer, and to disclose to him the whole particulars of the mistake that been made at the lodge gate, in his identity. But upon second thoughts, he considered that it was as well to leave well alone, so he kept the secret locked up in his own breast. To be sure he had to parry some rather home questions concerning the late John Evelyn, but he managed to do so, and the lawyer had no more suspicion that Claude was not Major Young, than he had of his own identity. The bright sun was shining into Claude's bed-room when he awoke in the morning, and Claude lay looking about him in that half dreamy state, between sleeping and waking, which some persons declare to be the most delightful period of existence. No wonder that Claude fell into a train of reflections; and no wonder, considering all things, that some portion of those reflections were painful. His thoughts flew back to the time when he was at his father's humble, but once happy home at Hampstead; and he could, by closing his eyes, fancy that he saw the cottage porch, with its clustering climatis intermingled with the sweet woodbine, and the great chesnut tree that was some paces before the door, and the little stream, too, that ran bubbling by, singing its pebbly song as though elate with idleness. And then in the strange dioramic view of the past, that imagination was presenting to him, came some darker passages in his career. His first robbing—his first—no, he would not, he could not call the death of Sir Lionel Faversham by his father's gibbet, a murder—it was to all intents and purposes, an execution.

"No, no," he said, "if ever there was an act which might be defended before the bar of Heaven, it surely was that of the son taking the life of him, who by the basest treachery had sacrificed his father." After this Claude's recollections went to Jack, and the gallant appearance that he had made when he, Claude, first saw him in the Hampstead-road in the waggon, which was a shelter at once for both man and horse. Alas! what a change had come over poor Jack! And as to the future, how dim and dreary it looked to Claude. He felt like some wrecked mariner deprived of his all, and cast upon the shores of a sea across which he was never again to wend his way. What was to become of him? What was he now to hope for? Was he to die in some ignoble scuffle on the road, or at last to be fairly taken and made a spectacle of, to gaping thousands upon the gallows? Tap! tap! came upon Claude's door. He started up in bed, and mechanically thrust his hand under his pillow, where he had placed his pistols over night. For many a long night Claude had not slept without these weapons close to his reach.

"Who knocks?" he cried.

"I," said Jack.

Claude knew the voice, and at once said—

"Come in, Jack—it is you, I think?"

"Yes, Claude."

The door was opened, and Claude placed his finger upon his lips, as he said—

"Hush, hush, Jack. Do not give utterance to that name. Remember who and what I am supposed to be here."

"It was a slip of the tongue," said Jack.

"Yes, and might be full of dangerous consequences. But have you any news?"

"None, but that, in the first place, it is time to get up, and in the next it is time to determine thoroughly what we mean to do."

"Yes, Jack, yes."

Claude began hastily dressing himself, and in a very short time had completed that operation.

"Now, Jack," he said, "the horses."

"Off and away!"



CLAUDE, AS MAJOR YOUNG, DOES A BENEVOLENT ACT AT OAKLEY HALL.

"Yes, as soon as consistent with common civility I can get away from these people; I only sincerely hope, much as I admire them, that I may never look upon their faces again."

"Why, what have they done to you, Claude?"

"Nothing, nothing; but I have by the merest accident in the world been able to do them a service, and I would not that they should even know me in any other character than that I was so strangely induced to assume, for worlds."

"I can understand that, Claude."

"I knew you would, Jack; so get all ready as soon after we have breakfasted as possible, for I know, of course, that they will not let us go before."

"Not likely, Claude. I will see to the horses, and you will find me close at hand at any moment that you please."

Jack left Claude's chamber, and he had not been gone long when one of the servants of the house came to tender his services as valet to Claude: but there was no occasion for such service, since Claude was all but ready to go down stairs. He enquired if any of the family were stirring, and was informed that at nine o'clock the whole of them would be assembled in the breakfast-room. Claude, upon consulting his watch, found that it was then a quarter to eight only, and an idea struck him which he immediately resolved to put into practice.

"I have just time, I find," he said, "for half an hour's ride before dressing for breakfast with the ladies. Will you be so good as to order my horse, and tell my man to be ready to accompany me from the lodge."

"Yes, sir."

The servant evidently considered that there was nothing at all extraordinary in this, and he went at once to give the necessary orders. Claude followed him down stairs, and as he walked through the magnificent drawing-room, he could not but give a sigh to the thought that he, had fortune prompted him, might really have been the possessor of so much substantial wealth. He could not but feel, however, how dangerous such thoughts were to his tranquillity, and he crushed them in the bud. It did certainly occur to him to write a brief note, saying that he was compelled to leave without the formality of a leave-taking; but then again, he shrunk from signing the fictitious name to it, which would be absolutely necessary, and he preferred, after all, leaving without any such ceremony. The servant lost no time in giving the orders with which Claude had entrusted him, and the horses, with Jack, were soon at the hall door. Jack understood at once, from the message that had been brought him, what Claude meant, and consequently he had packed the *vallaise* containing their disguises upon the back of his own steed, therefore all was ready. Claude sprang into the saddle, and without a word, turned his back upon the house, to the inhabitants of which he had been enabled to give so much satisfaction. They had proceeded about half way to the lodge, when Jack, riding closer to Claude, said—

"Have you left a note or message?"

"No, Jack."

"And yet you really mean to be off?"

"I do."

"Then the result will be that, missing us without a word of explanation, the good folks at the house here will spare neither time, trouble, nor expense to find out what has become of us. They will wait breakfast until God knows when, and then, upon finding we don't come back, they will fancy that we have become the victims of some foul play, and gratitude to you will induce them to raise the whole country upon the subject. You can probably, better than I, Claude, estimate what evils are likely to arise from such a state of things."

"Upon my word, Jack," said Claude, "all that is very true."

"You see it, Claude?"

"Oh, perfectly; and I find, and admit at once, that I have been precipitate."

"Will you go back?"

"Oh, no—no. And I do not like to write. But I will leave at the lodge such a verbal message as, at all events, will have the effect of preventing any such surmises as those you have mentioned occurring concerning us; and, whatever may be the amount of astonishment and regret occasioned by my taking so unceremonious a leave, there will be no hue and cry after me."

"Good," said Jack. "That will do."

By the time this little conversation had come to an end, they had turned a corner in the avenue of trees, and were within sight of the lodge entrance, at

which they had in the first instance been so strangely welcomed. Jack fell back to a proper distance from Claude, and the latter, slightly increasing the pace of his horse, soon reached the pair of handsome gates that formed the entrance to the mansion. The gate-keeper saw him coming, and respectfully opened the gates, and three men stood holding one of them back.

"Tell the ladies, your kind and good mistresses," said Claude, "that it is only from a feeling that it would pain me too much to bid them formally good bye, that I leave their home without doing so. Say that, if we never meet again, that I can never forget the few happy hours I have spent here."

"And are you really, sir, not coming back?"

"I am not. Good morning."

The man looked both grieved and bewildered, but he made no other remark; and Claude, with Jack so close to him as to preclude the possibility of any remark being made to him upon the subject, passed through the gate.

"It is done," said Claude, with a sigh.

"And very well done, too," said Jack. "It is a good job over, Claude; and now, here we are, with all the world before us, where to choose."

"What is your opinion, Jack, regarding Matthew, at the Antlers? Will he pocket the usage he got from me quietly, or will he raise an alarm that I am in this neighbourhood, think you?"

"He will secretly, and without for one moment allowing himself to be seen in the matter, let the authorities know that you are hereabouts."

"That, upon consideration, was my own opinion; so, Jack, if you see nothing to the contrary, suppose we strike across the country to the Western Road?"

"Agreed."

"Which will be the best way?"

"Right across the Heath, Claude, and so on through the lanes to the Edgeware Road, and then we can get by Kilburn and Willesden, to the Western Road."

"Yes, that will be the best route. Come on, Jack."

The horses had had a good night's rest in an excellent stable, so that they were as fresh as the morning, and when put to a canter, got over the ground in famous style. The only drawback upon the ride was the fact, that both Claude and Jack were doing it upon empty stomachs. But this was a drawback which they fully meant to remedy upon the first opportunity that occurred so to do. Still they had to ride a considerable distance before they came to any house of entertainment; and they had skirted the little village of West End, and got into the immediate vicinity of the Edgeware Road, before they saw the swinging sign of a little inn called "The White Horse."

"Will this do?" said Jack.

"Yes," replied Claude, "one place is about as good as another to us, Jack, provided we have no positive means of predicting danger in it, so let us alight and go in at once; I must own that life on the road without one's breakfast is but dreary sort of thing."

Jack smiled in that mournful manner that of late he smiled in, but he said to Claude—

"It will still be the safest course for us to pursue to keep up the distinction of master and man, for in that case you find out all that is going on in one part of the house, while I can keep a good look-out about the stables, and see all who come."

"True, true. But don't neglect your breakfast. Let it be of the best the house affords."

"I will."

They drew rein at the door of the little inn, and the ostler came to take charge of their horses.

"Feed 'em, sir?"

"No. Only hay and water," said Claude.

He dismounted and walked into the house. The landlady met him with a curtsey in the passage.

"Up stairs, sir, if you please."

"Can I have breakfast, madam?"

"Oh dear, yes, sir. Certainly, anything you please, sir. There's a room up stairs. Indeed, there's a nice room below, but Mr. Joliffe is there."

"Who is he?" said Claude, as he followed the landlady up the stairs.

"Why, sir, he is the coustable, and as they say Claude Duval is about Hampstead, they are going to swear in some men."

"Really," said Claude, as the landlady threw open a door, and ushered him into a neat bow-windowed room looking to the front of the house.

"Yes, sir, but I don't believe it."

"Indeed."

"No, sir; for the person who says it, between you and me and the post, I wouldn't believe him on his oath."

"And who is that?"

"Old Matthew, who keeps the Antlers."

"His own antlers?"

"Dear me, what a gentleman you are to catch up one. The Antlers inn, I mean, which, though I say it, perhaps, who should not, is no more to be compared to the White Horse, than chalk is to old cheese."

"And so he actually says that Claude Duval is in the neighbourhood?"

"Why, sir; when I say he says it, perhaps after all I ought not, for he don't want anybody to know as much, but I heard Mr. Joliffe say that he got a letter, what he called a—a—synonymous letter, I think."

"Anonymous, I presume?"

"Very likely, sir. It was something of that sort at all events; he says that Claude Duval, the famous hghwayman, was in the neighbourhood, and he soon found out it came from Matthew, and then they do say that the York mail has been stopped. But I am gossiping without attending to what you want, sir. Pray what may I bring you?"

"As good a breakfast as you can. I will leave it entirely to you."

"Very well, sir."

CHAPTER CXIX.

THE ATTACK AND AN ALARM.

The landlady made an exit, and when she was gone, Claude examined the priming of his pistols, as he said to himself—

"So Master Matthew pants for revenge, does he, and has fairly taken the field against me? Well, it is quite natural, after what has happened, that he should do so; and he need not be half so much afraid of me as before. Then I had trusted him, and he betrayed me. For that I have taken my revenge. Now I have not trusted him at all; therefore it is all fair, and he comes against me like any ordinary opponent."

Having thoroughly satisfied himself that his pistols were in good working condition, Claude became rather anxious that Jack should be made aware of the state of affairs at the "White Horse." He thought the best way to do this would be boldly to ring the bell, and order Jack to be shown up to him. He did so, and in answer to the summons, rather a lout of a lad made his appearance, and when Claude said "Show my servant this room, and tell him I want him," he looked as though he were too stupid to understand even so simple an affair. He, however, growled out a sort of assent to the proposition, and left the room.

"I won't go without my breakfast if I can help it," said Claude.

At this moment he heard a great noise of footsteps upon the stairs, and the idea that danger was approaching came naturally to his mind. He sprang to his feet,

and stood with a pistol in each hand. In another moment he heard the voice of the landlady saying—

"The back room, Mr. Joliffe, if you please. There's a gentleman in the front."

"Oh, very well," said a voice. "Now, my lads, come along, and I will give you your instructions how to act in this matter."

The clatter of feet died away in the room adjoining to that in which Claude was, and then, before he could decide upon any particular course of action, the landlady herself came in to lay the cloth for his breakfast. She was followed closely by Jack, to whom, it appeared, the waiter had duly delivered Claude's message.

"I hope, sir," said the landlady, "you will excuse the house not being quite so quiet as it is usually, but Mr. Joliffe finds that the public room down stairs, of course, can't be kept all to himself, so he has come to the back room on this floor; but the constables will soon be all gone, and then there will be no noise at all."

"Thank you. And are they going after Claude Duval?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sure I don't know whether to hope they will catch him or not. They do say he is a polite man to the ladies."

"So I have heard, madam."

"Oh dear, yes. Bless you, sir, there are no end of stories told of him. Ah—poor fellow! who shall say what drove him to be what he is?"

"Who indeed."

"Ah! well—well: perhaps, after all, they may burn their fingers by meddling with him at all, poor fellow, and so I have told Mr. Joliffe, though he did only laugh and say he wouldn't mind a slight scorch to lay hold of Duval."

"This Mr. Joliffe, you say, is a constable?"

"Why, yes, sir; and he is a sort of clerk to the magistrates hereabouts, and all that sort of thing. You see, sir, he is going to stay here all day, and send people out to catch Duval, and to hear what reports they can bring him, and then, I dare say, we shall have Sir Lionel Faversham too, in the course of the day, here. That is the son of the old baronet who was killed on the heath, they do say, by Claude Duval, long ago. But one must not believe all one hears."

"Certainly not, madam."

The boy now made his appearance with a tray, upon which was, certainly, a breakfast that Claude felt strongly inclined to do justice to, notwithstanding that his position was getting each moment more critical. There were eggs in abundance—grilled ham—salt fish—and coffee and hot rolls—a breakfast peculiarly inviting to one who had ridden six miles on an empty stomach. Jack said not a word while the landlady was thus speaking, but when, after asking Claude if there was anything more he wanted, and receiving an answer in the negative had left the room, he said—

"Claude—Claude."

"Hush, Jack! Do you forget that in the next room there is danger?"

"No—no. I heard all—I know all; but my voice was not sufficiently loud to reach any ears but yours.—What will you do?"

"Eat my breakfast, Jack."

"What!—Can you sit down to breakfast while those who would destroy you are only divided from you by a thin partition?"

"And why not, Jack? With my breakfast, I assure you that I shall feel much more ready to combat with them than without it. And now that we are here, sit down, and as rapidly as may be, refresh yourself. We may have work before us that possibly will interfere with our dinner."

Jack was truly astonished at the coolness of Claude, and before he could prevail upon himself to sit down at the table, he would first go to the door, in order to be fully satisfied that there was no listener there. Finding, however, the staircase and landing quite clear, he returned, and did partake of some of the breakfast, while Claude did the same, and said to him in a low voice—

"What have you heard below, Jack?"

"Only that the whole country will soon be up in arms against us."

"Is that all?"

"Yes—with a few trifling details."

"And do you know to whom we are indebted for all this?"

"No."

"Then I can tell you: it is to Matthew. Nay, Jack, we ought to have expected it. He is now a fair and open foe, and so I do not fear him. But tell me, do you think that there is the smallest suspicion below of who we are?"

"I do not, Claude: and yet a man did come and look curiously at the horses. I did not know him, nor did he look like an officer, or one who would be likely to know us; and so many persons affect to look curiously at horses, upon the affectation of being great judges of them, when their information extends not much further than knowing the head from the tail, that I did not take much notice of that circumstance."

"Humph! Eat away, Jack."

"I am satisfied."

"Very well—so am I. Now go, and boldly get the horses to the door. There is no one there, I think."

As he spoke Claude rose and went to the window, which commanded a good view of the front of the inn, and a road that led from it to Hampstead. After a moment he turned and beckoned to Jack.

"What is it?" asked Jack.

"Come and look. Do you know that man in the rough great coat, coming down the road?"

"Yes—yes. It is Matthew."

"To be sure it is. He is coming here to consult with the Mr. Joliffe who is in the next room, and a most fortunate circumstance it is too."

"Fortunate?"

"Yes, Jack, for as true as I stand here, I will frighten that Mr. Joliffe, and old Matthew, into letting us go as quietly as they ever mean to go themselves from this inn."

"Claude, you do things that nobody else can do, or ever thought of doing; I will keep out of the way of Matthew, for he would know me at once, and seeing me, he would guess that you were not far off."

"Wait until he comes up."

Jack did wait, and in the course of about five minutes, the greater portion of which were consumed by Mr. Matthew in rousing his spirits down stairs at the bar of the "White Horse" with something strong, he was heard slowly coming up to speak to Joliffe. Claude thought it just possible he might open the wrong door, and as he did not at that juncture want an interview with Matthew, he approached it, and held the lock. His suspicions were correct, for Matthew did try that room.

"Mr. Joliffe," he said, "it's only me."

Joliffe heard him, and called from the back room to him. "This way, Matthew—this way—I am in the back room."

"Oh, very well, sir," said Matthew. "Thank you, sir."

The door of the back room was opened, and closed again upon Mr. Matthew; after which, Claude, in a whisper to Jack, said—

"Well, what do you think of our affair now, Jack. Are we not in a prosperous condition?"

"Very; but hark! Some one else is coming up stairs. Hold the door still, Claude."

"I am. Ah, this visitor of Mr. Joliffe's knows the way, for he has gone direct into the room. I feel a great desire to know what he says. Jack, you turn all your attention to listening for the approach of any one from below, while I do these gentry in the next room the honour of listening to what they may be talking about."

This was hazardous, but it was, perhaps, the only way in which Claude could

ascertain the amount of his danger, and he was determined to adopt it. While Jack, therefore, with his body bent over the balustrades of the staircase, listened for any sound that might come from below, Claude placed his ear to the keyhole of the next apartment.

"Are you sure?" he heard some one say."

"If they are not the horses of Claude Duval, and the man who goes about with him, I will consent to be hung," said another.

"There, you be off, and get what armed assistance you can from Hampstead," said Joliffe, "while I and Matthew remain here. You need not be gone above an hour at the outside; and, for the love of Heaven, I beg that you will make no alarm here, for if you do, I won't take upon myself to say what might be the consequences."

"Nor I—nor I," said Matthew, whose voice betrayed the pitiable state of alarm in which he was. "Oh, how I do wish I had never meddled with the affair."

"Pho! Pho!" said Joliffe. "You be off, Simson."

Claude had enough. With rapidity he got back to his room again with Jack, and then he closed the door carefully. In another moment, he heard the man who was named Simson, and who had brought the report about the horses, go down stairs at great speed.

"What will you do, Claude?" again interposed Jack.

"Hark you, Jack—we must get away. You go down stairs and get the horses to the door, and trust me for coming after you."

"No—no, Claude, you are risking too much. If you are really going to face those men, let me be with you. I would live or die with you, Claude. You are by far too adventurous, and too generous to face such men alone, whereas with me in your company you are better protected against any danger."

"Believe me, my dear Jack, there is very little danger in this whole affair, and none at all against which I cannot be fully prepared. Go, if you really regard me, and get the horses to the door. Pay the landlady and the ostler."

"Yes," replied Jack.

Without another word Jack left the room, and then Claude began to make his preparations for the interview he was determined to have with Joliffe, and Matthew, the landlord of the Antlers. He found in a drawer of the room some corks, and providing himself with two of the largest, he put them in his pocket, and then with a double barrelled pistol in his right hand—a small but admirable weapon, which he knew he could depend upon—he coolly walked across the landing, and with a sudden movement opened at once the door of the back room, in which were his two foes.

CHAPTER CXX.

THE CHASE AND THE CAPTURE.

Joliffe had a bottle of wine before him, and upon the table, likewise, was a plate with some nuts in it, so that it was quite clear he had no idea, while engaged in endeavouring to capture Claude Duval, and bring him to what he called justice, any intention of mortifying his inward man. Matthew was facing the door, as well as Joliffe, so that they both had the full advantage, such as it was, of seeing Claude the moment he came into the room; and stare they did with all the power they were capable of. Claude closed the door behind him immediately, and said, in quite a composed and confidential sort of voice—

"Gentlemen, have you any real business with me?"

"Oh, good gracious!" cried Matthew.

"Who are you?" said Joliffe, rising.

"Sit still, sir. I am Claude Duval."

Joliffe sunk into his seat again, and turned as white as a sheet, while Matthew's

teeth palpably chattered in his head, and his knees smote each other under the table.

"Sir," added Claude, looking hard at Joliffe, "have you any business with me?"

"No—no—I—I only—I arrest—you in the king's—name."

"Pray say that again."

Claude held his pistol in a direct line with Joliffe's eyes, and Matthew, in a tone of agony, said—

"He'll do it—he'll do it, Mr. Joliffe—he—he don't mind what he does. I shall never recover the full use of my back, through the dreadful chimney business."

"I—I don't want you, sir," said Joliffe. "This unexpected meeting is rather —rather in a manner of speaking——"

"Too great a pleasure," put in Matthew. "I'll go home, if you please, Mr. Duval."

"Not yet," said Claude. "Mr. Joliffe, I was led to believe that you wished nothing more than to apprehend me, and that, of course, by coming into your society in this way, I should be giving you the desired opportunity. Come, sir, you are armed. Here am I, the notorious Claude Duval. Why don't you immortalize yourself by taking me at once?"

"Here goes then," said Joliffe, suddenly pulling his hand from under the table. "Here goes for a try at it."

A pistol was in his grasp, but Matthew caught him by the arm, exclaiming—

"No, no, Joliffe. Mr. Joliffe, don't try it. You might as well try to shoot the devil himself, as Claude Duval. Lots have heard it. I tell you, sir, he is shot proof. Don't attempt it. You will fail, and then we are dead men."

Claude did not give Joliffe much time to contest the matter with Matthew, but leaning over the table, he wrested the pistol from him in a moment, and laid it out of reach, saying as he did so—

"Well, sir, have you done what you intend, or have you any other snug little chance ready, by which you think you may catch me?"

"Have mercy upon me!"

"Stuff—stuff."

"Oh, yes," added Matthew. "Have mercy upon us, Claude Duval."

"Mercy!—But what have you done to me, either of you, that you should call upon me for mercy? Mr. Joliffe, it is your promise to try and take me. It is mine to elude your attempt. I am not cruel nor revengeful. As for you, Matthew, we were once friends, at least, I thought so, and I trusted you. You betrayed me, and for that I owed you a grudge, which I paid off, so that in he present affair, except that you really have no business to interfere at all in the matter, I have nothing very particular to reproach you with."

"Then you don't mean," whined Matthew, "to do me any hurt?"

"None, whatever."

"Nor me?" said Joliffe.

"Certainly not."

"Then, Claude Duval, you are one of the most generous of men, for any one but yourself would take my life for that pistol business; and to show you that I appreciate your generosity, there is the fellow to the pistol you have already taken from me."

As he said this, Joliffe took another pistol from his pocket, and laid it upon the table, before Claude, who removed it more for the sake of keeping it out of Matthew's way than Joliffe's, for of the latter he had now no suspicions, but of the former he had abundance.

"Now, Mr. Joliffe," said Claude, "while I am here, you are acting under durance, but the moment my back is turned it will be your duty to give an alarm."

"Nay," said Joliffe, "I——"

"Now, hear me out. I say you must give an alarm. Your duty calls upon you to do so, and if you do not, you will be very properly subjected to the severest

reproaches, and in all probability sacrifice your livelihood. As for Matthew, true, it is quite another affair. No positive duty, on account of his position, calls upon him to give any alarm, or to raise any hue and cry after me."

"Oh, dear no," said Matthew. "How true that is."

"But," continued Claude, "he will do so as a matter of choice."



CLAUDE AND JACK DISGUISES ONE OF THEIR PURSUERS, AND GIVE HIM INTO CUSTODY.

Matthew groaned.

"Yes. He will do so from choice, arising from a deep and enduring hatred towards me, founded upon revenge."

Joliffe said nothing, but he felt the full force of what Claude said, and when the latter added—

"Therefore, Mr. Joliffe, I must prevent you, by gagging and binding, from

giving the alarm I speak of, because it is your duty to give it, and I must gag and bind you still more firmly, because it is your inclination to do it, Matthew."

Matthew merely nodded.

Claude began upon Matthew. First he securely tied his hands behind him with his own cravat, and then he propped open his mouth with the largest of the corks, and tied one of his braces round his mouth in such a way as effectually to secure the cork in its position.

"Now, friend Matthew," he said, "I will give you leave to call out if you can, until some one comes to relieve you."

"And don't drum upon the floor with your feet," said Joliffe.

"A good hint," thought Claude, and he tied Mr. Matthew's legs to the chair, in such a way that if he attempted to move much, he would in all probability get a very awkward fall, chair and all. There was no doubt in Claude's mind but that he had awakened in the mind of Joliffe a kind of grateful feeling for sparing his life after the pistol had been produced, and that Joliffe had purposely given him the hint about the possibility of Matthew giving an alarm by drumming with his feet upon the floor. Acting, therefore, upon this supposition, Claude, although he went through the same process of pinioning with Mr. Joliffe, he took good care that it should by no means materially incommode him.

"Now, gentlemen," said Claude. "I shall take my leave of you."

Neither of them could answer him, so he went off at once to the door, and left the room. Without, then, waiting one moment longer, he went down stairs, and passing rapidly along the passage, emerged at the front door, where, to his great joy, he found Jack waiting with the horses. Jack was mounted upon his own, and holding Claude's by the bridle.

"Is everything settled, Jack?"

"Yes, yes! Mount."

Claude did so. The landlady appeared at the door to make her best curtsey, and in another moment Claude was off.

"Hurrah!" said Jack. "You got the better of them."

"Easily, Jack. Matthew was the only real enemy I had there, and I have secured him sufficiently effectually, I think, to prevent him from giving any alarm until we are some distance off. Let us push on."

They put their steeds to a sharp trot, and were soon half a mile from the public-house, and rapidly approaching the Edgeware Road, when they heard the sound of a horse's steps coming at full gallop towards them. They both drew aside, in order to observe who it was, and to allow him to pass if desirable. A few moments sufficed to bring the horseman close at hand.

"Claude," said Jack, "it is the man who was looking at the horses in the inn yard."

The man impulsively pulled up, and his horse almost fell upon its haunches as he did so, so sudden was the check which it received. Claude dashed forward, and caught him by one arm, exclaiming as he did so—

"Any opposition, and you are a dead man!"

"Not exactly!" said the fellow, as he with his disengaged hand drew a pistol from the side of his saddle, and presented it at Claude. The latter had just time to throw his head on one side, and so escape a couple of bullets with which it was loaded.

"Good!" said Claude. "Now my friend, take that——"

"Spare me," said the man, "I yield to you. Make your escape. There is a strong party of twelve armed men, half a mile off only."

Claude had not intended to fire at him, but he certainly had meant to knock him off his horse with the stock of his pistol, but when the man asked for mercy he suspended the blow, and said—

"You deserve it, but I have let so many off, that I don't see why I should make a special sacrifice of you. Are they officers who are coming?"

"No, no! You are, I suppose——"

"Claude Duval!"

"Yes. Nobody but he would have escaped my shot, and then spared me from the consequence of missing him."

Claude was in thought for a moment, and then he said—

"Jack, dismount. I want you to hold this man a moment or two. Take off his horse's girth too, and open the vallaise. Quick, Jack; I think I hear the party he speaks of coming."

Jack could not conceive what Caude meant to do, but he rapidly obeyed the order given to him for all that. Claude dragged the man off the horse, and handed him then to Jack. One cut with a horsewhip sent the horse off at full gallop, so that that encumbrance was got effectually rid of. Claude then took from the vallaise an old scarlet coat that he had been in the habit of wearing sometimes, and a cravat with long lace ends. Both of them, with the assistance of Jack, he put upon the man, and then with some prepared gum that they always carried with them in the vallaise, Claude fastened upon his face a pair of false moustache and whiskers. The next thing was to gag him, which was soon done with a piece of wood cut from the hedge, and notched at each end so as to fit into his teeth, and as his mouth was thus opened as far as it would go, he could not by any effort release himself. With the girth of the horse then, which Jack had all ready, they bound his hands securely.

"Ah!" said Jack, "I guess now."

"Yes," said Claude, as he pointed to the man. "This shall be Claude Duval to those who are coming. Do you think they will know him?"

"Egad!" said Jack, "his own mother would not know him."

"Good. Now, my friend, come along."

When the man found the trick that was being played him, and that he was not in a state to say one word to save himself, he got perfectly frantic with rage. He tried all he could to release himself from the gag, but that was not possible without assistance to incline it on one side. Then, by dint of the most extravagant facial grimaces, he tried to get rid of the false moustache, but in that he was equally unsuccessful, for Claude had intended them for himself, and had taken care that they should be securely stuck on. As a last, and a very foolish resource, he took to kicking, and gave Jack rather a severe contusion on the shin.

"Oh," said Jack, "that's the game, is it? Well, my friend, as your hands are tied, it would be a shame to hit you, so here goes."

Jack saluted him with some tremendous kicks on a dishonourable portion of his anatomy, and after that process the man evidently thought that kicking was a sort of thing that could be repaid with so much interest, that for him it was a frightfully bad investment.

"Look, Claude, they are coming," said Jack.

"Yes; I see them."

A body of well-mounted men turned, at this moment, an angle in the road, and when he saw them, Claude laid hold of his prisoner by the collar of the red coat, and appeared to be hauling him along. When the mounted men saw this spectacle they halted; but Claude called out in a loud voice—

"Police!—police!—Constables! Are there any constables among you?"

Upon this the mounted party came dashing on, and one cried out—

"Yes—yes; I am a parish constable. What is the matter?—What is all this about?—Who have you got there, eh?"

"Claude Duval!"

CHAPTER CXXI.

A FIFTY-POUND NOTE EASILY EARNED.

At the sound of this name the horsemen all paused, and the one who had announced himself as a parish constable showed anything but an inclination to come any further forward. One well-dressed but severe-looking individual rode a few paces up to Claude, and said—

"Do you really mean to say, sir, that you have captured Claude Duval, the notorious highwayman?"

"Here he is."

"Dear me—dear me! And who are you, sir?"

"I am Major Smith," said Claude, "and was riding along, followed by my servant, when this fellow called upon me to stand and be robbed; but as that was a thing very far from my disposition to comply with, I resisted. He fired at me and missed me, and then announced himself as Claude Duval—so I took him, as you see."

"Why, good God, sir, you have done more than all the London police have been able to do!"

"Have I?—What's that?"

"Why, by capturing this man. Are you aware that you will be entitled to about three thousand pounds for this important capture?"

"Really—no."

"I tell you, sir, it is so. I am a solicitor residing in this neighbourhood, and can assure you of the fact. I only hope you have him secure."

Here the sham Claude made rather a violent demonstration with his feet, at the same time that he produced an unearthly sort of noise in his throat, which he, no doubt, intended should be a protest against the whole proceeding.

"Hold him fast! hold him fast!" said the attorney. "He's a most desperate fellow. Hold him fast, I beg of you, sir."

"Will you be quiet?" said Claude, at the same time he saluted the fellow with another kick behind.

How all the horsemen laughed, to be sure, to see, as they thought, the redoubtable Claude Duval, who had filled them all full of fears, had met with his master at last. The fattest man of the party was particularly delighted, because, only that morning, his wife had said that she only wished Claude Duval would stop her upon the Heath, as she would not mind being robbed by a highwayman, who she had heard was so very polite and kind to the ladies.

"Upon my word," said the attorney, "this is a most admirable piece of business. You had better take him."

The parish constable, who rejoiced in the name of Ploddy, looked as white as a sheet, as he replied—

"I—I—yes. That is, if the gallant major will be so good as to lodge him in the cage at Hampstead, while I go to Newgate to get some of the regular hands there to come for him. Would not that be best, sir?"

"Cage?" said the attorney. "Pho! pho!"

"Oh dear, no," said the fat man; "no cage. He would be out of that, and robbing and smiling at somebody's wife before you could say Jack Robinson. Oh, no, you must not lose sight of him, Ploddy,"

"Yes, yes," said everybody, "Ploddy must take him."

Upon this, the constable looked about as rueful as anybody very well could, and sideling along, till he came near to the meek highwayman, he held up his little gilt staff, which, by the bye, shook in his hand, and said—

"Come, come, sir. Look at that, and tremble."

Everybody laughed except the attorney, who was naturally one of those savage and saturnine characters, who never laugh at a joke.

"This is trifling," he said.

The constable seemed to be in some fear of this attorney, so he approached a step nearer to the prisoner, and said—

"I will take him, sir, of course; but this gentleman had better go with me, as he is entitled to the reward."

"Oh, nonsense," said Claude; "I don't want any reward."

"Not want it?" said everybody.

"No, gentlemen, I don't want a reward for collaring a highwayman, who stops me to rob me. To be sure, my servant here assisted me; and if anything is to be had, he will, perhaps, put in his claim."

The constable gave a groan. From the disinterestedness of Claude, he had begun to hope that the £3,000 might find its way to him; but that the groom should rewaive his claim in such a manner, was a thing beyond possibility.

"Jack," said Claude.

"Yes, sir," said Jack.

"They say there is a reward for catching this fellow. How much do you expect of it, for helping me to get the better of him? Speak freely."

"Anything you like, sir."

"Oh, but I have nothing to do with it at all. I think—but I advance that merely as an opinion—that these affairs are always best left in the hands of the police, so perhaps this officer will satisfy you, and take the prisoner wholly to himself."

The constable whispered something to the attorney, who then said aloud—

"Very well. That may be done. If I understand you rightly, major—a—a——"

"Smith."

"Yes; thank you, Major Smith. If I understand you rightly, you renounce all claim to any portion of the reward or rewards offered for the apprehension of the notorious Claude Duval?"

"Certainly, sir. But my man here——"

"I am coming to that. In a word, will he accept of fifty pounds, and give up his prisoner to this constable, at once moving all further claim?"

"Take, it Jack," said Claude.

"Very well, gentlemen," said Jack. "Whatever my master says is right I will do. I know he is a good master to me, and lets me want for nothing."

The attorney looked gratified, for he had a private understanding with the constable to go halves. Taking his pocket-book, then, from his pocket, he produced a fifty pound note, and handing it to Jack, said—

"All these gentlemen are witnesses to these transactions, and I give you this fifty pounds in lieu of your claim for reward in taking Claude Duval."

"Oh, yes, it's all right," said Jack, as he coolly put the note in his pocket.

"Now. Take him," said Claude.

"Take him!" cried the lawyer.

The constable, in the most careful manner in the world, laid his hands upon the shoulder of the prisoner, saying as he did so—

"Gentlemen all, will you come with me to the lock-up? We can easily get a couple of men to stay with him until I return from Newgate with the officers who are used to tackle such customers as this."

"I will ride with you," said the attorney, "of course; and I dare say you will all, gentlemen, accompany the constable."

"Yes," muttered one; "and I will have my share of the reward, too, in spite of all the bargains between all the lawyers and all the constables in the world. I see how it is."

"And I," said another.

The attorney did not hear these demonstrations of hostility, he was so very busy in taking further precautions against the prisoner. These precautions consisted in tying a rope, which the constable had with him, round the neck of the unfortunate individual who, for the time being, personated our old friend Claude, and then, holding the other end of the rope, he proceeded in triumph.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is quite a gratifying thing to throw such a windfall as this into the hands of our friend Ploddy, who is a most active and zealous constable, so we shall, I am sure, be pleased at his getting the reward."

The dissentients said nothing just then, for they were in too great anxiety to see Claude properly secured in prison to risk his escape by any dispute among themselves; but to themselves they entered a mental protest against the whole proceedings. And now the prisoner, when he found that he was going to be dragged away, and that the real Claude Duval would indubitably escape, got quite furious. He appeared to forget the kicks he had brought upon himself already,

and in a frantic manner he assaulted with his feet any one he could get at. Poor Mr. Ploddy got the worst of it, and actually howled again from the pain inflicted upon his shins. It was in vain that the attorney pulled the rope that was round the supposed culprit's neck—he kicked away.

"Oh, you don't know how to manage him," said Claude. "Here, Jack."

"Yes, sir."

"Just show the gentlemen how to make him sick of that."

"Yes, sir."

Jack again inflicted, with the heavy horseman's boot he wore, such a half dozen kicks upon the frantic prisoner that he paused from sheer exhaustion, and was as quiet as a lamb.

"That's the way, gentlemen," said Jack.

"Dear me," said Ploddy, "I—I should very much like to try it myself. Take that—upon my life—and that—it's quite refreshing and delightful—and that—to be kicking Claude Duval, the famous highwayman, in this way. Who would have thought now that I, Ploddy, parish constable of St. John's, Hampstead, should, after all, be the man to kick Claude Duval. I always thought he was a coward."

"Did you?" said Claude.

"Oh, yes indeed; I know it."

"Then you don't kick him half hard enough; if he be a coward, you should give him such a one as that."

As he spoke, Claude saluted Mr. Ploddy with a kick that sent him sprawling some half dozen yards off in the road.

"Murder—murder! Fire! Oh—oh. Goodness gracious! Oh, murder!" cried Ploddy, as he rolled over upon the road.

"Well, really," said Claude, in a tone of commiseration, "I did not think you were so tender, or I should not have touched you at all. Never mind, though."

Claude mounted as he spoke, and the constable getting up and wiping the tears from his eyes, said—

"Won't I have you up for this, Major what's your name, that's all. Won't I."

"Nonsense," said Claude, "I'll claim the reward if you do."

"Oh, it's only a joke," put in the lawyer, who, the moment he heard any talk of claiming the reward, got in a fright. "It was only a joke."

"A joke," blubbered the constable, "a joke! Only you try it, sir. I'm d——d if I don't have it out upon somebody. It's all along o' you, Claude Duval. Take that, and that."

While Mr. Ploddy was revenging himself upon the sham Claude Duval, the real one, with Jack at his heels, quietly travelled off. They went on for a mile without speaking, and then Claude looked round at Jack and laughed. Jack caught the infection and laughed likewise, and then he said—

"An easy way of earning a fifty-pound note, Claude."

"Very, but the devil won't last long. Let us off and away. We will put up on the Western Road, somewhere that we know to be safe, and then to-night I will begin my operations upon Ealing Common. Now, mark me, Jack, the 'Times newspaper' will have an account of my capture to-morrow."

"Yes," said Jack, "and they will write themselves a letter to say that it is all owing to what they have said upon the subject, from time to time."

"Of course, Jack. It would be something like them, if they were to claim the reward too."

Jack laughed, and they both galloped on for another mile, when they suddenly came out into the Edgeware Road. Crossing that well-known thoroughfare, they went about half a mile to the north, and then turned down a beautiful green lane on their left, that led to Willesden and to Neasdon, two of the prettiest villages round London. At that time, the few villa residences that now dot the green lanes leading to those places were not in existence, and the place had a thoroughly rural aspect indeed. The only sounds that came upon their ears consisted of the lowing of cattle in the extensive meadows on either side of the lane,

and the tinkle of sheep bells. A little stream, too, kept up a soft and pretty murmuring as it ran under the roots of the elms and the ivy to their left. Occasionally, too, the soft sweet note of some bird, calling to its mate, would strike upon the ear in a gush of melody.

"This is beautiful!" said Claude.

"It is," said Jack. "Ah, if I could but, for the remainder of my existence, creep away from the world into some quiet spot, far away in the country, and only hear such sounds, and only see such sights as these——"

"You would be happy, Jack."

"As happy as I could hope to be."

"Do it, then—do it—I will provide you with the means, Jack, and it will be a place for me to retire to, occasionally."

"No—no, Claude, I cannot leave you—I cannot—and I will not, so say no more about it; and here we are at Willesden, with its pretty old Norman church. What a fair scene this is, Claude."

CHAPTER CXXII

THE BOARDING SCHOOL.

As Jack spoke, they both emerged from a narrow lane into the heart of the little village of Willesden, just within sight of the church. Claude paused to look at it.

"Yes, Jack," he said. "It is a venerable structure indeed."

"I have often regarded it," continued Jack, "under very different feelings than the present. Sometimes, in good truth, I hardly know myself, when I look back upon the picture of what I once was, and contrast it with what I am now."

"Retrospection, Jack," said Claude, "is at the best but an unprofitable speculation. Let it be for us to look forward. The past is too full of shadows for either of us to get anything but the heart-ache to strive to pierce the gloom."

"True—true."

"And now, Jack, do you know the way to the Western Road?"

"Yes, perfectly. Here is a lane that will lead to a little place called Harlesdon Green, and from there we can easily get upon a high road that will bring us out near Ealing Common."

"Good. Let us push on, Jack."

They turned their horses' heads down the lane Jack spoke of, and soon left Willesden behind them, much to the chagrin of an innkeeper, who from his door had been watching them, and hoping that they would make a halt at his house of "good entertainment for man and beast," as the sign signified. The lane was one of those pretty thoroughfares which are so abundant in the rural districts of England, and which with their luxuriant hedge roses and large elm trees present so beautiful a picture of verdant loveliness. They pursued it for some distance in silence. Claude spoke at length—

"Jack, how stands the Exchequer?"

"In other words, Claude, how much money have I?"

"Exactly."

"Then I am sorry to say," said Jack, "my stock is getting very low."

"Humph! and my pocket is low. We must transact some business, Jack, for it won't do to run short in so essential a particular."

"Hold," said Jack, laughing. "Upon my word, I quite forgot our friend the lawyer's fifty-pound note. That had slipped my memory, Claude. But it is rather a cumbrous article here, in the country, to get changed."

"It is. What have we here?"

"A toll-bar, I think. Yes. It stops this lane, which otherwise would lead folks into the Harrow Road toll-free."

"I have an aversion to this species of impost," said Claude, "and don't intend to pay. We shall, perhaps, have a little adventure here. Come on, Jack."

A man with a white apron made his appearance, and stood by the gate.

"My friend," said Claude, "can you oblige us with change for a fifty-pound note?"

The man looked angry, for toll keepers, probably from a considerable amount of jeering, and what is vulgarly called chaffing, which they have to endure in the course of their vocation, are an irascible race. He muttered something, in which the principal word was certainly "gammon," and then roughly added—

"Threepence a piece, and this here gate clears nothing."

"Really!" said Claude. "How obliging you are."

The man slammed the gate shut with an air as though would have said "Get past that if you can!" and then, thrusting his hands into two little pockets that were in his apron, he whistled from sheer aggravation, and crouched into the little sentry-box of a house, in which he defied the cold with a fire that occupied a fourth of its area.

"The gate may clear nothing," said Claude. "But that is no reason, Jack, why we should not clear the gate—so here goes."

One touch to his horse was sufficient, and over he went, clearing the obstruction in gallant style. Jack was a good horseman, and followed upon the instant. The toll-man just flew out in time to see that his gate was not quite high enough, and our friends left him staring, and swearing, and exclaiming—

"There's sixpence clean gone. Threepence for me and threepence for master, as I always divides it, and there's only been a donkey through all this blessed day."

The road now wound up a hill, and when they reached the summit they had a very fine view of the surrounding country, and of Willesden and Neasdon, by turning a glance in the direction from whence they had come. Ealing Common, then much more of a wild and desolate place than at present, was distinctly visible in the distance, and a tortuous looking road led to it.

"You see the route?" said Jack.

"Perfectly. Do you observe a carriage, Jack, coming along that road to the left, there, among the trees?"

"I do—I do. And a handsome turn-out it is."

"Yes, but yet there is an air of mystery about it. Don't you see that the servants have no liveries, or they have coats on them, with an evident design to hide them. Let us watch where the coachman goes to."

The carriage drove up to the door of an inn that was about a quarter of a mile from where Claude and Jack were, and the horses' heads were deliberately turned in the direction of the Western Road.

"Suppose we ride up," said Claude, "and take a look at those folks. They may afford us some sport for all we know to the contrary, and if they are going in our direction they may have some smaller change about them than we have, which may come in handy just at the present juncture. Do you see anything against the proposition, Jack?"

"Nothing. Business is business."

At a quiet trot they both made their way to the inn, where the carriage was in waiting, and they were not many minutes in reaching it. The vehicle itself was empty, and the footman and coachman were regaling themselves with something warm in rather a hasty manner, as though they expected to be interrupted every moment. Jack now assumed the character of Claude's servant, and held the bridle while Claude alighted, and with a careless air strolled into the inn.

"This way to the coffee-room, sir," said a waiter.

Claude followed him, and was led into a large room, at one of the windows of which were two persons in deep and earnest conversation. One was a pale-faced

man with a peculiar obliquity of vision; the other was taller, and his countenance bespoke dissipation early and late. Claude ordered some brandy, and the two men just glanced at him as he sat down at a considerable distance from them. They had a bottle of wine before them, and a couple of glasses. It was quite evident to Claude that they lowered their tone after his entrance, because the manner of both



DEEDS, FETCHED BY A LAWYER, RESTORED TO THE OLD FARMER BY CLAUDE.

of them was constrained rather, and Claude, in order to put them at their ease, took up a newspaper, with which he entirely covered his face from their observation, and which he affected to read. This seemed to give them more confidence, and he heard one say, with tolerable distinctness—

"Oh, it is only some traveller."

"Exactly, my lord," said the other; "and—and as your lordship was saying——"

"As I was saying, nothing can be easier. You have the letter, and you cannot possibly find any difficulty in getting her away from the school."

"I should think not, my lord."

"The house is in a lonely situation upon the common. We can dine here, or take a drive somewhere else until nightfall, and then, of course, I will take good care that the carriage is close at hand."

"It shall all be done to your lordship's satisfaction."

"I am sure of that when you are entrusted with anything. I never saw a girl in all my life that I was so anxious to take to the villa; upon my word, she is the most charming piquant little creature that you can imagine."

"Your lordship's taste is unquestionable, and I sincerely hope she will, for a time, adorn your lordship's villa. Repton House, I think is the name?"

"Yes, Repton House, and the girl's name is Florence Darvel, so you can have no sort of difficulty. Only, for the love of all that is gracious, avoid that encumbrance of mine, Jane Lee."

"I will, my lord. It is a pity that your lordship's illegitimate daughter, Jane Lee is at the same school."

"A thousand pities: and yet, if I had not called once there, to be sure that she was alive—for I would not trust the mother's word—I should not have seen Florence. I did hope to find that Jane was not in existence, and then I should have got out of the settlement I was silly enough to make upon her when the mother was with me; but when I did see her, the likeness to her mother was too unmistakeable."

"And to your lordship?"

"Well—well, she is like me. Confound her."

"Does your lordship know anything of the friends of Florence Darvel?"

"Friends! Relations, I suppose you mean, Clickney?"

"He!—he! Your lordship is so—so sarcastic."

"Well, who, in the name of wonder and truth-telling, ever heard of relations being friends, I should like to know? But, to answer your questions, I think—that is, I know she is the daughter of some artist, or poor gentleman of some sort or another. But that don't signify a bit. She is beautiful and attractive to me, so I put in my claim to her, and as I have money and influence, why I defy them. Drink, Clickney."

"Exactly so.—Thank you, my lord. Shall I have the honour of filling your lordship's glass? As I often say, if your lordship, with your immense possessions, and hereditary name and title, cannot enjoy yourself, it would be a hard case indeed; and if people in the middle, or, I may say, the lower ranks of life, have, by any charming accident, handsome daughters, they ought to feel that it is one of the peculiar blessings of the British constitution that there is an aristocracy to spend the taxes, and to take them off their hands."

There was a slight touch of irony in all this, but so very slight that it might have escaped the perceptions of one much keener than the noble lord to whom the words were addressed.

"You are a sensible fellow, Clickney," said his lordship, "and I have always said so. You suit me precisely. You have no vulgar scruples, and you are amazingly discreet."

"Every man, my lord, in this world, has his price."

"And your's?"

"In your lordship's favour, and £800 per annum."

"Besides various little perquisites in the way of expenses, and so on, eh, Clickney?"

"Exactly, my lord."

"Well, you earn your money, and I will say that you do me good service for it. But come, the horses are scarcely breathed. Suppose we take a drive of a few miles in the country, and then dine somewhere quietly."

"I am, of course, quite at your lordship's service. Shall I order the carriage to be got ready?"

"Yes—yes."

Clickney left the room, and Claude put down the paper from before his face. Over one edge of it he had taken an accurate look at his unknown lordship and Mr. Clickney, and he felt that he should know them both again under any circumstances. That he should hear anything more of importance by staying, he did not at all expect, so he rose and left the room without taking the smallest notice of his lordship; and having paid for what he had had, he walked to the door, where Jack was anxiously waiting for him, and mounted at once.

"Any news?" said Jack.

"A little."

"Ah, I thought by the stay you were making that you was learning something interesting to us. What is it, Claude?"

"Why, Jack, I rather think that there are materials for an adventure to-night if we choose to carry it out. Listen to me, and I will tell you all that I overheard in the inn."

Claude then related to Jack the little significant dialogue that he had overheard in the inn, between his unknown lordship and the gentleman who rejoiced in the somewhat singular name of Clickney, and he concluded by saying—

"What think you of all this, Jack? Shall we allow all this projected evil to take its course?"

"No—no. It is the abduction of a young lady from boarding-school, by a wretch who can have no such thing as human feeling in his composition."

"Well, we will stop him, and make him pay likewise for the attempt. I think I can give his lordship a lesson that will not be altogether thrown away upon him. But now let us ride on until the shades of evening; I dare say we shall find some friendly shelter."

CHAPTER CXXII.

A HEARTY WELCOME AND SNUG RETREAT.

Claude Duval was too well known upon the Western Road to find any difficulty in procuring shelter in some safe place until the hour should come when he might think fit to sally out upon an enterprise. It was not one of the least singular features in the history of Claude, that, notwithstanding the really tempting rewards that were offered for his apprehension by the government, so very few persons, except those actually and absolutely engaged in the profession of the criminal law, should have at all made any effort for his capture. We must in reality attribute this fact to the romantic spirit which was discernible throughout all his adventures, and the lavish liberality with which he rewarded all who did him any service, and relieved any distress that was made known to him; but certain it is, that a strong feeling in his favour existed in the minds of many persons, and there were hundreds to whom the reward offered for him would have been quite a large fortune, but who no more thought of acquiring the luxuries of independence by such means, than of flying. Everywhere that his generosity had been felt, there was a place of refuge for him, so that upon that road, in particular, Claude could ride up to many a cottage, and find a most true and hearty welcome. So that, what with those who had loved him, and those who feared him, there was, after all, but a small class left who would go out of their way for the purpose of endeavouring to give him up to justice. A small ride of about twenty minutes in duration, now conducted both Claude and Jack to the verge of Ealing Common, and as the day was yet young, they purposed at once looking for some place of shelter.

"I think," said Claude, "that we shall not compromise any one by remaining a few hours under a friendly roof, for I fancy now that all direct clue to our whereabouts is lost."

"Certainly," said Jack, "we are not pursued, and when that is the case we are about as safe as we can expect to be."

"Follow me, then; I know a little farm house across the common, where my appearance will not be the most unwelcome in the world."

Claude took the advance, and Jack followed him closely across the ancient common. They went quickly, for their object was now to get securely housed for the remainder of the hours of daylight, so that they rather avoided meeting any one, than sought an encounter. The common once crossed, they came into a thickly wooded lane, a very few paces down which was a gate, at which Claude paused, saying—

"This leads to the friendly abode I mentioned."

Jack had to dismount to unfasten the gate, and then they both rode through it and took a path by the side of a meadow for some distance, until they came suddenly in view of an old farm-house with no end of thatch upon its roof. Early roses were scrambling about its porch, and the scent of the climatis came freshly and sweetly upon the breeze.

"A charming spot," said Jack.

"Yes. But those who inhabit it were near being deprived of it by the rascality of an attorney, who got possession of the deeds connected with the property, and then joined with some one in an attempt to eject the family holding it. By mere chance I stopped the rascal upon the Uxbridge Road, and took from him a large pocket-book which contained the papers in question, and from some careful enquiries I ascertained how valuable they were to the real owners of them, so one night, when there was such a storm upon the common that a house could scarcely stand against it, I sought this place."

"Did you tell them who you were?"

"Yes. I, after much difficulty, made myself heard amid the howling of the tempest, and an old man with white hair, and his spectacles in his hand, came to yon porch door."

"I suppose, sir, he said, you want shelter from the storm. Pray walk in and take the best we can afford you."

"No," said I. "But there are storms worse than the wind and rain create in this world. I have brought you a little present, and if any one asks you how you came by it, say boldly, that upon this night, at this hour, Claude Duval came to the door and handed to you these papers."

"Claude Duval!" cried the old man.

"I slipped the papers into his hands and left him standing beneath the porch, looking the picture of astonishment."

"And what was the result, Claude?"

"Why, when the cause came into court, the papers that proved the claim of the old man and his family were produced, and the story of their recovery was fairly told. The judge decided in favour of the occupants of the farm, and the attorney was by the Lord Chancellor struck off the rolls, for he had asserted that no such deeds existed, when all the while it was quite clear that he had them in his pocket book when I robbed him."

"And have you been here since?"

"Once only, when hard pressed, and then they hid me, and saved me from a hot pursuit, to escape from which I should have had to take many lives."

By the time Claude had related this little circumstance to Jack, they came so near to the house that a young child, who was playing close to the porch, saw them, and ran in to give the news that some one was coming. In the course of a few moments a young man came out, and immediately after him just such a white-headed old man as Claude had mentioned. Claude smiled as he called out to them—

"Well, here I am again, you see, come back to you like a bad penny."

They both ran up to him, and seizing him by the hands, each tried how much he could say in the way of a kindly welcome to him.

"You don't know," said the young man, "how glad we are to see you."

"And he never will know," said the old man, "for you know, John, that we can't find words to tell him."

"No, father, that we can't."

"Will you give me a few hours' shelter?" said Claude.

"Weeks, months, years, if you will stay with us," said the young man. Don't we owe all we have to you? To be sure we do. Don't we, father?"

"Yes, John, of course we do. Where would have been the pretty little homestead in which you were born, John, if it had not have been for this kind friend?"

"You see," said Claude, "I have somebody with me. He is a dear friend of mine."

"Then he shall be, and indeed is, from this moment, a dear friend of ours," said the son.

"Yes, John," cried the old man. "Yes, take the horses, while I bring our guests in. This way; don't mind about going round to the path. You can't come by too near a way to this house."

There was something so kind and unsophisticated about the welcome of these people, that both Claude and Jack were quite affected by it, and the latter, as he looked around, said with a sigh—

"Ah, this is the sort of place I have always pictured to myself, I should like to pass the remainder of my life in."

"My dear, sir," said the old man, "you shall—shall he not, John?"

"Certainly, father."

Jack shook his head.

"I only wish I dared," he said. "But we will say no more upon that head just at present."

Before they could enter the house they were met by a young woman with an infant in her arms, and two young children close to her skirts. She was the wife of the young farmer, and well she knew how much she and all whom she loved, were indebted to the visitor who approached. Claude spoke to her with the ease and grace so familiar and so incidental to him, and he introduced Jack to her. In a few moments more they were all in the house, and the young man having returned from putting up the horses, took Claude aside, and said—

"Is there any present danger?"

"No. None that I am at all aware of. I only want to stay here until sunset that is all."

"And—and is there no hope——"

"Hope of what?"

"That you will be able to leave this life, so full of risks, and embrace one which will be more congenial to your nature."

Claude shook his head mournfully.

"Alas!" he said, "you do not know all. If you did, even you would—but no matter. I can almost say with the man in the play—

"That way madness lies!"

So let us talk of anything else in all the world, but what I am and what I might have been, or what I still may be."

It was quite evident, by Claude's manner, that a more painful theme than his own position in life could not possibly be started; so it was at once dropped, and to note the kindness and the scrupulous attention with which he was treated by those people to whom he had been such a guardian angel, one would have thought him surely one of the most important personages society ever saw or was likely to see. All this was very pleasing to Jack, for such was his affection for Claude, that he would much rather any one said a kind thing to him, or did a kind action to him, than to himself. No wonder, then, that the hours passed off pleasantly enough at that beautiful rural abode. Alas! what is called improvement and speculation, has swept away from the immediate neighbourhood of the metropolis many of these sweet retreats, where genius as well as simplicity might find a

congenial home; and the lover of the picturesque and the beautiful must now travel much further from the giant city, before he can be said to have left behind him those things which are of man's creation, to look upon those things which are God's! The sun at length slowly dipped into the western horizon, and the soft beautiful shadows of evening crept over hill and tree, dell and flower. The songs of numberless birds filled the air with a sweet melody; and Claude, as he leant against an aged elm, with the family around him that he had snatched from destruction, could not help giving audible expression to the thought of—

"How many more of such sunsets as this am I doomed to see?"

Jack was close to him, and whispered in his ear—

"The young girl at the boarding-school. The villain—the road!"

"Right. I have duties. To horse, Jack—to horse, again. It is still for Claude Duval. Life on the road! It was written upon the page, in life's great volume, directed to me, when I came into this world of sadness and of beauty. My horse—my horse, Jack."

CHAPTER CXXIII.

A NOBLE LORD IN A HOBBLE.

It was upon one of those strange misty, mysterious-looking evenings, incidental to the English climate at all periods of the year, but much more particularly in the spring and the autumn, that Claude and Jack issued forth from beneath the friendly roof where they had been so hospitably entertained. In the air there was a dewy freshness, which, while it obscured the locality, was grateful enough to the feelings; and as Claude looked through the mist, he said to Jack—

"We must not wander far, or we shall lose those of whom we are in search."

Before Jack could reply, a voice cried—

"Thank God! It's all right."

"Who spoke?" said Claude.

"Only me, sir, whoever you are. It's only me. Nicodemus Clarke."

Claude and Jack looked at each other with surprise, as well they might, for the name of Nicodemus Clarke was as new to them as anything could very well be.

"Yes, gentlemen," continued the voice, "I hid in this hedge till I heard you were in search of some one, and then, of course, I knew that you must be on the same errand as I."

"And what may that be?" said Claude, as a small stout man, after a struggle, succeeded in getting out of a hedge close at hand, and made his way up to them.

"Why, sir," he said, "Ruben Halleybut and I were coming across the common, and we met a man selling brooms, who said to us, 'If you want to make a good evening's work, you will wait about here, and nab the celebrated Claude Duval.' Well, of course, I thought it odd, and so did Ruben, for you know, sir, no doubt, of the great rewards offered for Claude Duval, and we thought it a strange thing that a man who only sold brooms should give us such a chance, when he might get it himself; but, howsomedever, Ruben said to me—'You stay here, Nicodemus, while I go to Hanwell, and rouse up the constabulary;' so you see, that's where he has gone, and here am I."

"Indeed!" said Claude. "Well, it's lucky you met me."

"That's just my idea. I thought to myself—Nicodemus, it's a lucky thing you have met with some one respectable, for Ruben is a deuce of a while—excuse me, sir, for naming the deuce in your company."

"Oh, don't think anything of that."

"Well, sir, perhaps you won't object to stay till Reuben and the constabulary come back, sir, will you?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Nicodemus, but I am in possession of valuable information regarding Claude Duval, do you know."

"Are you, really, sir?"

"Yes, and it is solely upon his account that I and my friend are upon the common to-night."

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, your information, let it come from where it might, regarding Claude Duval, is correct."

"Really."

"It is so, you may depend. But I happen to know that he will be here disguised, and for a particular object, too. It will not be long before a plain carriage will draw up on the heath, and in that carriage will be Claude Duval."

Mr. Nicodemus shook a little.

"So you have only to open the door," added Claude, "and seize him by the collar and make him your prisoner at once."

"Me, sir—me?"

"Certainly, you. Why not?"

"Lord bless you, sir, I wouldn't for all the world. Do I look like the sort of man to lay hold of a highwayman by the collar and say, 'Come along with me, if you please, and if you don't please, I'll make you.'"

Clade could hardly forbear a smile, for certainly the person talking with him was, to all appearance, as unlikely a person to do such a feat as he ever saw.

"Well then," said Claude, "I suppose your best and only plan will be to wait until the force you expect comes from Hanwell."

"Oh, sir, that's quite another thing, and if you and your servant will only stay with me in case of accidents, all may be well, sir. I am the beadle of Ealing Church."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir, and have been so now getting on for nine years; and though I say it myself, perhaps that should'nt, I will say that a more efficient beadle never put on coat or hat."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Claude. "Your discretion is evidently something immense."

"I believe you, sir. But you were saying something about this fellow, Claude Duval."

"I was. The fact is, I happen to know that he has come down here upon a very particular errand, and if he can ever be caught at all, it will be to-night, when he is rather off his guard. Since you wish it, I will stay with you until your friends come from the village of Hanwell, and then I will point out to you and to them how you may best take Claude Duval prisoner without danger; for what earthly good can come of risking valuable life or valuable limb in a contest with such a person. If taken, it ought to be with as much safety to all concerned as possible."

"My dear sir, I never in all my life heard a more true and better sentiment than that—in all my life."

"And particularly," added Claude, "I think persons in authority in parishes ought to be careful of themselves; for who knows what confusion and inconvenience might result from the death of any one of them?"

These sentiments came so home to the heart of Mr. Nicodemus, that he actually wiped a tear from his left eye, and spoke in a voice husky from emotion, saying—

"Upon my life, sir, you are a gentleman, you are indeed; and you speak for all the world, sir, like a printed book, you do. As you truly say, sir, authorities are the people that ought to be looked to."

"I always thought so," added Claude, drily.

"Ah, sir, if all the world was only like you."

"The world then would never get on," laughed Claude. "But my sincere advice to you and to your friends is, that when you find the carriage I spoke of to you, and feel convinced that it contains no other than the man you seek, you will fasten up the two doors of it, and drive it to Newgate."

"What an idea, sir. But—but—the coachman—is there a coachman?"

"Yes; and a footman too, for Claude Duval wishes to disguise himself well; so

I think you must pull the coachman off his box, and take him to the Hanwel[1] lock-up, and the footman with him to keep him company."

"That's good," said Mr. Nicodemus. "It's Claude Duval we want, and not footmen or coachmen."

"Certainly. But you will remember and put your friends upon their guard likewise, concerning the fact that this coachman and footman we talk of are associates and accomplices of Claude Duval, not his dupes, and therefore they will say anything in the world, and lie in the most extraordinary manner, to try to get him off."

"In course, sir. In course."

"They will, no doubt, try to frighten you, and impose upon your credulity by telling you that you have made a mistake, and that it is some lord that you have taken."

"A lord! Ha! ha! A lord. The lord will be made to dance upon nothing at Tyburn, I rather think."

"Not a doubt of it."

"Oh, dear yes, and I'll go and see him turned off, and then at the last moment I'll cry—'Good bye, my lord!—ha! ha! Good bye, my lord.'"

Mr. Nicodemus thought this a joke of such an exquisite character that he laughed and coughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and Jack, who had dismounted, and kept close to him, was forced to give him two or three tremendous slaps upon the back to aid him in his recovery from a state of incipient strangulation.

"Don't—don't! Oh, I am better now.—You'll knock all the blessed breath out of my body, that you will, if you hit so hard as that. Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"Friendly blows," said Jack.

"Devilish friendly."

"Well, well," said Claude. "Let us lose no time, for I rather think the carriage will be here presently."

At this intimation Mr. Nicodemus kept as close as he possibly could to Claude, for notwithstanding all that had been said, he thought there might be some danger which it would be quite as well to avoid, or at all events to be sure, by keeping in the immediate company of one who had professed such a reverence for parochial authorities in general, and beadles in particular.

"If you think you will be any safer," said Claude, "you can get up behind me. There is room."

"Humph!" said Mr. Nicodemus, "I don't think I was ever outside a horse in my life."

"Indeed."

"No, sir. So you see, not knowing much about it, I don't seem to like the idea exactly of getting up behind."

"But you forget that you will not be called upon to take any part in the management of the horse. All you will have to do is to hold fast by me, and as I will take care not to fall off, I don't very well see how you are to do so."

"Hark!" cried Jack.

"What is it?" said Claude.

"I hear the sound of wheels. He whom we seek comes!"

Claude listened, and Mr. Nicodemus turned as pale as death, and struggled on to Claude's horse.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

CAPTURE OF THE SECRETARY.

Jack was right. The sound of wheels upon a good gravelled road which intersected the common came in the course of half a minute quite plainly upon his ears. The beadle had managed, with some assistance from Claude, to scramble on to the back of his horse, and then he held fast as well as he was able.

"Bless us and save us, what an adventure this will be to talk of at the "Pig and Tweezers," of a Saturday night; I think I see anybody holding up his hands and opening his eyes when I tell him how I sprung upon the horse."

"Not a doubt of it," said Claude. "Ah, I hear the tramp of horses' feet, I think. Listen."



CAPTURE OF THE SECRETARY BY SIXTEEN STRING JACK—ALARM OF THE BEADLE.

"Yes." said Jack, "and from the west too."

"Then it's the folks from Hanwell," said Nicodemus. "They ought to have been here before this. But better late than never, says I. Oh, I can hear them myself now. Well, suppose, sir, we go on and meet them?"

"That will do," said Claude, "and you can introduce me."

"With pleasure, sir—with pleasure. Only I haven't the happiness, sir, to know who you are."

"Oh, I'm Colonel Doo."

"Colonel Doo?"

"Yes. That's easily recollected, ain't it. D double O, Doo."

"Dear me!—Yes, sir, it's easily recollected, only you see, sir, it's rather an odd name. To be be sure, we have a parishioner of the name of Done."

"I hope he will be of the party now coming to our assistance," said Claude.

As he uttered these words, Claude Duval just gave his horse a slight touch with his heel, and it made a bound forward that very nearly cast Mr. Nicodemus to the earth, and it did make him rise up so high and come down with such a bump upon the back of the saddle that he groaned again.

"Oh, gracious!"

"What's the matter?"

"Don't let him do that again, colonel, if you can possibly help it. I begin to find that I don't much like riding, do you know. Is he all right, sir?"

"All right? Yes, to be sure. That was only a little bit of play."

"Play, was it? Lor! I wonder what he'd have done if he'd thought of treating us to a jump in earnest?"

Claude had cantered off in the direction of the road to Hanwell, and in the course of a few minutes a loud voice cried—

"Stand!"

"Ah, that's Squadds, the butcher," said Nicodemus. "It's all right, Mr. Squadds. It's me and Colonel Doo."

"Ah! Nicodemus, is that you?"

"Yes. Come on. We shall nab him, lads. A-hem! It's all right now. Me and the colonel have laid our plans, and he's as good as catched, I can tell you."

An irregular assemblage of some fifteen or sixteen horse men now surrounded Claude and Jack, and by the dim night light (for twilight had fairly bidden good-bye to the common) Claude could see that some of the party had fowling-pieces and some old rusty blunderbusses, while one carried in as military a fashion as he could, a huge sword that had belonged to a trooper in some cavalry regiment, heaven only knows how long ago.

"Friends, all," said the beadle, "the thing is as good as done. I met the colonel and his servant on the common, and he says he will lend us a hand."

"Bravo!—Hurrah!"

"Hush!" said Claude. "Hush! It is strictly true that, having encountered Mr. Nicodemus upon the common, and hearing from him that he was upon an expedition for the capture of Claude Duval, I did say that, for so laudible a public object, I would lend my aid."

"Hear!—hear!" said a stout-looking personage, who was churchwarden of Hanwell, and accustomed to contribute just that much of oratory to the parish meetings. "Hear!—hear!"

"And more particularly," added Claude, "as I was in possession of, I believe, exclusive information upon the subject. I can inform you, gentlemen, that Claude Duval will be upon the common to-night."

"Hear!" said the churchwarden, faintly.

His friends and compatriots thought he said "here" instead of "hear," and they all gave a prodigious start.

"Murder!" cried the beadle. Some of the troop tried to escape, and for a few moments a degree of confusion prevailed, which was only quelled by Claude saying—

"For your own safety sakes, gentlemen, I hope you will be quiet. Any alarm may bring destruction upon some half dozen of you, at the very least."

This was an intimation that had quite a magical effect. They were all instantly as still as the grave, and Claude continued—

"I have a plan by which he may be captured without any loss of life among the highly-respectable company by which I have the honour to be surrounded."

"Hear! hear!" said the churchwarden, gathering courage.

"Yes, gentlemen, if you will all place yourselves under my guidance, and follow me, all will be well."

"We will! We will! Hear! Hear!"

"Hush!"

All was still again, and then Claude turned his horse's head in the direction where he knew the carriage of his lordship would be waiting the issue of the abominable scheme for getting the young lady from the boarding-school. It was as ardent a wish of Claude's to get hold of the secretary, as it was to punish his lordship for the plan of abduction, for well Claude knew that such men as he, who paid for the proceedings which were, if successful, to bring disgrace and affliction of the bitterest character upon unoffending persons, would be tolerably harmless if they could not find tools base enough for money to join them in the accomplishment of their bad ends. The whole of the troop of horsemen from Hanwell followed Claude and Jack as softly as they could make their horses step upon the verdant sod of the common, and in the course of a few minutes they saw the dim outline of a carriage. At the same moment Claude, who, from being so much "out o' night," was quite Indian-like in his sagacity when the sun was gone, saw a man creeping along close to a hedge.

"Jack?" said Claude."

"Here, sir."

"Catch that fellow."

"Ah, I had my eye upon him," said Jack, as he dashed forward, and with a vigorous push captured the secretary of my lord.

"Help! Help! What's this?"

"Another word above your breath and you are a dead man," said Claude, as Jack brought his prisoner before him.

"But—but——"

"Silence! Gentlemen, this is an important capture. This fellow it is who plays the part of Jackall to him whom we seek. Tie him up, Jack."

"One of the party held Jack's horse while he tied the secretary's hands and feet, so that, as regards the latter, he was nearly helpless, and as regards the former, he was entirely so."

"Mercy!" said the fellow, "are you going to murder me?"

"No," said Claude, "although you deserve it. Throw him into the green pond, Jack. You know it."

"Well, sir, I will soon pitch him in."

"But I shall be drowned. Oh, spare my life. If it is only six inches deep I shall be drowned—oh;—oh! have mercy upon a poor man with a large family. Mercy for my family."

"Any daughters?" said Claude.

"Yes. Oh! yes."

"Do they go to boarding school?"

This one simple question was sufficient to let the villanous secretary know at once the infamous scheme of himself and his master was known. He gave a hideous groan and would have fallen upon his knees to pray for that mercy to himself that he never had shown to anything human; but the cord, by the aid of which Jack had tied him, prevented him, and he could only speak.

"Do not take my life," he said. "Anything but my life."

"You hear this rascal, gentlemen?" said Claude. "Anything, he thinks, his villanies entitle him to but death."

"Oh, the rapscallion," said Nicodemus; "but we shall soon have his master now."

"Yes," said Claude. "But we must secure this fellow. Look out for a small tree, Jack, and tie him to it, so that we shall find him when we come back. His face to the tree, Jack."

Jack nodded, and at once dragged off the secretary, who was in such a horrible fright lest he should lose his life, that anything short of that was, by comparison, delightful.

CHAPTER CXXV.

NEWGATE PORCH.

"Now, gentlemen," said Claude. Come on. Follow me."

It was quite clear that the reinforcement which the beadle had sent for to Hanwell looked upon Claude as quite a redoubtable personage now, and were quite willing that he should, at all events, take the lead in the attack that they supposed was about to be made upon the formidable highwayman.

"Yes, sir," said one;—"and that, by the bye, was the one who, by his frequently looking behind him, showed the greatest inclination to run away. Yes, sir, you follow—that is, I mean, you lead and we will follow, if you please, sir. I only hope we may catch him."

"There can be no doubt of it."

"You—you really think so, sir," stammered the churchwarden."

"Certainly, I do."

"Then I—I am almost afraid, do you know, that I am wanted at home. You must know, sir, that my wife is in a delicate situation, and if anything was to happen while I am away, you know, sir, there's no saying how one might blame oneself afterwards."

"Don't go," said Claude. "We may need your valuable assistance."

"Don't be afraid," said another.

This word "afraid" stuck in the throat of the churchwarden like the celebrated "Amen" of Macbeth, and fearing that he should never hear the last of his pusillanimity from his neighbours and kind friends, if he now made a precipitate retreat, he resigned himself to the glories and the chances of an enterprise, which he began to think he had commenced in an over hasty and unadvised manner. Both Claude and Jack were anxious to bring this affair to a speedy conclusion, therefore they went on quickly, peering into the darkness to discover the carriage of his lordship. Presently, in the obscurity doubly obscure cast by some trees along a portion of the common, they could just see the object they sought, and Claude turning to those who were following him, said—

"Now, gentlemen, look for yourselves. What do you see yonder?"

"A carriage."

"Well, in that carriage is your man."

A sudden retrograde movement sufficiently notified to the fact that this was in truth anything but pleasant intelligence, but Claude continued—

"The only way to capture him, without bloodshed, will be to fasten up the doors of the carriage, and then drive it to London."

"But how can that be done?"

"I and my servant will charge ourselves with that part of the affair, and if we deliver into your hands the carriage and its occupant, will you undertake to drive it to Newgate?"

"Yes—yes—yes."

"Wait a few moments, then.—Jack?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come with me."

Jack followed Claude; and when they got out of ear-shot of the good folks of Hanwell, Claude said to him—

"There will be no difficulty in fastening the carriage doors?"

"I can tie them," said Jack, "and they will then resist any ordinary attempt to open them from the inside, and the more so that the noble lord will not be aware of the nature of the obstruction to his egress."

"Very well. Come and do one door, while I hold a little parley with him at the other."

Claude dashed up to the carriage, and appearing at one of the windows so

suddenly, that, to the perceptions of the occupants of the vehicle, he seemed more like some apparition than a living man, he said—

"A word with you, sir."

"Who are you? Help!"

"Silence, or you are a dead man. I will shoot you with as little feeling for the consequences or compunctious visitations, as I would a mad dog. Your only chance of safety lies in being silent and submissive."

"Submissive to what?"

"To your fate."

"That is rather a—a—wide explanation," said his lordship, faintly. "Who are you?"

"That is of no consequence. But we know who you are."

"Done!" said Jack, to intimate that he had fastened one of the doors of the carriage; and then Claude, while he did the other, added—

"You are the great highwayman, Claude Duval?"

"I!—I Claude Duval?"

"You don't deny it. There's a large reward offered for you, alive or dead, but we would rather take you alive."

"This is folly or madness. I am not——"

"Hush! if you deny your identity, we shall take that as a positive proof that you mean to make some desperate attempt to escape, and then it will be our duty to shoot you, and take you in dead."

"This comes of leaving my servants at the inn. Confound that secretary, where is he? I tell you, my good sir, I am not Claude Duval. You are most seriously mistaken, I assure you."

Claude put his arm into the carriage and pressed the muzzle of a pistol to his lordship's cheek, as he said—

"Repeat that, and you are a dead man."

"Done," said Jack, as he completed the fastening of the other door.

"Forward, friends," said Claude to the party of horsemen, who had kept carefully aloof during the brief parley. "Forward. He surrenders, and will allow us to carry him in safety and peace to Newgate."

At this gratifying intelligence, the horsemen advanced; and Claude, again clapping the pistol to the face of his lordship, said—

"If you do not, in a sufficiently loud voice to reach the ears of all present, acknowledge yourself to be what you are—namely, Claude Duval, the only thing I can do is to pull the trigger."

There was a something in Claude's tones, that were fearfully convincing, and in a voice, in which fear and rage struggled together, the noble occupant of the carriage said—

"I—I am Claude Duval."

"You hear him, gentlemen?" said Claude.

"Yes—yes. Oh, yes. All's right."

"Very well; now I advise that you blow his brains out at once, if he should give you the smallest trouble as you go along. If he remains quiet, I am certainly of opinion that it will be better to lodge him in the hands of the authorities alive."

Everybody, with loud demonstrations of satisfaction, concurred in this sentiment; and then, as they all could not but feel that there might be some danger in carrying the shooting of the supposed highwayman into effect, they were terribly anxious to impress upon his mind the propriety of perfect submission, and that could only be done by large talking of the offhand and determined manner in which they purposed putting him out of the world if he should exhibit a contrary disposition. No doubt his lordship thought himself surrounded by as rough desperadoes as the times could produce. One of the party mounted the coach-box, and then Claude said—

"Off with you. The cattle are good, and you will be at the gate of Newgate in half an hour."

Away they all went, leaving Claude and Jack to undisturbed possession of Ealing Common.

"Well," said Jack, "this is ridiculous enough."

"It is," replied Claude. "But now, Jack, we ought, I think, to give them some sort of warning at the boarding-school, that an attempt was to be made to carry off one of the inmates."

"That is easily enough done. Hush!"

"What is the matter, Jack?"

'I am listening. I thought I heard the sound of footsteps."

"Ah! and so do I. Just hold the bridle of my horse, Jack, and I will go and reconnoitre."

"Be careful, Claude."

"I will—I will, you may be assured, Jack. Don't stir from this spot unless you hear my voice, or the sound of fire-arms."

Claude dismounted and crept along in a stooping posture, until he came to a stile which led into a preserve, and it was in that preserve that he could hear two men conversing. While he, Claude, is carefully, so as not to allow himself to be seen against the night sky, creeping through the lowest bars of the stile, we may briefly notice the noble lord's reception at the great metropolitan prison in the Old Bailey. His lordship's fears had been quite sufficiently awakened to induce him to wish to see the end of this adventure as a living man, rather than as a dead one; so after the carriage started he said not a word for some quarter of an hour or so. All that time, however, his rage was gathering strength, and slowly getting the better of his prudence.

"Is it to be, indeed," he thought, "that I, one of the Hereditary Legislators of England, born to wealth and honours, should be thwarted in such a little common place affair as running off with a poor man's daughter? Why are the daughters of common people sometimes pretty, if they are not to be made useful in adorning the dignified leisure of a noble aristocracy, I should like to know?"

This was quite a conclusive argument to his lordship's perceptions, and certainly if uttered among his own class, or possibly of an afternoon in the House of Lords, might have met with a "Hear! hear!" His lordship then tried one of the doors, but Jack was too great an adept at the tying of knots to render it a very easy matter to open one, and suddenly recollecting that at the back of the carriage there was one of those mysterious looking little windows, about the size of one's hand, he knelt upon the seat and tried to look through that upon the dark road. Then he tapped at it with a ring he had upon his finger, but the noise of the carriage wheels drowned all sounds of that character, and his lordship, if he meant to make himself heard, must manifestly think of some more affectual means. By feeling in his pockets he found a small penknife, and with that he broke the little window at the back of the carriage, and cried—

"Hilloa! Hilloa!"

"Once—twice," said somebody. Stand out of the way, Hoffendon, and don't be a fool."

"The devil!" said his lordship as he slipped off his seat and lay at the bottom of his carriage in an agony of fear.

"Thrice," said the voice, and then bang! went a blunderbuss, and half a dozen shots flew in at the back of the carriage. His lordship escaped uninjured, but the individual who had taken the coachman's seat was not so lucky, for one of the bullets with which the blunderbuss had been loaded, after penetrating the back of the carriage, and passing harmlessly over his lordship, went through one of the front windows, and lodged about an inch deep in the hind portions of the amateur coachman, who uttered a yell upon the occasion that might have been heard a mile off.

"Murder! murder! Oh, oh, oh!"

"Never mind," said he who had fired the blunderbuss. "It's only me."

"Oh, curse you! Why did you do that?"

"I have hit him!"

"Yes, you have. How can I sit and drive now, I should like to know, booby. What an idiot you are to be sure, Bailey."

The whole cavalcade now came to a stand, and Bailey, who was the individual with the blunderbuss, explained that he had seen the prisoner making an attempt to get out at the back of the coach, so without more ado, according to agreement and understanding, he had fired at him.

"And killed him?"

"Well," said Bailey, "I heard say there was six slugs in the blunderbuss."

"And I've got one of 'em," groaned the driver.

"Well, you needn't mind it," said Bailey. "You know it wasn't meant for you. God bless me, who are you, I wonder, that's so mighty particular about trifles?"

"Trifles, you scoundrel."

"Now, now, gentlemen," said the beadle, "don't quarrel. Let us go on. I dare say Claude Duval is dead now, and the best thing we can do, is to leave our friend Griggs at the first public house we come to, and get on to Newgate as fast as we can."

"Oh, curse you, Bailey," said the wounded man; "won't I serve you out for this some day. Oh dear, oh dear, I do think I shall faint clean away."

CHAPTER CXXVI.

A LITTLE MISTAKE.

ANOTHER of the party who possessed sufficient skill to guide the carriage to town, mounted the box by the side of the wounded man, and then, without thinking it to be at all necessary to look at the condition of the supposed highwayman occupying the interior of the vehicle, they started again. The little bit of experience of the aptitude of blunderbusses to do mischief, and not at all to respect the rights of an hereditary aristocracy, was not lost upon the noble lord in the carriage, and thinking that he was in a very safe place upon the carpet at the bottom of the vehicle, there he remained. A public house upon the Western Road was not such a rarity, even then, but that one was soon reached, and at the door of it the wounded Griggs was put down, with a promise that, notwithstanding his not actually going to Newgate with the prisoner, he should have his equal share of the large reward that would be distributed amongst them all. On went the carriage again, and at Tyburn Gate, he who now drove could not help, in the pride of his heart, saying to the toll-taker—

"We have got Claude Duval here."

"Claude Duval?"

"Yes. He's settled at last."

"Killed?"

"Yes. We had to do it. He wouldn't be quiet."

A look of deep concern crossed the man's face, as he said—

"You might have told me something else that would have pleased me better. Did he ever take anything from you?"

"No; but only consider the reward."

"Oh! ah! the reward. Well, every guinea of it to me would look the colour of blood. Go on; I won't take the toll of you. Nothing that ever belonged to a man that would kill for hire in such a way shall find a place in my hands."

The escort of the carriage said nothing, but passed on, and as they went down Oxford Street several of them spoke to each other in whispers, and one said—

"I like the idea of the money, but I don't half fancy being pointed at, as we all shall be, as the fellows that killed Claude Duval for the reward! That ain't pleasant, is it?"

"Not very; and—and I say, what a sight there may be in the court when we get to Newgate."

"A sight?"

"Yes, to be sure, all blood and squash, you know. Faugh! there's no saying how he may be mangled by the bullets from Bailey's confounded blunderbuss."

By degrees they all got talking in this strain, so that by the time they turned out of Snow Hill into the Old Bailey, they felt about as thoroughly uncomfortable as any dozen men could. Upon the principle, however, of post-boys coming into a town, they went up to the gate of Newgate with a dash, and one rung violently at the bell by the debtors' door.

"What now?" said a gruff voice through a grating.

"We have brought you a customer."

"Come, no nonsense. What is it?"

"Claude Duval!"

"What! another take in!—ha!—ha! Dead or alive?"

"Dead."

"Humph! Well, I won't say exactly that that's a do. A bullet will settle him as well as any one else, and the greatest fool in the world may send it on its errand. Did you do it?"

This was not very complimentary, but that was no time for anything in the shape of private quarrels to take place. The whole Hanwell party were agitated, and had dismounted from their horses. The wicket-gate of the old jail was opened, and four or five officers descended the steps. One tried to open the carriage door.

"What the deuce," he said, "if he is dead, have you tied him in for?"

"Oh, never mind that. You take him out, and give us a receipt for him, that's all. Hadn't you better get a sheet?"

"A what?"

"A sheet; cos, you see, we rather think he is all in bits."

A frightful groan, with something of a howl mixed with it, now came from the carriage, and the officers themselves retreated a step or two, while the whole of the Hanwell party rushed into the vestibule of the prison in the greatest fright imaginable.

"What, in the name of all that's troublesome," said one of the officers, "is the meaning of all this?"

"He ain't quite dead, that's all," faltered the beadle of Ealing. "He ain't dead, gentlemen. Take care of yourselves; he'll come out with a bounce."

"Stuff—stuff."

"Well, my good sir, you open the door. I think, when we bring him to the gate of Newgate, and give him up, carriage and all, to the officers, we have done all that ought to be expected of decent men."

"Yes, yes," cried all the others. "We give him up."

"What is the meaning of all this, Jones?" said one of the officers to another. "Lend me your knife to cut this string that ties the door fast. It was no fool that put it on."

"It's fast enough."

"Yes. But there it goes. Stand out of the way, and I'll fling open the door at once. If anybody comes out quick, pounce upon him and hold on. We will soon clap the darbies on him."

"All's right."

The moment was now one of intense excitement and curiosity to all present. The officers so dispersed themselves that it would have been next thing to impossible for any one to escape from the carriage by a sudden rush, while the Hanwell party, looking over their heads from the porch of Newgate, betrayed, by their looks of fiendish anxiety, how deeply they felt the awful character of the whole proceeding. Added to all this, the governor of the prison, who had been roused with the information that Claude Duval was brought dead to the gate, had just reached the vestibule with a night-lamp in his hand, and with eager eyes was watching the whole of the mysterious proceedings.

"Now—now," said one.
"Hush!" said another.
"Make way," said a third.
"What in the name of fate," said the governor, "is the meaning of all this?'
"It's Claude Duval, sir," cried half-a-dozen voices.
"And all in pieces," added the beadle of Ealing.



MISS HOLLOWAY AIDS CLAUDE AND CICELY IN ESCAPING FROM THE BOARDING SCHOOL.

"All in what?"
"In pieces, sir; it was Bailey's blunderbuss as did it.'
"Out with him," cried the governor. "Don't let us have any more of this nonsense. Out with him, my men, directly."
Thus urged, delay became insubordination, and the officers dragged the door of the carriage open, when, to their astonishment, there appeared upon the step, in

the act of getting out, a personage of an appearance as widely different from Claude Duval as anything could well be from another. Dismay, mingled with astonishment, sat upon every countenance. The governor dropped the light he carried, and the beadle of Ealing dropped his staff, letting the little gilt crown at the top of it come with an enormous dab upon the pavement.

"Police!" said his lordship. Is there a constable here?"

"A constable?" cried a dozen voices.

"Yes, for I have some men to give into custody who have attempted my life, as well as forcing me with them to this place, wherever it is."

He looked about him as he spoke, and then the governor coming forward said—

"Ah, this is another of Claude Duval's tricks. Pray, sir, who are you?"

"A peer of the realm."

The governor gave his head a slight jerk as he added—

"Here's a pretty affair. Why, good God, how could you all be so stupid as to bring this gentleman here, mistaking him for Claude Duval?"

"We—we were told," stammered the beadle of Ealing.

"Told, by whom?"

"A very nice gentleman indeed, on Ealing Common, told us this was Claude Duval in the carriage, and helped to fasten it up, so we came right on to town with it."

"Oh, you dolts, I'd take my oath that that nice gentleman upon Ealing Common was no other than Claude Duval himself."

The Hanwell party uttered a simultaneous groan, and then Bailey whispered to another—

"I say, the best thing for us all to do is to be off at once, before they have seen enough of us here to identify us. The officers are looking at us all as if they had made up their minds to know us again if it were one hundred years hence."

They all found that they had made some egregious blunder, and the whispered advice to be off went from mouth to mouth, and then, as with one word, they turned their horses' heads from the door of the prison, and off they went as though there was some handsome premium for him who would be first out of sight of its old grey walls.

* * * * * * *

And now that we have disposed of his lordship and his captors, we are enabled to return again to Claude, who it will be recollected had dismounted and left his horse in the care of Jack while he crossed a stile into a plantation verging upon the common, to listen to some whispered conversation that was going on between two men there. A feeling, which to himself he could not translate, seemed upon this occasion to impel Claude forward for the express purpose of listening to the conversation of these two men, and carefully treading upon the grass and pushing aside the thick growth of underwood from his path as he went, he soon gained a convenient spot in the deep shadow of an alder tree, from which he could catch every word that was uttered by them. It would appear that one of the men was arguing with the other respecting some circumstance which he felt much more confident concerning, than did his companion.

"You were always a timid slinking genius," said the one in a tone of mingled threatening and irony. "Upon my word, I wonder how I have continued to keep you about me so long."

"Why, Mr. Sachory, I rather think," said the other, "I have been at times a little useful to you."

"It is well you said a *little*," responded the other.

"Ah, well—well, we can't all expect to be so clever or so bold as you, you know, sir."

"Bah!"

"Yes. Bah! sounds very well, but it don't alter the case a bit. I do think I am afraid, and that's the fact—I can't help it. Perhaps it's foolish, perhaps it ain't, but afraid I am."

"And always will be."

"No, sir, not always. You know very well that in any quiet bit of roguery, that only wanted lying, and a good face on the matter, and in which there was no danger to life or limb, you have always been able to depend upon Sam Midge."

The other uttered an exclamation of contempt.

"But in this affair," continued Sam, "I must confess I am rather out of my element. Every man can do some things, but he can't do all things. Did I ever scruple about an oath or any little piece of perjury, in the way of the profession?"

"No—no."

"Well, then, don't get into a bluster, and be saying 'bah!' because I can't like this sort of thing, which I say again is out of my line."

"But consider the reward. I have promised you no less a sum than £500 for yourself."

"I have considered it. What do you suppose, sir, brings me here if I had not, I should like to know? He! he! he!"

Sam chuckled, as if he thought he had said rather a clever thing; and after the pause of about half a minute, the other added in a calmer and more friendly voice—

"Well, Sam, we ought not to expect impossibilities. You are rather a fool, I admit; but yet you can do something well enough, and this, perhaps, as you say, is rather out of your line."

"It is."

"Well, well. The reward makes it well worth trying, you know. I wonder where the deuce the chaise is?"

"Ah, that Bob is always behind."

"Confound him. Now, Sam, I do hope that you will have face enough for this business."

"Face enough! Oh, if it's only that, sir, that's wanted, I shall be able to go through with it famously, I can assure you. All I'm afraid of, is the consequence if that highwayman fellow should find it all out, you see."

"Pho!—pho! How can he? You know that there would be no end of squabbling about the reward, if more than ourselves were to be engaged in his death."

"Yes, his death. Put him out of his troubles, sir, and then I shall be out of mine, but not before."

"He shall die, you may depend. Fortunately, the reward is payable whether he be taken to the authorities alive or dead, and as such is the case, I certainly prefer taking him dead."

"So do I, sir—so do I."

"Well, then, Sam, all you have to do is to take the letter to the house, and get the young woman off into the coach, and then we will send for him, and if she can but be got to write to him, come he will."

"Good."

"And then he shall not be five minutes in the house before a bullet finds a place in his skull."

"Good again," said Sam; "and then my £500 is certain."

"Certain as if you had the amount in your pocket. Ah, Sam, I suppose you will leave your old master then?"

"Rather," said Sam.

"What on earth, thought Claude, "can these two rascals be talking about?"

"Well," continued he who was the employer of the other, "well, if I don't break that boy's head for not bringing the chaise sooner. You know the school well, I suppose, Sam?"

"Oh, yes. There's no dog."

"Ah!" thought Claude, "it is another attempt upon the school, is it?—What on earth can these rascals be planning and plotting now, I wonder? Confound them, I will thwart them yet."

He considered for a few moments as to what would be the best plan of procedure; and then he thought that he could not do better than actually go to the school at once, and boldly ask to see its proprietress, and put her upon her guard regarding the danger that threatened her establishment, for although he had not heard anything sufficiently explicit from the two men to know which young lady was threatened, yet, of course, that could not materially matter, since the care of the mistress of the establishment could be directed to all. He lingered yet a little longer, with the faint hope of getting more accurate intelligence from the men; but they continued conversing in the same style, so that it would have been useless for him to wait longer, and as for anything in the shape of retribution upon them for their projected villany, he felt that that could easily be accomplished after he had taken steps to warn the schoolmistress of the nature of the danger upon her establishment, and cautioned her to take such steps as she might to guard those in her care.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

THE YOUNG LADIES' ACADEMY.

THERE was one thing, however, that did puzzle Claude amazingly, and that was, how his capture could be in any possible way contingent upon the success of those two men in getting a young lady from the school; and yet they both spoke as if that was a consequence necessarily arising from it, and by no means an extraordinary accident. As he, Claude, went back to where he had left Jack with the horses, he turned this part of the affair over in his mind, but without being able to come to any conclusion concerning it. He was roused from the kind of reverie into which that puzzle plunged him, by Jack calling in a menacing voice—

"Who goes there?"

"'Tis I, Jack," said Claude. "'Tis I. I thought you knew my footstep."

"It sounded strange to me. You were walking much slower than usual."

"I was in deep thought."

"Anything amiss, Claude?" asked Jack, in a tone of anxiety.

"I will tell you all I have heard, and you can draw your own conclusion."

Claude then related to Jack the substance of the conversation that he had overheard between the two men, and when he had concluded he added—

"Now, Jack, there is some mystery here, which I confess my utter inability to unravel."

"It is a mystery indeed, Claude, which transcends my imagination. But what do you intend doing?"

"In the first place, the proprietress of the school ought to be fully warned, upon no pretence to part with one of her charges."

"Yes, Claude. But there may be much danger to you, looking around this spot, much more than either of us suspect. I would strongly advise that you ride off at once, and house yourself at your friend's farm again, while I stay to finish this adventure."

"No, Jack. No."

"Nay, the danger to you is a hundred-fold more than what it is to me!"

"Yes, Jack, that is true, but I cannot help feeling a something, which you may call folly, or superstition, as you please, which urges me to pursue this adventure personally; I know not how it is, but a strange feeling of satisfaction is at my heart to-night. I feel as though some great joy was impending over me; and as though Heaven, in its great goodness towards one, even so erring as I am, had looked to my happiness especially."

"You do surprise me, Claude."

"Not more than I surprise myself. But to you, Jack, I have no concealment, and as I have hesitated not to reflect upon you much of my repinings and melan-

choly feelings, I feel that I ought to tell you when the light of a new beam of joy irradiates my heart."

"You are right, Claude."

"I was sure you would say so. But now let us both come to the school, and we will, at all events, put those whose duty it is to be careful of the trust reposed in them, upon their guard. They must take care of their lambs, for wolves are abroad."

Claude had mounted his horse, and now both he and Jack made their way to the boarding school. This school, which, during the occurrences of that night occupied so prominent a place in the thoughts and speculations of every one, was held in what had once been a mansion of great splendour for its period, but which, having become unfashionable, had left the hands of the family that owned it, and was taken for, perhaps, the only commercial purpose it was at all adapted for, namely, a school. There were a pair of massive iron gates at its entrance, and the old sculptured ones of the family, originally owning the place, still were to be seen in bold relief upon the pediments. Beyond the gates was a carriage drive, which, pursued either to the right or to the left, alike would lead to the house, which itself was one of those old red-brick buildings of which some of the still remaining mansions of the nobility in and about London are tolerably fair specimens. The heavy iron handle of a bell, which was at the top of the gates, hung on the right of them, and it was to this that Claude appealed when he and Jack reached the place. The peal was not a very loud one, for Claude did not wish that any one but the inmates of the house should hear it, and he began to think that the reason it was paid no attention to, was, that he had not rung loud enough, but Jack was of a different opinion.

"We are apt to forget one thing," he said, "which in this case especially ought to be taken into account."

"What is that, Jack?"

"The hour, Claude. To us, all hours of the night are alike, and we are so accustomed to travelling on business by the light of the stars, that we are apt to forget the habits and the predilections of what are called the regular portion of the community."

"That is true. What is the time, Jack?"

"About two."

"No wonder, then, that we are denied admittance to a young ladies' boarding-school. What shall we do?"

"It is absolutely necessary that we get admittance here. And I think it an equally clear conclusion, that we shall never accomplish that by ringing. Now, I will open the gate if you have no objection, and we will close it behind us again."

"Do you think you can?"

"Oh, yes; easily. These large locks offer no difficulties whatever. I shall manage this one, no doubt, easily."

"Do it then, Jack."

Jack dismounted, and while Claude held his horse by the bridle, he took from his pocket a picklock, and in the course of a few moments forced back the bolt of the gate lock.

"Done," he said, as the ponderous gate yielded to a touch; "come on, Claude. We will find some convenient place to shelter our horses, and then we can go on foot to the house, or, if you like it better, I will wait under these chesnut trees in charge of the cattle."

"I think, Jack, that will be better."

"Very well, only be as short a time gone as you can, Claude, for after a little, when I am not with you, I get full of all sorts of foolish fears, and so weak upon my own imagination, that I am as wretched until I see you, as though there was a strong probability that I should never do so again."

"Be calm and confident, Jack, I will come back directly I have performed my mission, and you know I cannot come to much risk among the young ladies."

"I don't know anything of the sort," said Jack, with a faint laugh. "Young ladies are very dangerous personages."

Claude had dismounted, and smiling at Jack's fears, he made his way up the well gravelled carriage road towards the house. The distance was short, but when he reached the house he did not appear to be much nearer his object than before, for the outer-door was firmly closed, and only a faint light was to be seen along the second floor in what he supposed was the dormitory of the young ladies. Claude was rather puzzled to know what to do. After some consideration, however, he said to himself—

"The absolute necessity of the case authorises me to dispense with ceremony. The mistress of the establishment and her servants must be made aware of the danger that is at hand, and which is none the less dangerous, that it is to be a piece of craft, instead of violence. I will and must ring them up."

With this determination, Claude looked about for a bell, and finally found one. There was an old fashioned knocker, too, upon the door, and for a moment or two he hesitated whether he should not knock instead of ring, but he finally determined upon the bell.

"The sound of a knocker," he said, "is very alarming in the night, and as I wish to perform my mission as quietly as possible, the bell shall be the medium of my communication with the inmates of this house."

Claude rung and rung, gently too,—for, after all, intractable a thing as a bell may seem to be, yet a gentle and friendly ring may be given as well as a gentle and friendly knock at a door. He then waited for about five minutes, but not the slightest notice was taken of his application for admission, and he began to fear that it was "no use knocking at the door," and it was equally as inefficacious toring at all.

"I must not be baulked by a trifling difficulty," said Claude; so he rang again, louder than before.

This time the application was not quite so ineffectual, for a quantity of cold water came down from an upper window, and would have completely drenched Claude, had he not adroitly escaped by jamming himself close up against the outer door. A female voice then said—

"Who's there, and what do you want?"

"To reply to the last question first," said Claude, "and negatively—I do not want a shower bath."

"Who are you?"

"One about as much sinned against as sinning. It matters little who I am or what the world calls me. Let it suffice that I came here as a friend."

"We have no friends," said the voice;—down went the window.

"A strange notion," thought Claude. "I will ring again."

Tingle! tingle! went the bell; and then he heard from some back window a watchman's rattle spring.

"How foolish," he said, "that they will not come and see what I want. I must and will arouse them in some way."

He retired from the door, and looked up at the window, and it was well he did so, for suddenly some large fire-arm was discharged through the door from the inner side, and would undoubtedly have killed Claude if he had been in the way of the bullets that came crashing through the panels of the door.

"Take that," said a voice.

Then a chorus of screams came from the second floor, where Claude had seen the faint light, and where he had no doubt the young ladies, who were so guarded by cold water, rattles, and fire-arms, slept.

"I will be quiet," thought Claude. "They will then fancy they have killed some one, and probably come out."

He kept out of the way of the door, for he did not know what feeling might possibly prompt a second discharge of the gun; but he was not so far off as to hear a little dialogue that took place in the passage.

"Oh, Miss Lee!" said a voice, "how could you?"

"Mercy me! I don't know. But I didn't think it would go off at that end."

"But that is the thin end, and you know Mr. Delancey, the dancing master, always said the thin end."

"Oh—oh! I thought he said the thick. Indeed I did. What a noise it did make, to be sure. Oh, my nerves—my nerves."

"But what—suppose somebody's killed ?"

"I can't help it. Indeed I can't help it, Miss Bundlecumup, if there be."

"But a fellow creature ?"

"No, mum; don't call a fellow creature some housebreaker. An individual, if you please, mum."

"Well—but what shall we do ?"

"Nothing, mum. There's a Providence above us, and we had much better leave whoever is outside to it. Providence, you know, mum, is up at all hours, and it will look after whoever is outside, if he should be shot."

This was rather a cold-blooded philosophy, and Claude resolved that he would see how far it would go, so he uttered so horrid a groan that it reached the ears of all in the passage. It was echoed by a cry of surprise, and then some one said—

"Oh, I shall faint away dead! What was that ?"

"Nothing, mum, nothing. Only the night wind."

Claude groaned again, and then he heard something that made a clatter upon the stone flooring of the hall thrown down, which he had no doubt was the gun, and a scuffling of feet proclaimed that the whole party that had been there assembled had taken to flight.

"Confound their fears, muttered Claude: "what shall I do ?"

He took another long survey of the building, and then he thought he would examine the back of it; and he accordingly made his way through the garden until he reached what was by far the most inviting aspect of the house, inasmuch as it looked into a garden full of fruits and flowers.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

CLAUDE'S ADVENTURE IN THE SCHOOL.

A young moon was just peeping up from the horizon, and cast a pale mellow light upon the beautiful vegetation of the garden and upon the windows of the old house. Some tall trees were rendered beautiful as though their foliage was of silver tissue, and the deep black shadows cast into some of the hollows of the building, gave the whole place a much more picturesque appearance than it could pretend to under the flaunting eye of day.

"A pleasant spot, truly," said Claude.

Not for long, however, did he continue to gaze upon the beauties of the garden and of the building. He was upon other thoughts intent, the principal of which was to find some mode of getting into the building, and so forcing its inmates to feel and to recognise that he came upon a friendly errand. After a time he observed a tree, the branches of which grew so close to some of the windows of the house, that he considered he might easily effect an entrance by its aid.

"I will try," he said. "Any farther efforts on my part to procure an admittance by the ordinary modes of ingress might end in my death, for they are not exceedingly scrupulous in the use of fire-arms, so, as I must and will get, I can only avail myself of the means placed at my disposal."

The tree had branches very low to the ground, so that the climbing part of the affair was by no means difficult, and in the course of a few moments Claude stood upon one of the window-sills at the back of the house. A touch sufficed to

convince him that this window was open, or rather that it was not fastened. He raised it, and sprang lightly into the room, to which it communicated. All was pitch dark within, and for some few moments Claude was in considerable doubt as to what sort of room he had thus got into. By degrees, however, his eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, and he could see dimly about him. He found that he was in a long narrow room in which there was a miscellaneous assortment of goods of all descriptions, that made it look more like some second or third rate broker's shop than anything else, and from which he could deduce that he was in the spare or lumber room of the establishment. Of course, it would not suit his views to remain in such a place as that, and, accordingly, after cautiously walking about it, and ascertaining that there was but one door to it, he emerged into a narrow passage. In this passage, where Claude Duval now found himself, a number of cloaks and bonnets were hung, and there were some rout seats along one of the walls. What could be the object of those seats, or where the passage might lead to, was to him matters of mystery, but he slowly and carefully pursued it, treading as gently as foot could fall in his progress. After going about thirty feet, he found that the passage terminated in a baize door, which was quite destitute of lock, latch, or other fastening. It merely had a small handle by which it might be opened. Claude hesitated, and listened, as well he might, for he could not have the smallest idea as to where this door might lead him, but when he came to consider that his motive for thus invading the privacy of that house was a good one, he felt a degree of boldness that enabled him to proceed. When we speak of boldness, as connected with Claude Duval, we do not, by any means, allude to that physical courage which enabled him to dare all obstacles, and to overcome them in the remarkable manner which we have often seen to be the case during the progress of this narrative of his achievements, but that moral courage which enables a man to do what he feels would be unjustifiable were it not that he had some reason, which, in its nature pretty sufficiently upheld him in the action. In this instance, Claude was upon no marauding expedition—he aimed at no man's purse, nor any maiden's fears; what he came for was, to give warning of danger, and those persons who had in the front of the house received him in so uncourteous a fashion had to thank the indomitable resolution, that in the pursuit of good or of evil, would not be turned aside by difficulties, that he, Claude, did not leave the boarding school to its fate. Gently he pulled back the baize-covered door. It made not the slightest sound upon its hinges, but to his surprise, instead of finding that it opened into a room, he saw, only two yards from it, another door, the upper part of which was wholly of glass, and through which gleamed a pale light. To pause, and hold his very breath for a moment, lest he should give any alarm, where he would not wish to do so, was to Claude the wish and will of a moment. All was still, and then, just as he was about to move a step forward, he looked through the glass door, and he heard a voice say—

"Oh, but Emma, what was it?"

"I don't know. Let's all go to sleep," said another. "Perhaps it was Miss Juker's beau that she met on the common."

"Indeed, Miss Frimling, you are quite wrong," cried another, "you know you would be very glad to have a beau yourself."

"I? I?"

"Yes you; and as for that, didn't you say the postman was good-looking."

"Oh, gracious!" cried half a dozen voices at once.

Claude advanced a step, and peeped through the glass door, and he found as he had begun to suspect, that he was an unobserved spectator of the dormitory of the establishment. The room was a spacious one, and upon the chimney-piece a night light was burning, which just cast sufficient illumination around it to prevent the apartment being in positive darkness. The young ladies had of course been alarmed by the noise of the discharge of the gun, and were busy forming conjectures as to the cause of it.

"I know it was Miss Williams," said one, "that fired the gun. You know, all of you, that she is very ill-tempered."

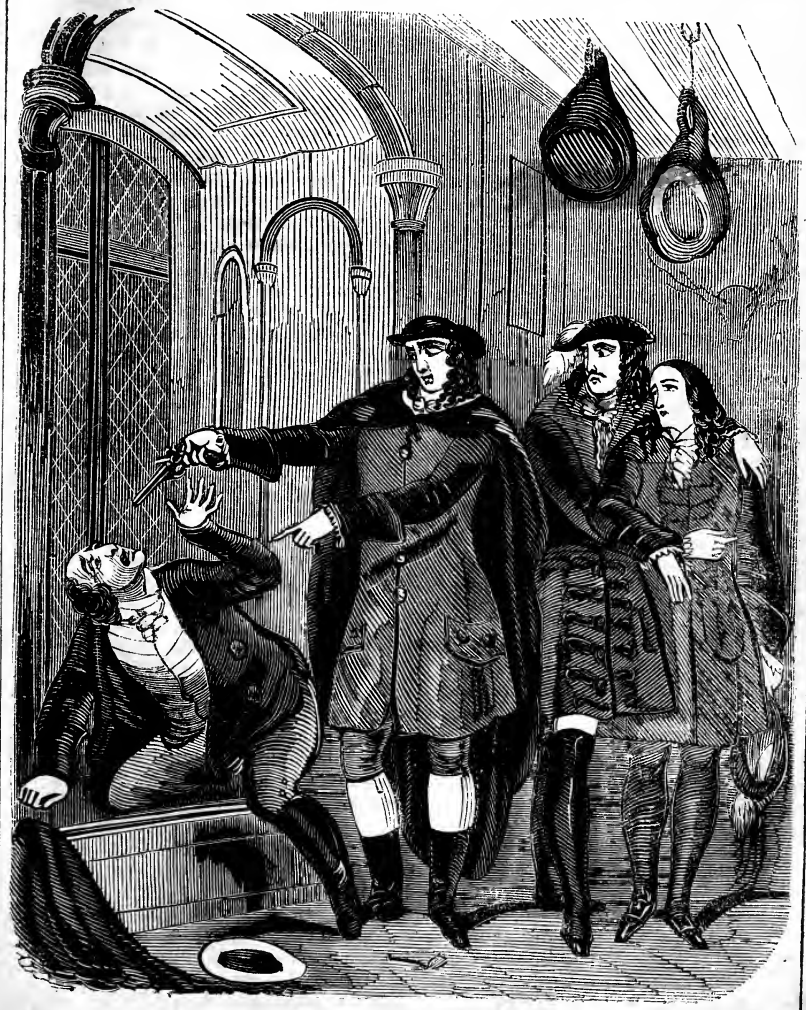
"Oh, very, very!"

"But it might have been some man coming to rob the house," said another.

"Well, but suppose it wasn't, but only somebody coming to serenade us."

"Oh my," cried the whole in chorus.

"Some Captain of the Guards," continued the young lady who had so success-



fully started the idea of the serenade, "and who has seen us all walking on the common, and fallen desperately in love with all of us."

"Very likely. Nothing more likely!" cried all the others. "He could not do otherwise, and oh, if he be good-looking?"

"With loves of mustachoes," added another.

"And curly hair."

"And such whiskers!"

"This won't do," thought Claude, "it's only a waste of time, besides a very unfair thing for me to remain here."

"Oh, what," said one, "if it were Claude Duval."

A general scream came from the whole lot, and then they all said how terrified they should be, and yet how delighted.

"I have heard," said one, "that he always dances a minuet with any young lady he meets, and kisses her three times."

"Oh gracious, I should tell him to don't. But don't I wish he'd come in, and frighten Miss Briggs, the old fright."

"Ha, ha, ha!—ha, ha, ha!"

"So, ladies, said a harsh female voice, suddenly, as a door slammed, "this is the way you amuse yourselves, instead of going to sleep as you ought to do?"

Silence now reigned in the dormitory, unbroken save by the half suppressed titters of some of the younger pupils; and Miss Briggs, for it was none other than that lady herself, continued—

"Really, young ladies, I am exceedingly obliged at finding that I am so far honoured as to be made a subject of your humorous remarks in my absence. Is that you laughing, Miss Tomlins?"

"No, madam—He! he!"

"Perhaps, Miss Tomlins, four of Watt's hymns learnt by heart to-morrow before dinner will not be quite so laughable a matter as the occurrences of to-night."

"Oh, dear!"

"What did you say, Miss Lucombe?"

"Nothing, madam."

"Very well, Miss Lucombe, you will be so good, to-morrow, to learn a page of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary by heart, and repeat it with your feet in the stocks and the backboard on your shoulders."

This sentence struck dismay into the hearts of the culprits, and not one made the ghost of a remark. They found that Miss Briggs had a frightful facility in pitching upon any offender, and that her punishments certainly increased in intensity as she went on, without regard to the fact of whether the offences were greater or smaller.

"Bother the old woman!" said Claude to himself.

Miss Briggs having thus pitched right down upon two of the culprits in a metaphorical point of view, waited until she found by the stillness in the dormitory that she had struck terror into the whole flock, and then in a stately manner she moved off, but before she left the room, she said—

'And, young ladies, as you have all been very seriously to blame—for no young lady, who is a real young lady, could possibly be awake at this time of the night—I shall give you all nothing but bread and treacle for dinner to-morrow."

An unusual groan came from the dormitory, under cover of which Miss Briggs made her exit.

"Mieu!" said Claude, executing a capital imitation of the cry of a cat.

The young ladies all burst into a peal of laughter.

"It's the cat," said one. "Puss! puss! puss!"

"Mieu!" said Claude again. "Listen to me. Mieu!"

At the idea of the cat suddenly saying "Listen to me!" the young ladies were petrified with astonishment, and some of them uttered little short screams of dismay.

"Listen to me," said Claude again in a curious squeaking voice. "Mieu! you shan't have bread and treacle. I'll speak to Miss Briggs and get you all off, that I will. Good night, dears. Bless you all. Go to sleep."

Astonishment kept all the young ladies silent, and then an unknown dread took possession of them all, and every head was popped under the bedclothes, while Claude stepped gently away, and finding near at hand a staircase, descended it with the hope of meeting with Miss Briggs, or some other authority of the seminary.

At the foot of the staircase, Claude found that there was the identical room from which the gun had been fired that had produced such an amount of consternation among the young ladies of the establishment. A hastily lighted candle was upon a sideboard in this hall, and likewise from a doorway, which was partially open, there streamed a light, and the sound of voices came upon Claude's attentive ear.

"Yes," he heard some one say, "I will do it. I could not, Miss Briggs, go to rest again to-night with the thought upon my mind that a human being might be lying upon the very threshold of the house, wounded, and in want of help."

"But it may be a robber."

"Robber or no robber, God made him, and we have sacred duties to perform."

"Well, Miss Holloway," said Miss Briggs, "I must say, that for a junior governess, which you will be so good as to recollect you are, you certainly have some very strange notions."

"I am quite aware, madam," said Miss Holloway, "that a junior teacher in this establishment ought to be a mere machine, without feeling or sensation, beyond what is just sufficient to enable her to perform her duties."

"Indeed, Miss Holloway."

"Yes, madam, but not having attained to that pitch of philosophy, I shall open the front door, and see if any one be hurt."

"And so we may have all our throats cut through you. I declare, if a man were to cross the threshold of this house at this time of night, I would not give a pin for my life. I should just at once say to him——"

"What, madam?" said Claude, stepping into the room; "what would you say to him? Pray go on, I will hear it at once, to save you the trouble of repetition."

Miss Briggs fell off her chair to the floor, where she sat in a state of incipient hysterics. Miss Holloway looked very pale, but she spoke with tolerable firmness, as she said—

"What is the meaning of this intrusion? What want you here?"

"Not to create the least alarm," said Claude. "I come upon an errand which, when explained, will, I think, warrant, or at all events, excuse my presence."

These words were spoken in so gentle a tone of voice, and with such a suavity of manner, that even Miss Briggs, after clutching her throat several times convulsively, partially recovered.

"Who are you?" she said.

"A gentleman, madam, I hope."

"I am sure of it," said Miss Holloway. "Speak, sir."

"I come to warn you that an attempt will be made, by means of a forged letter to get some young lady from this establishment to-night. I regret that in my anxiety to bring this news my motives were mistaken."

"Mistaken!" cried Miss Briggs.

"Yes, madam. Surely the discharge of a gun at me through the street door before I was permitted to explain myself, was rather a serious and a hasty mistake."

"But you are not hurt?" said Miss Holloway.

"No," said Claude, smiling, "I am rather lucky under such circumstances, and certainly have escaped without injury."

"Thank Heaven! Oh, Miss Briggs, you see now what might have happened from precipitancy."

"I don't know that," said Miss Briggs, gathering herself up from the floor; "I don't know that."

"But you shall know it, my dear madam," said Claude, "before we part. It will be my duty to convince you."

"But how can I be convinced? In the first place, how did you get into the house?"

"Permit me, madam, to keep that little secret to myself for the present, as I don't think you would exactly like to take the same method, so it must be a matter of but little interest to you."

"Murder! Murder!" cried an elderly lady, in a flannel dressing gown, at this moment bursting into the room. "What's it all about? Murder! Murder!"

"It can't be worse, madam, than murder," said Claude. "Allow me to hand you a seat."

"Who are you? who are you?" cried the old lady.

"Hush!" said Claude.

A smart ring at the bell by the outer door came plainly upon the ears of the whole party, and before any one could speak, it was sharply repeated.

CHAPTER CXXIX.

RETRIBUTION UPON EVIL DOERS.

"You hear," said Claude.

The whole party was as silent as the grave.

"You hear," repeated Claude.

"Gracious! what is it?"

"Just what I tell you. A villain has some object—a base one, no doubt—in getting from the protection of your roof one of the young ladies who reside here. I am here to prevent him. Doubtless after this little explanation, I shall, at least, have the privilege of being considered for the time as being a friend."

"But how do we know?" said the old lady.

"Nay, madam, you will know. Ha!"

The bell was rung again smartly.

"This must be attended to," said Miss Holloway. "If this gentleman will so far oblige as to go to the door."

"Dear me," said Miss Briggs, "some folks find out who is a gentleman, I think, mighty quick."

"Yes, madam," said Claude. "It requires a lady to make that discovery with any degree of certainty and despatch."

He slightly bowed to Miss Holloway to give point to the compliment, and Miss Briggs, with a toss of her head, sailed into the passage, as though she fully intended to answer the bell, but her courage failed her, and she came back again, saying—

"I don't see why the servants should not open the door in preference to a stranger doing so."

"That is quite optional with you, ladies all," said Claude. "But I make the offer to do so, if you will permit me. If you, miss—(turning to Miss Holloway)—and this other lady—(turning to the old lady)—whose face much reminds me of the celebrated Court beauty, the Countess of Salisbury, will permit me, I will answer the door."

"With all my heart," said Miss Holloway.

"And with all mine," said the old lady; and then she added to Miss Holloway—"I think he's the handsomest and politest man I ever saw in all my life."

Miss Briggs, thus finding herself in a minority of one, said nothing, and Claude at once left the room, and reached the street door just as the bell was rung again. It was well secured, but as there was a light in the hall, he found no difficulty in drawing back all the bolts, and removing the chains. It would appear as though the person without heard this process going on, for no more ringing took place, and when finally Claude opened the door wide, keeping behind it himself, a voice said—

"Is this the school?"

"Yes, sir," said Claude, capitally imitating a female voice.

"Oh, very well."

A man immediately stepped into the passage, and as soon as he was far enough

in to permit its being done, Claude closed the door again, and commenced deliberately doing up all the fastenings as they had been done before. This was a proceeding, particularly as it was accompanied by the sight of a man instead of a woman, which gave some sort of a shock to the visitor, and he said quickly—

"Oh, I am not going to stay."

"Very likely," said Claude, "but we always shut up."

"Oh—ah! It's a mere custom."

"Exactly. It is not very likely we are going to keep you in a young ladies' seminary. Walk in. This way."

The man, who was respectably enough attired, and who no doubt was the attorney who had had so interesting a conversation with his clerk in the plantation, followed Claude with some degree of trepidation in his countenance into the parlour. The three ladies—we must in common courtesy call Miss Briggs a lady—looked surprised, and Claude, as he closed the door, said in a clear voice—

"This gentleman has some business with you, ladies; I think he is a lawyer by his looks."

The attorney started.

"Now, sir," added Claude, "be as explanatory as you can, if you please, and as brief as possible, for at this hour we are none of us inclined to occupy too much time."

A faint suspicion that all was not right seemed to come over the mind of the attorney, and yet when he took a second thought, he asked himself how it was possible that any one could by any human possibility have found out his intentions, and he spoke with some degree of boldness, as he said—

"A sick young lady is staying here."

"Well, sir," said the old lady who had been so flattered by Claude telling her she was like the countess. "Well sir?"

"Perhaps," said Miss Holloway, "perhaps you will mention the young lady by name, of whom you come in quest?"

"Oh, certainly," he said, "the young lady is named Macqueen, and is a relation to my old friend, Dr. Macqueen, in whose behalf I came here."

"Is that correct?" said Claude.

"It is," replied Miss Holloway. "It is so far correct, but it is very strange that Dr. Macqueen should send a message to his niece, as we believe the young lady to be, at such a time of the night as this."

"He is very ill," said the attorney.

"Indeed?"

"Oh, yes; and has been for some days."

"How strange, then, that he should write to us yesterday to ask if the young lady wanted anything, and to let him know of her state of health from day to day."

"Ah, how like him," said the attorney.

"Like him, sir?"

"Yes, he is the last man to confess indisposition until it really becomes too serious to conceal, and now that he is himself fully impressed with a belief that he is dying, he of course at almost the last moment wishes to see his niece, to whom he is most tenderly attached."

"And where does he reside?" said Claude.

"At Winchester."

Claude staggered back, and had to hold by a chain for support, as that name Winchester rung in his ears like a death knell. What a host of painful recollections did it not bring to his mind. How gaunt and terrible arose that old cathedral before his imagination, with all the scene of blood that had therein been created to the detriment of his happiness in all time to come."

"Horror! horror!" he gasped.

"You are ill," said Miss Holloway.

"Gracious Heavens! What's the matter with the politest man in the world," said the old lady.

"Ahem!" said Miss Briggs, "of course it means something."

"Yes, madam," said Claude, "it means that although you are destitute of feeling, all are not in such a condition. This was but a passing pang, ladies, which I could not wholly repress. It has gone now, and as I was before, I am your humble servant."

"Humph!" said the lawyer.

"Well, sir," said Miss Holloway, to the attorney, as she now and then cast a compassionate look at Claude, who she saw was suffering, although she knew not from what cause. Well sir, and admitting that Miss Macqueen is here, what do you wish to say to her. I may just incidentally mention, that in her state of health this is a very improper hour at which to disturb her."

"Nothing," said the attorney, "but the extreme urgency of the case would justify it."

"Then what do you propose?"

"That this letter from her uncle should be handed to her, and then, of course, I will wait her answer. If it be what I expect it will be, she will accompany me without delay, in a chaise that I have near at hand, until the Winchester mail passes, in which we can proceed."

"Impossible, sir."

"Why so, madam?"

"Such a journey, in the young lady's state of health, would be fatal to her."

"Perhaps you will allow me to decide, madam?"

"Give me the letter."

The letter was with the most polite air in the world handed to Miss Holloway, who, the moment she cast her eyes upon it, said—

"This is not Dr. Macqueens's handwriting."

"No, poor gentleman. Paralysis prevents him from moving his right hand. I wrote that at his dictation. Alas! that so truly great and good a man should not be long for this world."

"Alas, indeed. Well, sir, Miss Marqueen, who is scarcely able to walk without assistance, shall see the letter, and it will be for her own judgment, to decide in this painful emergency, as to what is best to be done."

"And I will wait outside—"

"No," said Claude, "inside, if you please."

"But—but—"

"I will take no denial, sir. Do you think, now, for one moment, that these ladies would allow so dear a friend of their dear friend, Dr. Macqueen, to remain outside?"

The attorney bit his lips.

"As you please," he said. "I am far—very far—from being insensible to these little kind attentions, believe me, ladies; and although your tame tiger here, who, I suppose, is a footman in disguise, may not have exactly the manners of genteel society, yet if he serve you well, I may well forgive him."

"How kind," said Claude. "Mutual forgiveness, I think, sir, would be the most agreeable thing in this case to you."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing in the world that I will not stand to, believe me."

Miss Holloway had left the room with the letter to Miss Macqueen, the sick young lady, and during her absence Miss Briggs was anxious to do what her small malice might be able to suggest to annoy Claude. Handing a seat to the attorney, she said—

"Pray be seated, sir. I do not like to see a gentleman not treated courteously."

"Thank you, madam."

"As for common people"—here she darted a killing look at Claude, who only laughed—"as for common people, they are of no consequence, and can be left standing."

"You could not possibly utter a more true sentiment, madam," said Claude, "and that is the reason why I have not offered you a seat before."

Miss Briggs looked pins and needles, but before this small mass of words could proceed any further, Miss Holloway came back, looking very pale, and with the open letter in her hand which she had taken to the sick Miss Macqueen. The attorney started from the seat with which he had been accommodated by the despicable affected courtesy of Miss Briggs, and looked anxiously at Miss Holloway, who said in a voice of emotion—

"She will attend you, sir."

The attorney looked triumphant, but Claude stepped forward, and in a deep impassioned voice, said—

"No. This must not be. I have the very strongest and best of reasons to believe that there is some gross deception in this matter, although what it exactly is, I confess I am, up to the present time, rather puzzled to know."

The attorney would have interrupted him, but Claude, in a voice that echoed through the room, said—

"Peace, sir! If you would consult your own safety you will be pleased to hear me out. Be warned in time, or the footman in disguise, as you were pleased to call me, will read you a lesson that you will not forget to your dying day."

The attorney shrunk back aghast.

"Call a constable," said Miss Briggs.

"Presently, madam," said Claude. "There is time enough. I will take care of all that. I say I have reason to suspect that some foul plot is in progress, and I have come into this house for the protection of its inmates, and please God I will protect them."

"Sir, will it please you," said Miss Holloway, "to—to read—this letter, and yet, I hardly know——"

"You feel that you are probably taking an unadvised step by asking me to do so."

"I do."

"Then do not hand it to me, I pray you. I will try by some other means to unmask villany."

"Nay, then you shall read it, sir. As the friend of Miss Macqueen, I throw myself upon your honour."

She handed the open letter to Claude, whose face as he read it became of an ashy paleness. His limbs trembled—his hands convulsively clutched the paper, and when he had concluded it, he uttered the exclamation of—

"Great God!"

The letter which had produced such unwonted effects upon Claude Duval, ran as follows—

Winchester.

"My Dear Madam.—Pray resign yourself for awhile to the protection of the gentleman who will be the bearer of this letter. I am very ill indeed, and much wish to see you before I die. I hope you are better, as my most ardent wish now, from all that I have heard, is to place you once again in the hands of Claude Duval, your husband.—Believe me to be, my dear madam, yours faithfully,

John Macqueen."

Claude might well exhibit the strange symptoms he did, upon reading this to him most extraordinary and incomprehensible epistle. He staggered towards the door, and held by the back of a chair as in choking accents he spoke—

"For the love of all that is good and merciful, tell me——"

He could proceed no further, and Miss Holloway coming up to him with clasped hands, said—

"Oh, sir, say no more, I know all, and from that letter so do you; but remember that I confided to your honour."

"God bless you!" cried Claude, "where—where is—is she?"

"You will not—you do not wish to see her?"

Claude sunk upon the chair close to which he was, and burst into tears.

"Cicely—Cicely!" he gasped, "my Cicely."

"Your—your—Cicely!" cried Miss Holloway.

"Your Cicely!" echoed the attorney.

"Yes!" cried Claude, springing to his feet, "yes, my Cicely. Oh, joy! Oh, God, I would not give this moment to be made the emperor of the world, for now I am assured that by some miracle she yet lives."

"And—and you?" said Miss Holloway.

"I," he cried in a voice of thunder. "Who should I be, but Claude Duval!"

CHAPTER CXXX.

A MOMENT OF JOY.

THE mention of that well-known and much dreaded name had very different effects upon the persons present. The old lady looked as though she would faint. Miss Holloway quietly sat down and sobbed; and Miss Briggs, after finding she could not get out of the room without passing in what she considered too close proximity to Claude, made a futile attempt to get up the chimney, which only resulted in her getting her head and face all over soot: the attorney looked like a corpse; and when Miss Briggs, upon retiring from the chimney, flung herself upon him, and cried, "Oh, protect me," and covered his face with soot likewise, they looked a remarkably fine pair.

"Yes," added Claude, "I am Claude Duval."

"Fly—fly!" said Miss Holloway.

"But not alone—where is she?—where—oh where? I now begin to understand it all. She lives!—she lives! Take me to her. Tell me where once again I may look into those eyes, the brightness of which I thought quenched for ever. Where is she—my Cicely—my heart's best treasure?"

No one seemed able to move to help him, and he made towards the door and flinging it open rushed up the staircase, calling aloud as he went—

"Cicely—Cicely! 'Tis I—'tis I, Claude. Your own Claude. Speak to me. I would barter life for the joy of once again hearing you pronounce my name."

He reached a door which opposed his progress, to open it was the work of a moment. Then another came in his way, and that too was opened, when, without heeding where he was going to, he rushed at once into the young ladies' sleeping room, calling loudly—

"My love! my life! Come to these arms!"

Now there were just twenty-two young ladies in that large dormitory, and as they uttered two-and-twenty shrieks, the reader may imagine there was a tolerable uproar. Then all the twenty-two heads were put under the bed-clothes, but as curiosity to know what was going to happen next, could not be gratified by a countenance of that state of things, the twenty-two heads popped out again, as if by some species of machinery. Of course, the most interesting problem in the world was, regarding who the "Love" and the "Life" was.

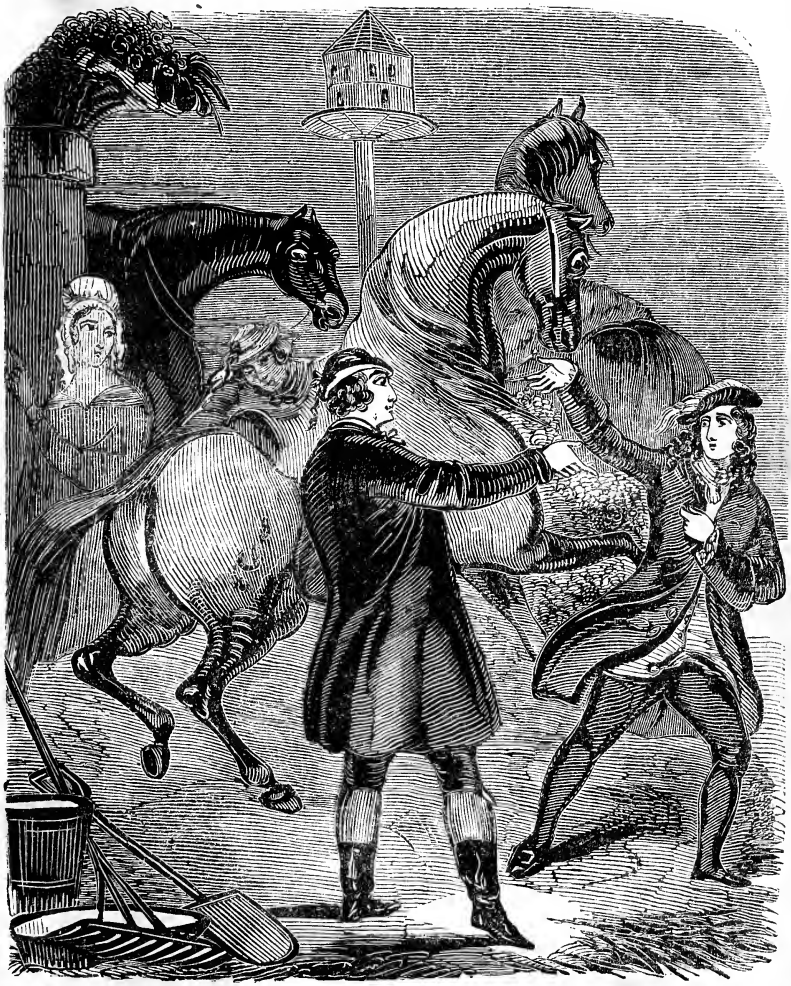
"Where is she?" cried Claude, looking about him.

"Not me," said one.

Twenty-two additional shrieks were raised, as they all thought that the intruder was only looking about him for a few moments to see which of the lot he would pounce upon, and declare to be the fair enslaver of his affections. Whether hopes or fears were most predominant, we cannot take upon ourselves to say, but the affair as regarded any personal consequences, was in a very few moments put an end to, and the young ladies were witnesses to a scene that opened their eyes considerably. It happened that at the further end of the domitory there was a little door leading into a little chamber, that, by the kindness of Miss Holloway, had been given up to Cicely, for Cicely it was, who was at the school to all intents

and purposes. How she came there will shortly be explained. The little door was suddenly flung open, and certainly with far less show of weakness than might have been expected. It was excitement lent her strength. Cicely came forth to meet Claude Duval. She had heard his voice. In an instant she was in his arms.

"Claude! Claude!"



THE HALT AT THE FARM-HOUSE.

"Cicely! My Cicely!"

This was all that they for some time could say to each other, but the language of love was eloquence itself, as Claude pressed numberless kisses on her lips.

"Oh, Cicely," he at length found breath and heart to say. "Tell me, dearest and best, if this be a dream or reality?"

"Real. All real, Claude."

"And you are well—quite well?"

"Ah, no. I am faint and weak. The wound is slow in healing, but this joyful meeting will do more than all surgeons, ay, more than time itself, to restore me to what I was again."

"Blessings on this joyous chance. Oh, how have I deserved such happiness?"

"And you are well, Claude?"

"Well and happy. My Cicely, your eyes sparkle as of old, and there is a something too of the old colour on your cheeks. Ah, dear one, if some angel, but one short hour since, had told me I should see this sight, I might well have been pardoned for doubting the messenger from Heaven!"

Again he kissed her lips, and one of the boarders, who was in a distant corner, ejaculated—

"How nice!"

In an instant the twenty-two heads, with twenty-two faint screams, were hidden under the bed-clothes, from which same retreat about half-a-dozen voices declared how ashamed they were of a Miss Brown, such being the name of the young lady who had given utterance to the candid opinion about the niceness. Claude and Cicely, who, in the excess of their own joy had to tell, the truth, quite forgotten that there were any spectators present, now looked around them, and Cicely feeling that some explanation was required, said—

"Ladies, this is my husband."

"Lor, Miss Macqueen," said one, "you don't say so?"

"Good looking, too," said another.

"Come away, Claude," said Cicely; "we will not part again. These young ladies have been all very—very kind to me since my residence here, the reasons for which I will impart to you at greater leisure."

Claude advanced to the middle of the room, and with a smile upon his face, he said, as he placed his hand gracefully upon his breast—

"Ladies, I wish I knew in what words to express to you the deep feeling of gratitude that now swells my heart towards you all. God bless and preserve all your pretty faces. I think I had better kiss you all round."

Twenty-two very faint screams indeed ensued upon this proposition being made, and one young lady—it was that terrible Miss Brown—said—

"Tell us who you are?"

"I am afraid you will be shocked to hear."

"No—no—no," cried all the twenty-two voices.

"Well, then, ladies," added he, "I am Claude Duval, of whom you have no doubt heard, and if you choose to capture me, you will share a very handsome reward among you."

At this moment Miss Briggs made her appearance in the room, with a countenance looking like a newly opened cask of vinegar.

"Well, young ladies," she said, "if you are young ladies, which I begin very much to doubt, I am truly astonished to see, and to hear you all, in your night-dresses, and in bed too, speaking to a man. It's monstrous—monstrous!"

"We couldn't help it," cried one.

"We are covered up," said another, "and most of our heads have been under the clothes."

"He hasn't kissed us yet," said a third.

"Besides," said Miss Brown, "he's very nice-looking."

"Yes, yes," said all the twenty-two.

"And we can see him much better now you have brought your light, Miss Briggs," added one, in a bantering tone. "What do you think of him, mem?"

A shrill peal of laughter followed this sally, and Miss Briggs cried—

"If I only precisely knew the young lady who said that, I would drag her out of bed at once and make a dreadful example of her. As it is, sir, you will be pleased to walk out of this house at once; and pray, do you know anything of the key of the front door? for the gentleman below can't wait any longer for Miss

Macqueen, and if she don't feel disposed to go with him, he is quite willing to go without her."

"I have the key in my pocket," said Claude. I took care to see that the door might be made fast in the inside, and suspecting a scoundrel, who is down stairs, might wish to leave the house before he had my permission so to do, I took the precaution of preventing him."

"But, sir——"

"Nay, madam, be calm; I will come down and speak to that person very shortly. Cicely, do you think you could bear the fatigue of a ride on horseback for a few miles?"

"Oh, yes, yes. With you, Claude, anywhere."

"Upon my word," said Miss Briggs, "this is very pretty—very pretty indeed, sir."

"If you allude to these young ladies, madam," said Claude, "I certainly subscribe to your opinion. They are very pretty indeed, as you say; I wish that my regard for truth would permit me to pass the same compliment upon you."

The twenty-two young ladies all laughed outright at this, so much did they admire it; and Miss Brown actually sat up in bed.

"I will now, Cicely, leave you. Get ready," whispered Claude, "and come down stairs to the parlour as quickly as you possibly can; Jack is in the immediate vicinity of this place waiting for us."

"Yes, Claude, yes."

"Do not fret yourself by any undue haste. All is well."

He then turned to the young ladies, and said again—

"God bless you all. Good night; I shall never forget you all as long as I live, and I hope, if you ever hear of me, that you will put the most gentle construction upon all the sayings and doings of Claude Duval."

With this he moved to the door, which the terrified Briggs held open for him, and made the best of his way down the stairs to the parlour, where there were waiting those who were not a little anxious, but from different motives, to know what was going on above. When Claude reached the parlour he found it still occupied by the attorney, Miss Holloway, and the old lady, whom he had succeeded in prepossessing in his favour by a well-timed compliment. He at once addressed himself to the attorney.

"Now, sir," he said, "explain yourself."

There was a something—an indescribable something, and yet a something to be felt, seen, and trembled at about Claude's manner as he pronounced these words, that made the lawyer tremble, and turn a shade paler than he was before.

"I am listening," added Claude.

"What—what do you mean, sir?"

"I mean to ask you what brought you here, I mean to give you one chance of telling the truth. Do you understand me now?"

It was as plain as the nose on his face to the lawyer that Claude saw through the whole transaction, and in this way wished him, the lawyer, to confess it. He shook for a few moments, as one might suppose a prisoner at the bar to do before he says—"Guilty, my lord," and don't very clearly know whether the fond confession will procure a mitigation of his sentence or not.

"Speak!" cried Claude, still more impatiently. "Speak!"

It was at this moment that a thundering knock came at the outer door of the house, and awakened echoes in every portion of the building by its tremendous and continued reverberations.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

THE RACE THROUGH EALING.

This knock seemed as if it had fallen upon the heart of every one present. The attorney sprang behind a chair. Miss Briggs gave a short scream, Miss Holloway made two steps towards Claude, as though she would have said "You can and will protect me," while the old lady swooned outright.

Even Claude himself could not but start to hear that loud appeal to the knocker. A feeling, however, that there might be personal danger—and, oh, how dear to him now was personal safety! now that he had once more found a tie to bind him to life again—came over Claude; and for all he knew, some imprudent domestic might open the door to those without, and produce much mischief. With this feeling strong upon him, he flew to the hall, and there found that he was only just in time to prevent a tall scraggy servant from attempting the fastenings. Then he recollected that he still had the key, without which the door could not be opened safely, in his pocket, and he merely said—

"Begone. Touch the door at your peril."

The servant shrunk back dismayed, and the knock was at the moment repeated with, if anything in the shape of a difference, more force than before. Claude felt the necessity of coming to a parley with those without, lest they should get sufficiently impatient to adopt other means of entrance. He accordingly advanced to the door and rapped at it with his knuckles on the inside panel, calling in a loud voice—

"Who is there?"

"Open the door," said a voice, "or we will have it down in a few moments."

"But who are you?"

"That's no matter. Open the door."

"My mistress says, that as this is a young ladies' school, she can't think of letting the door be opened at this time of night. I'm the gardener, you must know, and am bound to protect the premises. Only tell me who you are, and what you want, and I'll go and wake up missus and tell her at once, and if she says, then open the door, Joseph, I'll open it."

A whispered consultation now took place upon those outside, and at last another voice than that which had previously spoken, said—

"Tell your mistress that we are officers of the police, and that it is for the protection of her and her house that we come."

"Oh, if that's it, gentlemen," said Claude, "I'll go and have her woke up, and tell her at once, that I will. Only you wait quiet a few moments—I'll come back as quick as I can. Is there thieves about, gentlemen?"

"Yes—yes."

"Very well. Oh, what a twitter I am in to be sure."

"Confound you—be quick, will you?"

"Yes, gentlemen—yes."

Claude hoped that by all this delay he should have given Cicely time to get ready to come down to the parlour and meet him, but she, poor thing, what with the weakness she was still suffering from, and the agitation consequent upon Claude's sudden and unexpected arrival at the school, was really unable to make that expedition she would have wished, and she did not come down. Claude made his way into the parlour again, where he found affairs just the same as when he left. Turning to the lawyer, he said—

'We shall meet again, sir, I have something much more important on hand just now than the taking any revenge upon you for your share in to-night's transaction."

The attorney breathed more freely as he thought to himself—

'If you catch me again in such a fix as this, I give you leave to do what you like.'

Miss Holloway ventured an inquiry concerning the persons at the door, and Claude said—

"It is better that you should know as little of this night's proceedings as possible, and that you should hold as little converse with me as may be. If I could get out by the back of this house it would be well, but I do not ask you, miss, to compromise yourself by aiding me so to do."

These words were accompanied by a look, the translation of which was—"Pray throw all the facilities you can in the way of my leaving by the back of the house with Cicely, but do not seem to do so, for this lawyer is playing the spy now with all the cunning in his power, and besides you will never hear the last of it from Miss Briggs. Miss Holloway quite understood this, and she said coldly—

"You have declared yourself to be Claude Duval, the well-known highwayman, and therefore I cannot aid you."

She then left the room. Claude felt satisfied that he should now find every facility for escape by the back of the house that Miss Holloway could throw in his way, and he looked most anxiously for the appearance of Cicely, for he felt that the patience of the officers at the door must very soon be completely exhausted. While all this, then, was proceeding below, Cicely had rushed back into her little chamber, and hastily opening a trunk that she had been accommodated with, by the kindness of Dr. Macqueen at Winchester, she took from it the male attire that she had worn upon the occasion of receiving her wound in the old cathedral. Her idea was, that by dressing herself in that costume, she would make it much easier for Claude to get away with her, and she accordingly began, in a very hurried manner, to put on the various articles of clothing. No doubt she was much longer thus attiring herself than she would have been in the apparel belonging to her sex, and which she was accustomed to, but at last she did succeed in completing roughly her toilette, and then she ran hastily from the room into the young ladies' dormitory, that being the only way by which she could readily reach the lower part of the house. Now it at the moment, and in the excitement of all that had happened upon that eventful night, struck Cicely that the young ladies would not be at all prepared to see her in male attire, and when a general scream saluted her as she made her hurried appearance, she was perfectly astonished. Feeling, however, that there was no time for any delays or explanations, she merely said—

"Ladies, I thank you all for your kindness to me, and now bid you adieu—and you, Miss Herbert, in particular, I——"

"Murder!" cried Miss Herbert, as Cicely approached her bed.

"I will only give you one kiss, my dear girl, and then say farewell, perhaps for ever, for you have been very kind to me."

"No, I haven't," said Miss Herbert. "No, I haven't."

Cicely was in too great a state of agitation herself to notice particularly this strange manner of Miss Herbert's, but rushing up to her, she clasped her in her arms, and kissed her, adding—

"God bless you—good bye all!"

She then opened the door, and made the best of her way down the staircase to the parlour.

"Well, Miss Herbert," said one of the young ladies, "so you have been actually kissed?"

"And in bed, too," said another.

"But that handsome fellow that came in here before," said a third, "said he would kiss us all round, but he didn't."

"Oh, for shame, Miss Walker!"

"Well, but——"

A general storm of indignation at Miss Walker now saved poor Miss Herbert from the consequences of any further remarks upon the kissing she was obliged to put up with, and we will leave the young ladies to settle their disputes as best they can, while we again proceed to the parlour below. Claude's anxiety for the appearance of Cicely was immense, and he was standing upon the threshold of the

parlour-door, which enabled him to command a view of the staircase at the moment that she came hastily down. Before she could reach the hall, the officers who had waited outside the door got beyond all ordinary patience, and knocked again violently at the door. The sudden shock caused Cicely almost to fall; but Claude, who knew her well in her disguise, flew forward and supported her in his arms.

"Dearest and best!" he cried, "we must fly from here as quickly as possible. Do you feel your strength equal to riding?"

"Oh! yes—yes, Claude. But who is it that demands admittance here so rudely?"

"Enemies whom we will baffle yet."

"Heaven protect us!"

"Amen! Come this way, Cicely. This leads to the back of the house, does it not?"

"It does—it does, Claude!"

"One moment and I am with you."

He left Cicely an instant alone, while he went to the door of the parlour, and extracting the key from the inside, he placed it in the lock on the outside, and in a moment had locked in the attorney, Miss Briggs, and the old lady, who was still in a state of syncope.

"There," said Claude, "you are very good company for each other, and I don't think that the whole of you put together would have energy sufficient to break down the door, so you will remain prisoners until some one else does it for you."

He threw the key down in the hall in an obscure corner, and then clasping Cicely round the waist with his left arm, he said—

"Let those stop us who dare."

Bang!—bang!—bang! came heavy blows upon the front door, which the officers now had made up their minds to burst open, and, strong as it was, it would not probably be able to hold out long against men who would go so systematically to work against it as they would. Claude and Cicely hurried along the hall, and dashing open a pair of folding doors that divided it into two equal parts, they came to that half of it that might be said to belong more particularly to the back entrance, which was nearly as large and as available as the front. A slim female figure darted from a side room, carrying a small hand lamp.

"Help," cried Cicely, "we are lost."

"No, no," said Claude, "it is a friend. It is a young lady residing here, who will befriend us."

"Yes, it is I," said Miss Holloway. "But is this really you, Cicely, as your voice would have me to believe?"

"Oh yes, yes; do not wonder at this strange disguise. Imperious circumstances forced it on me once before, and now it may aid us greatly. Can you, and will you indeed aid us, dear Miss Holloway?"

"I will, and I think I can. Did I not promise to do so, when shortly after you came to this house you confided to me your sad story?"

"Yes, oh yes, and from my heart I thanked you."

"This lady, then," said Claude, "knows all?"

"She does."

"And pities us?"

"From my soul I do," said Miss Holloway. "But do not mistake me, I pity you for that you failed in leaving the mode of life that you have been so well known in; I pity you that impediments so insurmountable were thrown in the way of your leaving England; but I have no morbid, and I think wicked sympathy, with what you were, and I hope are not now—a highwayman."

"We will not quarrel, my dear young lady," said Claude, "about the manner or the particular feelings with which you will do us a great kindness."

"God reward you," said Cicely.

"This way," said Miss Holloway, "this way. Forgive me, if even at such a

moment as this, for the sake of my own feelings, I was forced to say what I have said; you will not find me the less a friend for my frankness."

"That I feel certain of," said Claude.

Miss Holloway had two keys in her hand, a large one and a small one; with the former she opened the house door that led into the large garden at the back, and just as she did so, a loud crash at the front door proclaimed that the officers had succeeded in breaking it open; under cover of that crash, Miss Holloway slammed shut the back-door.

"Take this key," she said to Claude, "quick—follow me!"

She fled on before them in the dim night light, for she had left the little lamp she had been carrying in a niche in the hall, and Claude still more than half supporting Cicely, rapidly pursued her. After traversing several garden paths, Miss Holloway struck off to the left into one that led to a small door in the wall. There she paused as she said—

"The key you have fits it. Fly at once."

"Oh, how can we thank you," said Cicely, while Claude was busy unlocking the door.

"By your immediate departure," replied Miss Holloway.

"I will not say thank you," said Claude, "for I could say no less for the most trivial service. What you have done for us will sink deeply into both our hearts. Adieu."

Miss Holloway moved her hand, and Claude and Cicely passed through a small door in the wall. At that moment there arose in the garden, quite close to the house, a loud shouting of voices, and one above the rest cried—

"This way, this way; I know he has escaped at the back. Remember the reward. This way, men, this way."

"Ah!" said Claude, "so close are they on our track."

"And we are lost," said Cicely.

"Not so, dear one, not so. We are in danger, but far, I hope, from lost. Let those who are weary of this world interrupt me now."

He carefully locked the door on the outside and placed the key in his pocket; then taking a pistol in his right hand, while with his left he still supported Cicely, who was little able to endure fatigue, he walked slowly on.

"If I could but find Jack," he said.

"Where is he, Claude?"

"Close at hand. The discharge of a pistol would bring him to me, but it would likewise act as a direction to our foes. We must look for him, the distance is short."

"Ha! ha!" cried a voice, "there he goes!"

Claude turned to where the voice came from, and there, perched upon the garden wall, and tolerably plainly to be seen against rather a whitish patch of sky, was the attorney who had been locked in the parlour.

"There they go. Come on, come on. Recollect you get the reward if he is taken alive or dead."

Claude levelled his pistol, there was a bright flash, and with a shriek the attorney fell into the garden.

"There's your share of it, at all events," said Claude, "without any wording or quarrelling about the amount. How do you like it?"

CHAPTER CXXXII.

A NEW FRIEND.

"Gracious Heaven, have you killed him?" said Cicely.

"I should not wonder. A couple of slugs are rather hard of digestion, even to a lawyer; I should not have fired at him but for the latter part of his speech."

"Oh, God!"

"On, on, Cicely, there is no time for regrets. Recollect that these men would

consider no death too cruel to put me to, for the sake of the gold that they would divide as the price of my murder!"

"You are right, Claude, you are right. On their own heads be the consequences. It was only my woman's nature that for a moment shrunk aghast at death in any shape, and inflicted by any one."

"Say no more, Cicely; I know well, and can fully appreciate all that you must feel. On, on."

"Yes, Claude, yes. Hush!"

A whistle, clear, shrill, and distinct, came upon their ears.

"What is that?"

"Jack. It is Jack's whistle."

"Thank Heaven!"

"Hold!" said a voice, and a man sprung upon Claude, and grappled him by the throat. "Whoever you are, you are my prisoner. Offer the least resistance, and I'll soon put a stop to it."

"Indeed," said Claude, "who may you be? Keep clear, Cicely, keep clear if you love me and value my safety."

"Come, come, my friend, this won't do. I'll clap a pair of darbies on you in a twinkling. I'm an officer."

"Really," said Claude.

"Yes, my name is Foster."

"Then, Mr. Foster, I sincerely advise you as a friend to take your hands off me, for though I can say with Hamlet, that I am not splenetic or rash, yet I don't approve of this sort of thing, or put up with it long. Be warned."

"Oh, I dare say, you think you are a fine fellow."

The officer, who had been placed at the back of the house as a kind of scout or sentinel, actually had not the smallest idea of who he had got hold of, but commenced grappling with Claude to throw him. Upon this Claude seized him with a grasp of iron, and after they had swayed to and fro for a few moments, Claude flung him right over his shoulder on to his head. The officer lay without sense or motion, and then a voice cried in friendly accents—

"Claude, Claude!"

"Jack!" said Claude. "This way."

In another moment Jack with the two horses made his appearance, but when he saw a third person he paused and said—

"A prisoner or a friend, Claude?"

"An old friend, Jack, it is Cicely."

"Cicely! Cicely!"

"Yes, Jack. The wounded, not the killed Cicely; she is restored to me once again. Oh, Jack, I am surrounded by dangers, but I am so very—very happy."

"And I am bewildered," said Jack. "This is a dream!"

"No dream, Jack. If it were, I for one should wish to awaken from it."

"And I for another," said Jack.

"Now, Cicely," added Claude, "now, my Cicely, mount, and we will be off at once. At least we will give our foes a gallop for it."

He easily lifted Cicely, and then sprung up behind her himself; Jack mounted at the same moment, but before they could stir from the spot, a rattling discharge of pistols ensued, and Claude felt sensible that some bullets had passed in most dangerous proximity to him and to Cicely.

"Speak—speak, dear one," said Claude.

"Yes, Claude, yes."

"Are you unhurt?"

"Perfectly."

"Jack, is all right?"

"Right, Claude, right."

"Fire this from where the flashes came, and fire low."

Both Claude and Jack discharged a pistol in the direction he mentioned, and then, before the officers—for nodoubt they who fired were officers—had time to load

again, Claude and Jack were off and away over the heath. Jack kept very close to Claude, so close that he could speak to him easily, and he now said with considerable concern of manner—

"Have you a fixed destination, Claude, or are you merely riding on at random to distance your pursuers?"



TURPIN, CLAUDE, AND PARTY, SURROUNDED BY THEIR PURSUERS IN A FOREST DELL.

"Not that, Jack; I want to give them a good race, and then make a detour to the left, and come upon the heath again. The safest place in the world now for Cicely is that farm-house in which you and I have experienced so hospitable a reception. There for a time, until her health is perfectly established, I know she will be safe."

"She will, Claude, if——"

"If what, Jack?"

"If she be a being of flesh and blood."

"Why, Jack, how can you doubt that. Is Cicely the first person in the world, who, after a conflict, has been left for dead, and then only found out to be dangerously wounded, and eventually fully recovered? That, Jack, is the whole substantial history of the case. Of course there are a thousand little minor details which both you and I will be delighted to hear from the lips of Cicely, but that she is here is a great fact, Jack, that I would not exchange for all my hopes here and hereafter."

"I am satisfied," said Jack, "and well pleased too. Hark, Claude, do you hear that?"

"Yes, the sound of horses' feet upon the common. We shall be hotly pursued, but our horses are fresh, and we are desperate, so come on, Jack. Woe to him who shall have the fortune to come up with us in this race."

"There is much danger," said Cicely faintly.

"Not so much to us as to our enemies, Cicely. Cheer up, dearest; you speak very low."

"Ah, Claude, I am not so strong as I would fain have made you and myself believe. The wound was a very cruel one."

"He who inflicted it has gone to his account."

"Alas! alas! I fear that I shall be a clog upon your exertions to escape those enemies, that are even now pressing like blood-hounds on your track."

"No, Cicely, no. It is you who will give me strength, endurance, and that species of desperation that regards all dangers as so many incentives to overcome them. You are safe—quite safe."

He held Cicely round the waist with his left arm, while with the right he grasped the bridle and guided the horse. Jack now kept about twice a horse's length behind, in order the better to listen to the foe, and to give Claude notice of his progress, and so on they dashed to Ealing. The little common was soon traversed, and they entered the village, then a much more rural spot than it is now. It only consisted of a few cottages, and to the left of the road of a large white-fronted house that had been a favourite residence of the Duchess of Marlborough, but which was burnt to the ground some years ago. At that time not a soul was stirring in the little irregular street of the village, and Claude dashed on until he came to the junction of roads, one of which leads to Hanwell, and the other right on through some straggling outskirts of the village to what is now called Ealing Park.

"To the left!" cried Claude. "To the left, Jack."

"Yes—yes. They are coming on, Claude. Ah! what is that?"

"Stand!" cried a horseman, emerging from the Hanwell Road, followed by some half dozen more well-mounted men. "Stand where you are or we fire."

"Fire away," said Claude.

As he spoke he suddenly wheeled his horse round, and took a few steps in the direction from which he had come. One pistol only was discharged at random. Claude had still a loaded double-barrelled pistol handy, but he did not wish to fire it at random. He had escaped the shot, but before he could resume his course again, one of the horsemen quickly advanced and laid hold of Cicely by the arm.

"Surrender!" he said. "You are overmatched, although you do ride double. Surrender, I say."

"Not yet," said Claude, as with a blow of the stock of the pistol he held in his hand, he struck the man from his horse. "Forward, Jack, forward!"

Claude's horse was a little alarmed at what was going on, and made a furious plunge forward. If Claude had not been the accomplished horseman he was, that plunge would have unseated him, but as it was, it only had the effect of giving him a slight start of his foes, and at once allowing the horse a free rein, off he went like the wind. Jack kept within a few paces of him, and what was strange enough was, that the horse of the man whom Claude had knocked down, kept them company, rushing on by the side of Claude's horse as if it much enjoyed

the new society into which it had got. The horsemen who had been pursuing Claude across the heath, now effected a junction with those who had so inopportunely made their appearance from the Hanwell Road, and with a tacit understanding that they were all on the same errand, they joined in the chase with abundance of good will. The superiority of both Claude's and Jack's steeds, aided no doubt by a certain amount of tact in riding, which long practice and abundant experience, under all conditions and circumstances, had given them, was soon apparent, and if the chase had to be continued right on, without either party having any help or aid with fresh cattle, no doubt could for a moment have been entertained of the result—the pursuers, horses must have broken down. Such, however, was not the case, for in such a neighbourhood the probability was that fresh parties would join the chase as it went on, so that Claude ran the risk of finding new enemies in his path at intervals, without himself having any new means of evading them, or of contesting with them. It was in this way that some of the most celebrated knights of the road, notwithstanding the manner in which they were mounted, were run down, as it were. But it will be remembered that Claude had no sort of intention of continuing an even race of such a description. His object was to turn to the left, and get back to the common as quickly as possible, if he could but shake off his pursuers for a sufficient time to practise the plan. Jack kept him steadily in view. He knew that Claude's acquaintance with the neighbourhood was tolerably exact, and he was pleased to see him take suddenly to a lane to the left, the umbrageous foliage of which rendered it quite invisible to any one at that hour who had no previous knowledge of its existence.

"Claude," said Jack. "One moment!"

"What is it?"

"Send the spare horse that is by your side, along the road. Who knows but the clatter of his hoofs may deceive the enemy?"

"A good thought. Do it, Jack. I will breathe my horse a moment and wait for you."

Jack led the steed of the fallen man a few paces up the road, and then giving it a switch with his riding whip, he started off at a hard gallop. In another moment he was back to Claude.

"Let us walk the horses until we find we have occasion to put them to their mettle again," said Claude. "If this succeeds, we can take our way leisurely enough to Ealing Common."

The horses were now put to a fast walking pace, so that their feet made the least possible noise upon the soft ground of the verdant lane they were traversing beneath huge overhanging trees.

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

It would appear that, notwithstanding the great difference between the tread of one horse and of three, the party in pursuit of Claude and Jack was puzzled when it reached the corner of the lane. A halt took place, and then, after some conjectures and hypotheses had been started, one said—

"I don't think there can be any difficulty about it. The fact is, we know that Claude Duval had a companion, and they have separated, in order to puzzle us."

"What shall we do, sir?"

"Why the only thing we can do is to follow the example. One half of our number must go down this lane, and the other half pursue the road, and don't let us waste time about it."

This arrangement was quickly concluded. There was no choice in the matter, for no one could have the smallest idea as to which of the routes the important

personage they wished to capture had taken, so they had equal chances. It did so happen, however, that one of the boldest officers that the police of London could boast of, headed the party that went down the lane. They had not proceeded far before Claude heard them, and he spoke to Jack at once—

"They come, Jack. We must once more try the mettle of our steeds."

"Do you think, Claude, if we were to draw up among the trees, there is any likelihood of their passing us?"

"No, Jack, no. If they don't hear the horses' feet they will soon guess that something of the sort is being tried on, and you may depend they would not come down this lane at all if they did not feel pretty sure that one or both of us were here."

"Come on then, Claude."

"Are your pistols ready?"

"Quite, Claude, quite."

They at once dashed forward, and then the sound of their horses' feet came clearly enough upon the ears of their pursuers, and acted as a powerful incentive to their speed.

"And all this," said Cicely, "is for me. Oh, Claude, I shall begin to think that I am your evil genius."

"Evil genius, Cicely. Oh, no. You are the only good genius I have ever met with since I discarded the counsels of my poor sister, who did her utmost when quite a girl to make me different from what I now am. Ah, I did not listen to May then. Jack, keep in the middle of the lane. There is an ugly ditch on the near side."

"Claude—Claude!"

"What is it—what has happened?"

"Who—who is that character?"

The voice of Jack it was that asked the question, but there was so much dread of a superstitious character mingled with it's tones that they were, in truth, hardly recognisable. Claude was upon the point of asking him to what he alluded, when to his astonishment, upon turning his eyes to the right, he saw within a few paces of him, a mounted man galloping rather close under the trees, but keeping up with him as easily as though the pace were nothing. Notwithstanding that the night was by no means what might fairly be called a light one, yet, from having been accustomed to it for some hours now, Claude could see sufficiently well to enable him to note with tolerable accuracy the stranger's appearance. He was a plainly-dressed man, with a horseman's half-cloak on. His hat was pulled rather close down over his forehead, and he wore high boots that shone in the dim light as though some sort of metallic case was upon the tops of them. The horse he rode was small and of great strength. It was, or by that light it looked to be, coal black, and the action of the creature, although going at such great speed, was so easy and so graceful, that had not Claude's situation induced him to keep a wary eye upon this man, his whole attention would have devolved with delight upon the steed.

"Claude! Claude!" again cried Jack, "for the ove of Heaven, speak to it."

"Hillos!" said Claude. "You can pass on, sir."

The stranger made no reply, and Claude himself could not help at the moment feeling something akin to the superstitious terrors of Jack creeping over his mind as he looked at that solemn man and horse gliding along by his side like the wind. The horse, too, although the pace he went at was one that might have warranted as much, did not make the smallest sound indicative of distress or of exertion; but like a thing of air, on it flew, keeping neck to neck with his own good steed, which at times dashed the foam from its mouth. Jack had greatly contributed to this strange feeling by calling the strange horseman "it," as though he could come to no other conclusion than that the appearance was something not mortal. But this was a state of things that could not go on, and Claude, whatever might be his momentary feelings or sensations, was not a man likely to yield beyond the passing

moment to any superstitious fears. He felt the necessity of forcing the stranger to something like communication, and therefore, he said, in a clear voice—

"If you are a friend, say so. If an enemy, I defy you."

"Do you expect to find friends by the hedge-side, Claude Duval?" said the stranger, in a clear voice.

"Ah, you know me!"

"Why, by report, but not at all personally. Hope we shall be better acquainted though. They are hard upon your back."

"Your friends, I suppose?"

"Nonsense; I never aspired to the luxury of having a friend; but you certainly have Jack there. How are you, Jack?"

"Good God!" groaned Jack.

"Ha! ha! Jack, you were one too many for the gallows, you were. May we all have such luck!"

"In plain language," cried Claude, passionately, "who the devil are you? You say you have known me well by report, and if you have, you have heard among other trifles that I am not a man to be played with. Speak at once to the purpose, and say who you are, and what, in the name of all that's abominable, do you want with me?"

"Humph!" said the stranger, with the most provoking indifference of tone and manner.

This was much more than such flesh and blood as Claude Duval was capable of bearing, and suddenly wheeling round his horses' head in the direction of the stranger, he raised his hand, but ere he could grapple with the man who had so angered him, he too wheeled his horse round, so that he was out of reach, and he said—

"Is this the way to save yourself, Claude Duval? Is it wise to get into a brawl with the first stranger you meet?"

"The consequences be upon your own head!" cried Claude.

"Nay, they will fall upon yours—hush! If you remain here, and count twenty slowly, your pursuers will be upon you. Now, take my advice."

"Your advice?"

"Yes, wiser folks have taken it before to-day. Don't be angry, but trot after me until I tell you to stop. Then we can give them a volley when they are within pistol-shot of us, which I think will discomfit them sufficiently to enable me to show you how to elude them altogether."

"Dare I trust you?"

"That is a subject entirely for your own consideration, Claude Duval. If you say no, I am off again as silently as I came, and there is no harm done. If you say yes, you cannot say it too soon."

"Yes," cried Claude.

"Follow, then."

At two bounds the stranger's horse placed some thirty feet of ground between him and Claude, and then, at such a swift trot that few steeds could have come near it at a hand gallop, off they went. Claude had made up his mind to trust to the mysterious stranger, and Jack said not a word. Cicely, too, was silent, and so they pursued their way, while upon the night air came the furious beating of the horses' hoofs of those who pursued them. Suddenly the stranger paused.

"Halt!"

Claude immediately drew rein.

"The scoundrels want to kill you," he said to Claude, "but we will foil them at that game. It shall be dangerous to set a price upon any man's head in such a manner. Have you a pistol ready?"

"Yes."

"Then blaze away when I say 'Fire!' and then, without any further troubling yourself, follow me."

"I will."

"Fire!"

Bang! went the three pistols, for Jack fired likewise. A scene of confusion ensued, during which Claude and Jack followed their new friend through a gate into a farm-yard. The gate was closed again on the moment by some unseen agency, and the stranger, in a low voice, said—

"Hush! Not a word, as you value your lives. Leave another to speak for you now."

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

A CURIOUS REVELATION.

Both Claude and Jack found themselves not a little puzzled by the whole of this procedure. It was so entirely out of the common way, that they could form no rational conjecture concerning it. Cicely, no doubt, was not the least surprised of the party. No doubt she was the most alarmed, not for her own sake, but for the sake of those who were so dear to her. We say those, because we feel that by this time no one could appreciate more fully than she (Cicely) did the noble devotion of Jack to Claude, and the value of those services which were partly the services of honest affection.

"Claude," she whispered, "what will be the end of all this?"

"No matter, Cicely," he replied, "so that in its progress there is so much joy."

"Joy?"

"Yes. Are you not with me?"

A silent pressure of the hand was the only reply that Cicely could give to this sentiment, uttered at a moment of such great danger, that it sufficiently showed how very dear she was to him. It would appear that the unknown friend who had brought them into the farm-yard overheard them talking, for he admonished them to silence by a startling—

"Hush!"

They were immediately profoundly still, for they felt how little, if any, right they now had, after accepting of his guidance, to endanger probably his safety, by disputing his wishes in any particular.

It was soon manifest that, notwithstanding the rather uncomfortable repulse that the officers had met with, they did not intend to relinquish the pursuit easily. The sound of their horses' feet sounded sharply on the road.

"Follow!" said Claude's new friend.

By the dim light they saw him make for a large barn, a little to the right of the entrance to the farm-yard. By the fluster of garments of some one who stood there, they could see that some female was lending as much assistance as she could to the party. This female, whoever she was, opened the barn door, and in another moment they all rode in, and the door was closed. The darkness now in the barn was most intense. Indeed, it was that kind of darkness that novelists declare may be felt; but as we never found any place quite so dark as that, and as we are writing a veracious history, and not a novel, we can only say that the darkness in the barn was such that you could not see your hand before your face.

"Do not any of you speak again," said their new friend. "Leave all to me, and the best that can be done shall be done."

"We have faith," said Claude.

The barn-door was opened a short distance and then rapidly closed again. This was merely done for the purpose of allowing the stranger to pass out. Claude and his party were, however, so near the high-road, that, if anything in the shape of a parley should take place, they could not fail of hearing every word of it. The situation was decidedly an uncomfortable one. They heard the sound of horses' feet suddenly cease, and then a voice cried in imperative accents—

"Halt! Hilloa! House here."

"*Ees,*" said some one, "what *wur* it?"

"Have you seen anybody pass here, my friend?" said the same voice that had had cried "halt!"

"Ees," replied the other, "three men on 'osses. They went on fast enow, and nearly rode over me, 'cos, you see, I went to see what kind o' night it was."

"And they went on?"

"Ees."

"Thank you—Come on, comrades, we shall soon have them. They can't be far a head of us, now. How do you get on with your wound, Davies—can you ride farther?"

"Oh yes—yes."

Away they went as hard as they could tear, helter skelter, and Claude began to think the danger was past, but in this he was soon undeceived, for a loud strange voice cried suddenly—

"What is all this about? I heard somebody—padlock the gate, boy, and this 'un; and call Gregory; I'm sure some one is on the farm. Fetch me my gun—Stay, no.—Call Gregory, I'll get the gun!"

There was a scuffling of feet, and then the barn-door was opened again and Claude's new friend popped in his head, saying—

"The officers have passed now."

"Then," said Claude, "I suppose we had better be off?"

"No.—No."

"Think you not?"

"No. The officers upon not finding you, or any traces of you, a little further on, may retrace their steps again, and then a meeting would be perhaps something more than troublesome."

"What do you advise?"

"That you stay here. The man who keeps this farm is no friend, and probably might be mischievous, so he must be duped as to the character of his guests. We will pass ourselves upon him for the officers. Come out of the barn. He will return directly."

"But you have a friend here," said Claude.

"Yes. The gate was opened by such. That friend, however, is not the master of the house."

The little party now emerged from the barn, and then the new friend of Claude Duval called out in a loud voice—

"Hilloa! hilloa! Whose place is this? Is any one here? In the king's name, I demand assistance. Hilloa! hilloa!"

Lights flashed across the yard, and then the farmer, who had been for his gun, called out—

"What's all this racket about? Who be ye? I'll make a hole in thy carcass, danged if I don't."

"Then you shall be hung on your own gate-post, my friend."

"Eh?"

"Hung on your own gate-post, I said. We are officers of police, and if you make a fool of yourself, by any resistance to us, you will soon hear of it from the County Magistracy."

"Why did thee not say that afore," added the man, in a very mild sort of tone. "How be I to know? If so be, as you be officers, I'm sure I don't want to interfere. Bring a light, Gregory, and show the gentlemen into the house."

"Come on," whispered Claude's new and mysterious acquaintance to him. Come on, our only chance is to deceive this old curmudgeon, and if the officers should come back, we can, I think, stand a siege in this place for some time."

Claude trotted his horse along the yard until they came to the porch of the farm-house, which was one of those ancient looking structures that are fast disappearing from the face of the land. A half-wild looking boy stood there with a lanthorn in his hand, and by his side was the farmer, an old crabbed-looking

man, with dirty grey hair, and a face scored and puckered up into such a number of wrinkles, that it looked like some wonderfully intricate piece of network.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "walk in. What be the matter?"

"We are after the celebrated highwayman, Claude Duval," said the stranger.

"Dang it, don't I wish you could nab he."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Oh, I hate he."

"I will get you," said Claude, as he dismounted, and carefully helped Cicely from the saddle, "to be so good as to tell us the reason of that hatred, Mr. Farmer."

"Oh, yes, I'll tell a—But—but—who ——"

He was looking curiously at Cicely, and Claude felt it was quite necessary to say something to account for her delicate and debilitated appearance.

"This is a young gentleman," he said, "who was attacked by Claude Duval, and got hurt. We found him on the road, and, being bound to give him all the help we could, I put him on my horse."

"Ah!" said the farmer, shaking his head, "what a wagabone that highwayman fellow is. But there's an odd report about to-night, I can tell you."

"An odd report? What mean you?"

"Why, one of my men, who has come from Southall Market, says that Dick Turpin——"

"Dick Turpin, the highwayman?" cried Claude.

"The very man. That he was seen last night in the neighbourhood on his black mare."

"I thought he never came so near London," said Claude.

"Sometimes," said Jack. "Don't you recollect his robbing Colonel Wood, near Croydon?"

"Oh, yes—yes. I heard of that."

"Gregory—Gregory. Take the osses," said the farmer.

A great hulking countryman approached, rubbing his eyes—for he had been, to his manifest discomfiture, awakened from a sound sleep, in a barn close at hand, the straw from which was sticking in a very picturesque way all about his hair and face.

"Ees, master, ees."

"Our stay here will be so short," said Claude's new friend, "that we will not trouble any one with our horses. Our friend here will look to them."

"Yes," said Jack, seeing that he was appealed to. "Yes, I prefer waiting here with the horses, and if this Mr. Gregory will bring some hay and a little water, it is all we shall want for the cattle."

"Oh, yes—yes!" cried the farmer, who was delighted at the idea that a feed of corn for each of the horses was not required. "Oh, yes—yes, all's right. That will do. You attend to he, Gregory."

"Ees, master. Ees."

Claude, with Cicely upon his arm, and their new friend following close behind, entered the farm-house. The knowledge that Jack remained behind with the horses, was a great thing towards the feeling of security that was so essential to their comfortable stay for any time in the farm-house, and so they all went into a room that was called the best parlour, and a couple of candles were lighted.

"Now, what will you have?" said the farmer.

"First of all," said Claude's new acquaintance, "who is in the house besides yourself and Gregory, and the boy?"

"Only my deaf housekeeper, Mrs. Williams, and she's a-bed long ago, she be."

"Well, tell this gentleman why you hate Claude Duval."

"Why, you see, he stopped me one night, and took £10 from me, and gave 'em to an old man as I'd turned away from my farm, cos why, he was past all sort of work, and what use was he to me? I never could catch the old man *arterards*, or wouldn't I a persecuted him—ah, wouldn't I."

A shrill whistle at this moment sounded from without.

"That's Jack's whistle," said Claude.

"Ah! Then they are returning."

"I'll go and see," said the farmer, I'll——"

"No, my friend," said the stranger, "you will not trouble yourself to do any such thing.—Permit me——"



SURPRISE OF CLAUDE'S PURSUERS ON FINDING THE OFFICER SHOT BY DICK TURPIN.

"What—what——"

The stranger took a rope from his pocket and began to tie the farmer's hands behind him, and as he did so, he said—

"This gentleman that you see there, in the boots, is Claude Duval. The gentleman there in the shoes is a friend of his. The gentleman outside is another, and we mean to hold your farm to-night against all comers."

"And who be you?" said the farmer, his teeth chattering with terror as he spoke.

"I'm Tom Smith."

The farmer looked about him with a bewildered air; and when Tom Smith, as he chose to call himself, opened suddenly the lid of one of the old-fashioned window seats, which were made of about the size of large trunks, and said—

"Oblige me by stepping in here—"

He gave a howl of terror. Tom Smith took a pistol from his pocket and cooly shook the priming. Before, then, he could procced further in his pretended proposition of shooting him, the farmer sprung into the window-box with the greatest agility.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

SOUTHALL FAIR.

While this little piece of comedy was going on, Claude and Cicely looked on with deep interest, and at its conclusion Claude said—

"What do you propose?"

"Listen to me," said Smith. "The fact is, that in a neighbourhood like this, and with a sick person, your only chance in the world is to throw the officers off the scent—to take to flight, encumbered as you are, will not do. Besides, if you were to stop to fight them, you could not kill enough of them to ensure your safety. I think, therefore, the best way will be to hold out here for a time, until we can send them off on a wrong scent, or play them some trick that may show itself as we go on. You hear that the house, now we have stowed away the farmer, is nearly untenanted, so what is to hinder us from taking possession of it, and playing the part of owners of it? I have one friend on the premises who will help us."

"I like the plan," said Claude; "however, it will afford my young friend, here, an opportunity to lie down a little."

"Certainly."

Another sharp whistle from without showed that Jack felt that there was cause for alarm.

"Go," said Smith to Claude. "Go, and let the cattle be put in stable, and bring your friend here."

"I will."

"Oh, Claude, will you leave me?" said Cicely, in a low voice. "Will you let me be out of your sight again, now that we have, after so many dangers, met?"

"Do you mistrust me?" said Smith.

"Oh, no—no. But——"

"If you did, it is only natural that you should do so. Wait one moment."

He went to the door and called aloud. "Ann!—Ann!" and a young woman, with some degree of alarm depicted on her countenance, made her appearance.

"Ann," said Smith, "this lady wishes to rest a little. Do not be alarmed. A lady she is."

"You know the secret?" said Claude.

"No further than that this is a lady you have with you, that is all. And now you can ask Ann, who is the only female in this house, except the old deaf housekeeper, if I can be trusted."

"Oh, yes—yes," said Ann, anticipating the question. "I, and all who are dear to me have much need to bless you, sir."

"Are you satisfied, Cicely?" said Claude. "There is truth in those tones, is there not?"

"Yes, Claude. Go—go."

Claude at once left the room to go and speak to Jack, and Cicely, in company

with Ann, proceeded up stairs, but not before Tom Smith had given Ann some whispered instructions, to which she replied—

"Oh, yes, certainly, Mr. Dome. Certainly, sir, in a few minutes."

"Don't hurry," said Tom Smith, who was, we see, named Dome by Ann.

When Claude got outside, he found Jack in no little trepidation to see him.

"I thought," he said, "you would never come out, Claude. Don't you hear the officers coming up the lane?"

Claude listened, and heard both the sound of voices, and the tramp of horses' feet.

"Yes, Jack," he replied. "But our safety is here." He then told him what had been determined upon within the house, and after a few moments' thought. Jack said—

"Well, it may be all for the best, Claude, I hope it is. At all events, rest is of no importance to Cicely."

"It is, Jack, and I thank you kindly for thinking of her at such a moment as this. As soon as you have put up the horses, come inside."

"I will."

Claude returned to the parlour, and was just in time to see Tom Smith equipping himself in a pair of top-boots and a smockfrock. Ann had brought down stairs several of those garments, and that indeed was what he, Smith, had whispered to her to do.

"Do as I am doing," said Smith. "We must make our appearance, as far as we can, correspond with our professions."

Claude saw the importance of putting some such a disguise over his regular apparel, and he immediately equipped himself. Jack then came in and was induced to do the same, so that they all three wore the appearance of respectable husbandmen.

"Now," said Tom Smith, "we will be three brothers. I am Tom. You, Claude, will be Jack, and your friend here, Bill."

"Let me be Jack," said Jack, "for I shall then not forget my name, since it is the one I am used to."

"Very well," said Claude, "then I will be Bill; and as this is all your plan, Mr. Tom, we will, if you please, leave the whole management of it to you. Only tell us what we are to say, and how we are to play our parts."

"Circumstances only can guide us," said Smith. "At any time the horses can be saddled, and we can, I think, be off, but I hope we shall be able to do that and leave our enemies in not a very good condition to follow us. Ann! Ann!"

"Yes, sir."

"Is there anything to drink in the house?"

"Oh, yes, sir, some fine old ale."

"Good. If they resist that, they are wonderful officers indeed."

"Then you mean to ask them in?" said Claude.

"Yes, and my great hope is, that baffled, and tired, and hurt, as they are, they will not scruple to accept the polite invitation."

"Hush!" said Jack.

They all listened, and heard a loud knocking at the gate leading into the yard, and a voice shouting—

"House!—House!—Hilloa!—Is anybody up here?"

"I'll go," said Smith. "You two can stroll out quietly afterwards, and see how things are getting on."

With this Smith, or Tom, as it will be more convenient to call him in the scene which is about to ensue, went from the room, and Jack approached Claude, and said in a whisper—

"Do you trust him?"

"Yes, Jack, fully."

"Then I am satisfied."

"But remember, Jack, if you hear me say I wonder if the moon is yet up, you will understand that as a hint to get our horses out."

"Good—and Cicely?"

"I will take care to ascertain where she is, now at once. Ah, here is the young girl. Can you tell me in what room the lady is? I am her husband, Ann."

"If you will follow me, sir, I will show you."

Claude did so, and found that Cicely was lying down to rest in the room directly overhead, so that she could easily enough be communicated with. He kissed her cheek, saying—

"Dear Cicely, be under no alarm. All will be well."

"You say so, Claude," she replied, "and you will be near me, so all is well."

Feeling then that his presence down stairs might be required, he tore himself away, and descended the stairs. Jack was rather impatiently waiting for him.

"They are talking outside," he said, "but I did not like to go without you, Claude. Come at once, and let us hear what it is all about. This is rather a ticklish position I take it."

"A little so, Jack."

They both left the house, and upon reaching the court-yard they found Tom upon the point of opening the gate to about a dozen mounted men, who were without in the lane.

"Well, gentlemen," they heard Tom say, "you can make sure of him I should think to-morrow. He can't be far off."

"I don't know that," replied one of the horsemen. "Foiled we are, and there is no such thing as saying nay to that; but where he may be by to-morrow morning, I won't pretend to say."

"But at all events, we cannot do better than turn in for an hour or two to feed the horses and rest. There's rain coming on," said another, "don't you feel it?"

"And are we really to give it up as a bad job?" said a third.

"No, no, Jenkins," said the first speaker, "let Reed and Thompson keep watch in the lane: we will not wait long. It's quite clear that for some particular object or another, Duval is hankering about this neighbourhood, but it would be sheer folly of us to go galloping, perhaps in the very contrary direction to which he has taken."

"Will you come in then, gentlemen?" said Tom.

"Yes. Yes."

"The gate was swung open, and ten men on horseback came in, while the two underlings who were mentioned, kept watch in the lane, not over-well pleased, no doubt, to be exposed to the pelting of the rain, which was beginning to fall rather sharply, while the others of the party went into the farm house."

"Open the door, Bill," said Tom to Claude.

"Yes, Tom," said Claude.

"And Jack," added Tom, "get a drop of ale ready for these gentlemen, will you?"

"Yes, Tom."

"Are these your brothers?" said the principal officer.

"Yes, sir.—Gregory! Gregory! Gregory! I say!"

"Oh, don't give yourself so much trouble. Of course you will understand that we pay for whatever we have, as we are upon the public service, and get it refunded to us again by the clerk of the peace, you know, so let our horses be well fed, and give us the best you have in the house, Master Farmer."

"Certainly, sir, and I only hope you will catch Claude Duval to-morrow. This way, gentlemen.—Ah, it's a horrid thing to think that the highways are not safe. Suppose, now, I was coming home with the price of a score of sheep in my pocket, how unpleasant it would be to meet a fellow who would say 'stand and deliver.'"

"Very. Very."

While Tom carried on this discourse with the chief officer, Gregory, the farming man, who had heard himself called in such stentorian accents, made his appearance again from the barn, where he had vainly hoped to get a little more sleep. At the sight of Tom, instead of his mates, his mouth opened quite wide, and he said—

"A man!—Who be ye?"

"Come, stupid," said Tom, "take these horses and give them a feed each, and a good one too."

"Eh!—Lor!—Who be ye?"

"Why really, Gregory," said Ann, stepping forward, with her apron over her head to protect her from the rain, "really, Gregory, you will have to go back to the mad-house again—you don't seem to know your own mates."

"Mad—house—eh?"

"Poor fellow," said Tom to the chief officer, "he has been in a lunatic asylum once, and I fear will have to go in again, for at times, notwithstanding he was brought up with us, he don't know me or any of my brothers."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and then he generally speaks of some old man."

"Really!"

"Wher's the old man?" said Gregory. "I don't know ye, 'danged if I doos. Wher's the old man?"

"It's a pity," said Tom, "and enough to draw tears from a horse's hind leg; but the only thing that does him any good and brightens up his memory is this."

Tom as he spoke took from his pocket a coiled-up horse whip, and straightening it out, he gave Gregory a lash or two with it, that made him dance and roar like a bull.

"Do you know me now?" said Tom.

"Oh, ees—ees."

"Who am I—am I your master?"

"Ees, ees, maister,—oh, dang it dont, and——"

"And do you know my two brothers, Bill and Jack?"

"No—I'm dang'd if I doos."

Slash went the whip.

"Murder, oh—oh, murder—Yes, I doos, Bill and Jack—and, yes, I knows anything now.—Oh, oh, oh.—Dang it if I ain't bewildered; and I shall have to say the Lord's prayer backwards or raise the devil and axe him to unbewitch I.—What will become of I?"

"You see what a poor fellow he is," said Tom.

"Oh, yes," replied the officer; "but what a cunning there is about mad folks, and the——"

"Oh, tremendous," said Tom, as he followed the officer into the house. "I and my brothers are going to Goodhall farm in the morning, if it is fine, so you see we are ready for the start."

Ann made herself quite busy and u eful. Indeed but for her, Jack would have found no small difficulty in complying with Tom's orders about the ale, but she assisted him, and the table was soon respectably enough laid with a cold round of beef, a foaming tankard of ale, and some large wheaten loaves.

"Now, gentlemen," said Tom, "fall to; your cattle will be well looked to, but you'l excuse me going in and out, as I have some stock to get ready for the market."

"Don't mention it," said the chief officer, "we should be very sorry indeed to interrupt you in your business at all, and we are very much obliged to you for your very civil reception of us."

"Don't think of that, sir, it's no more than one ought to do to gentlemen who are trying to rid us of the greatest pests in the world, namely highwaymen."

"You are right. I tell you what it is, comrades," added the officers, when the door was closed upon Tom, "that farmer is a decidedly clever fellow, that he is."

"Yes," said Bill, who was pouring out the ale. "Yes, my brother Tom is reckoned a man of abilities."

The door opened, and Gregory popped in his head, and cried—

"I can't make it out, dang it. Wher's the old man?"

"Ah," said the chief officer, "you want it again do you, you poor mad fellow?"

"But wher's the old man?"

"Take that," said the chief officer, as he snatched up a stick and gave Gregory a blow on the back with it. "Do you want, you fool, the old man now?"

"No—no. Oh, dang it, no!"

"You own that I am Bill?" said Claude, snatching up another stick.

"And that I am Jack?" cried Jack, doubling his fists.

"Yes—yes. Dang it, ees."

Poor Gregory made a precipitate retreat upon this, and punching his own head with his clenched hands, he cried, as he took his way to the stable-yard—

"Dang it, I am mad—I am mad, and shall be in a Lunacy Sylum, as safe as bricks. I is mad; mad as a March hare, and no mistake."

CHAPTER CXXXV.

THE FIGHT ON SOUTHALL GREEN.

After this, it did not seem very likely that Mr. Gregory would have much stomach for any further interference, since it brought with it such an amount of retribution. At any other time a sense of the ludicrous, in the whole transaction, would have made Claude laugh immoderately; but one thought of Cicely, above stairs, was more than sufficient to control any such impulse. The officers did ample justice to the strong ale, and the eatables that were placed before them, so that Claude felt at each draught they indulged in from the ale flagons, that he was, in a manner of speaking, getting rid of a danger, inasmuch as the larger quantity of that pleasant and seductive fluid they imbibed, the less would they be in a condition to exercise that amount of judgment and discretion that was requisite in the circumstances they were placed in. Tom, who took the lead in what was doing, urged them, by a great many jocular inducements, not to spare the ale, and they, like men who had got thirsty by hard riding, certainly paid an amount of attention to it that was extraordinary. After a speech which made the officers all laugh, Tom left the room, and in a few moments his voice could be heard outside, shouting in a careless sort of way—

"Bill—Bill. The dun cow has got among the turnips. Bill—Bill, just come out a minute."

"Your brother is calling you, I think," said one of the officers to Claude.

"Is he?"

"Yes. I heard him," said another.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, a moment then," added Claude, and he at once left the room, and made his way to the farm yard, where he found Tom Smith awaiting him.

"If anything is to be done," said Tom, "now is the time."

"Agreed," said Claude. "What do you propose?"

"First, to let all their horses go. Come with me."

Tom led the way through a stable to a small yard, along one side of which was a long manger, at which the horses of the officers were enjoying themselves, for Gregory had taken good care of them, and was there with a lanthorn.

"Gregory," said Tom.

"Ees, sir."

"You know me?"

Gregory gave his back a wriggle, as much as to indicate that he had a perfect recollection of him in one way, and then he added—

"Oh, ees—ees."

"Have you any way of getting into the meadows from here, Gregory, without going through the yard again, into the lane?"

"Ees, here's the little gate."

"Good. Open it, Gregory."

A gate was opened that led across a small ditch into the open fields, and far away in the dim obscurity of the night. It was just what Tom Smith wanted. He led the horses of the officers, one by one, through that gate, and with a lash to each of them with a heavy horsewhip which half-maddened them at the moment, he dismissed them into the open country, plunging and dashing on as though death were at their heels.

"That will do," said Claude.

"I think so, now let us get our own steeds all ready saddled and bridled, and we will be off. Where's Jack?"

"Waiting upon the officers."

"Well, he must be got out."

"And Cicely?"

"Who?"

"I have no secrets with you. She who is above stairs in male attire is my wife, Cicely."

"She must and shall be well cared for. But how to get her down, is the mystery. Ah, whom have we here?"

"It is I," said Ann.

"Then you have come in good time. Can you get the lady down here without passing through the supper room?"

"Oh, surely, sir. In a moment. There are three staircases to the old farm house, and she could get here two ways without going near the parlour."

"All's right then. Go for her at once."

Claude waited in a state of feverish anxiety until Cicely made her appearance; and the moment she did so, she clung to him, saying—

"Ah! we are once again together, and all is well."

Tom was placing the bits in the horses' mouths, for they had not been at all otherwise divested of their trappings, and in a few moments all was ready for a start, with the exception of getting Jack out of the supper-room. That, however, was not a matter of much difficulty, for the officers entertaining no suspicions, might just as well admit of an excuse for his absence as for Claude's. The latter accordingly went to the door, and called aloud—

"Jack! Brother Jack, come here a moment."

"Don't you hear you are called?" said the chief officer to Jack.

"Am I, though?"

"Yes, to be sure; your brother calls you. I dare say it's all about that d—d cow, that gives you no end of trouble. Ha!—ha!—ha!"

All the officers laughed as the principal one laughed at this sorry joke, and amid the explosion of merriment, Jack safely enough left the room, and hurried into the farm-yard.

"Claude?" he said.

"Yes, Jack, it is I. All's right. Follow me."

"Yes, Claude; yes. Shall we escape?"

"I think so."

"And Cicely—what of her? Is she safe and better? How has the fatigue affected her, Claude? We must look to her comfort and safety above all things, you know, Claude."

"I thank you, Jack, from my heart, for those words. All is well, I think and hope. This way—this way."

A few moments brought them to where the horses were, and then Tom Smith, as he would call himself, took Claude aside, and said—

"Which, in your judgment, will be the best, to go away by this little gate leading to the fields, or by the high-road?"

"I should prefer the road," replied Claude, "simply because I have Cicely with me, and we may meet with obstacles the field way, that the horse, doubly loaded, might not be able to surmount: but then, again, the field way is the safest."

"It is. There are but two enemies in that direction—I mean the road—and

if they use fire-arms, the report may alarm our ale-drinking friends before we wish that they should find out anything is amiss."

"True. And yet, if I could but get Cicely to Ealing Common, she is safe."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I have a friend there who will afford her a shelter, and then my mind would be at ease, come what might."

"Would it be prudent, think you, to go direct to your destination?"

"Perhaps scarcely so."

"Not at all, I think. No doubt all that road is well watched, and although, if you have a friend there that you feel you can rely upon, I would, by all means, advise you to lodge Cicely with that friend. I beg of you to make a detour in your progress there for safety sake."

"You are right—you are right. I am not well acquainted with the country beyond Hanwell, but if you will be my guide, you will add much to the debt of gratitude we already owe you."

Claude's new friend, Tom Smith, willingly gave his assent to the proposition of becoming the guide of the party to Ealing Common. The next consideration—how to get Jack and Cicely away from the house, without creating any suspicion in the minds of the officers—was set about, and quickly arranged. At this moment, however, Ann was seen emerging from the house, leading Cicely by the hand. She was immediately taken in charge by Claude, who mounted his horse, and caused her to be placed behind him. The reader is aware that Jack was the last of the party below, who had been called out of the parlour on the frivolous pretence of looking after the cow, while attending to the comforts of the officers. After a short absence he reappeared amongst them; and on entering the room with a doleful countenance, he muttered—

"Confound the cow. You did well, my friends, to say she gave us no end of trouble. The beast is now trespassing on our neighbour's turnip-field, and you must excuse my absence while I get her out, as we like to do as we would be done by."

"Oh, certainly," said two of three of the officers at once; "don't mention it. Your kindness is so great, that we can readily excuse such a trifle as that. We are sorry, my friend, that you are compelled to leave us; but if you will procure us a little more of your sparkling old ale before you go, we shall be happy enough till we see you again."

After furnishing them with more ale, Jack placed his hat on his head, and quietly left the room. He soon joined the party in the yard, where his horse was in readiness for him. Having mounted, Tom Smith placed himself in front of the party, and said in a low tone—

"Silence!"

He listened for a moment, and not hearing a sound except the cooing of the disturbed pigeons, he led the way to the gate by which they had entered. The roadway to it they had littered with straw, to prevent the noise of the horses' feet; and in a few minutes they were once more fairly on the road, in the wake of their mysterious new friend, Tom Smith, in whom the reader will not have failed by this time in recognising as the notorious Dick Turpin. After progressing some distance, they turned into a by-lane leading in the direction of the Hanwell Road. Now the morning had made such progress, that in the open country all objects were distinctly visible, and the sky was of that dull leaden sort of colour peculiar to the early dawn before the sun has risen sufficiently to gild it with beauty; but in this lane, where were those in whose fortunes we are also deeply interested, the trees in many places met so completely overhead, that a darkness continued, which a mid-day sun could only convert into a dubious sort of twilight. Claude and his party were in one of those dark portions of the lane when thus questioned by the officers—

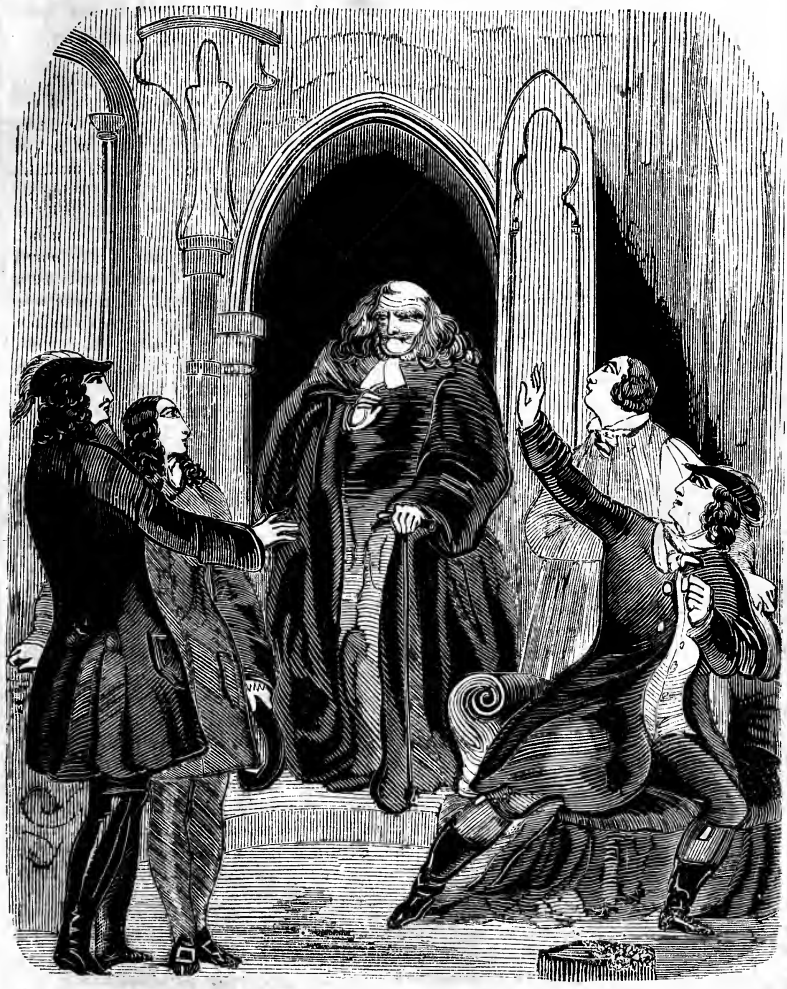
"Now, let us have a look at you!" said one of those men who had been left in the rain to keep watch and ward. He was closely followed by his companion.

"Look away," said Tom.

"We will trouble you to ride on to the next gap in the trees. This place is as dark as a dungeon."

"Very good," said Tom, "we will follow you."

A short canter brought them all to the gap in the trees which the officer had spoken of; and then he who had assumed the office of spokesman cast a scrutinising



SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF THE OLD CLERGYMAN BEFORE CLAUDE, TURPIN AND PARTY.

eye upon the party. It will be remembered that with the exception of Cicely they had each a smock frock and top-boots on.

"You may or may not be what you say," said the officer, "but it's my duty to——"

Before he could finish the sentence, a loud shout rent the air; and then a loud galloping of some approaching horses came clearly upon the ears of the whole party.

"My friend," said Tom, "we would gladly have given you the chance of getting out of this with whole bones; 'but needs must,' you know, 'when the devil drives.'"

He made a clutch at the officer's throat as he spoke, and got hold of a cloth cape he wore, which being rather old and rotten, came away in his hand in a moment.

"Not quite so fast," said the officer, and drawing a pistol from his holster, he fired at Tom.

"A close touch!" said Tom, as snatching a pistol from his breast-pocket, he fired at the officer. The other officer tried to make off in the direction of the Farm House; but Claude, by a dexterous turn of his horse, intercepted him, and struck him down with a blow inflicted with the butt-end of a pistol. He who had been fired at by Tom, was hanging down upon his horse's neck, and the animal, terrified at the report, set off at full gallop.

"Forward!" cried Tom.

Both Claude and Jack gave their steeds the rein, and off they went like the wind. Tom kept the lead easily, although he was behind at the first part of the start. His horse actually sprung past the others in two prodigious leaps, and then it kept its place as easily as though it was merely taking a pleasure canter. The lane was soon cleared, and then, Tom, waving his arm to intimate that they were to follow him, turned a little to the left, and soon emerged into the high road to Hanwell. Our friends were three quarters of a mile a-head, when the officers, who had been played such a trick at the Farm House, appeared at the end of the lane, and all mounted too. How they came to be in such an efficient state for action, is soon told. When Tom and his friends had left the place, the fears of Gregory in a great measure subsided, and he not being quite so stupid as he looked, repaired at once to the parlour, and popped his head in, just as one of the officers, being attracted to do so by some hideous groans, had lifted up the lid of the window seat, and discovered the farmer.

"Hilloa!" cried Gregory, as he saw his real master's head. "Here's the old man at last. Dang it maister, where have you been?"

This produced an explanation. The officers found they were duped, but Gregory, placing his finger to the side of his nose, said—

"The osses bean't gone."

"Not gone, why you have just told us they were all started by those highwaymen. What do you mean?"

"This en, maister. They was started, but it was only into the close paddock. They can't get out. He! he! who's a vool now, I wonders?"

Gregory was right. In the darkness, Tom nor Claude had been able to see exactly where the officer's horses' went; and so, in lieu of sending them right away into the open country, they had only turned them out into a small two-acre paddock. Thus it was, that in the course of ten minutes, the officers—although some of them were not in the soberest condition—were all mounted again, and had in a helter skelter sort of way, taken to the lane, with a hope of speedily overtaking the fugitives. But this was a matter much more easily wished and attempted than performed, considering all things.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

THE CHASE AND ITS RESULTS.

Tom and his friends being, as we have said, about three quarters of a mile a-head of the officers, had very nearly reached Hanwell, while they were emerging from the outskirts of Ealing, so near together are those two pretty villages. Claude thought he might put a question to Tom.

"How far shall we pursue this road?" he said.

"Through Southall; and then, by the green lanes to the left, we can get round to Ealing again.

"That will do. What do you think of our friends, behind?

"That they will remain behind, until we turn completely, as we shall do; and then they will be pursuing nothing, for we shall halt, I hope, while they continue their wild goose-chase upon the high road.

"I know not how to thank you."

"Pho! You may do as much, or more, for me some day."

"Are you, then, on the road?"

"Ha! ha! Well, sometimes I am. But is not this a fine bracing gallop. By Heavens, it does one's heart good to come over the country in this way. Out of the road, will you?"

This was said to a small market cart driver, who was plodding along to Southall Market, with a couple of pigs secured in the cart by a netting. Claude and Jack had room enough to pass on one side, and so would Tom, if he had moved to the other side, or paused a moment; but instead of doing either of those things, he said something to his horse, and in another moment the creature was over, cart, pigs, and all, and safely alighted upon the other side.

"Well done, my pet," said Tom, as he patted the neck of the noble creature he rode. "Well done, pet, though you have done better things than that."

"That horse," said Jack, "is the devil, or——"

"Or what?" said Claude.

"Never mind just now, Claude, we will speak of it another time; I have my own ideas about it. Push on We are lagging behind, don't you see. If we keep up this pace another two miles our cattle will be quite knocked up."

"I fear it. But only look at our friend's horse. It has not turned a hair, and it looks as fresh as if it had just trotted out of a meadow."

The stranger's horse did indeed merit all the ecomiums that could possibly be passed upon it; and notwithstanding the speed at which it had gone, it certainly did not exhibit the smallest trace of distress. The village of Hanwell, with its pretty little picturesque church by the banks of the Brent river, was dashed through in a few moments, and they were upon the high road to Southall. It ws just then that the first glimpse of real sunshine of that day began to gild the tree tops, just indeed as they were emerging from the valley of the Brent to the high ground on its western side. The view around was now very beautiful, but to men struggling for their lives, and pursued by a relentless foe, the calm unimpassioned beauties of nature appeal in vain. Obstacles in the shape of market-carts, and occasionally a waggon, now began to be in the way, for the market at Southall was a well-attended and popular one. To his dismay too—for Jack was, as we know, rather easily broken-spirited—he saw a flock of sheep about a quarter of a mile a-head. The mellifluous grunting of some pigs too, showed that some of that obstinate race were not far off. Still Tom upon his wonderful steed kept on; and as they neared the sheep, he cried—

"Keep to the right, and we shall pass them."

This was correct, for the man in charge of them was diligently collecting them upon the other side of the road. Claude got by, by a hair's beadth almost without injuring any of the creatures. He had an almost superstitious love of animals, had Claude, and would at any time have run some amount of personal risk to avoid injuring one. Fortunately, the pigs had not yet reached the high road, but were just coming into it from a lane, so that the officers would encounter them immediately, although the fugitives narrowly escaped them.

"All right," cried Tom. "We shall have time to draw rein at the George Inn at Southgate, and take a glass of something as well as breathing our cattle. Here we are."

There was a sudden turn in the road, and then all at once they dashed into the pretty High Street of Southall, and Tom, as he said he would, drew rein opposite to the George Inn. Preparations for the market were going on all round the place, and indeed much of the stock had already arrived, so that there was the

noise of a good deal of chaffering about the price of pigs, poultry, and cheese, going on already. The landlord of the George, hearing some horsemen pause at his door, came out with a smiling face; but the moment he saw Tom, he cried—

"Good God! You, and a market-day too!"

"Why not?" laughed Tom, "the more the merrier, you know. Let us each have a thimbleful of brandy."

"And the horses?"

"We have not time. Nothing for them but the privilege of standing still for two minutes."

"What's that?" said Jack.

"Which? which?"

"Those horsemen coming in the other direction to which we came. Is there a hunt here?"

About a score of men in red coats came trotting along, and Tom said, with an air of discomfiture, which, however, quickly vanished—

"Yes, by George, the harriers do meet to-day. Now if those idiots should take it into their heads to run us down—Humph! Well, we should have to show some sport, and at all events, whoever came near me, should, in a sense that he would not like, be in at the death!"

"But something must be done," said Jack.

"Of course it must. Here's the brandy. I drink to our further acquaintance, gentlemen."

"Can you," added Jack, "be so calm at such a moment of danger? Oh, Claude this is the end."

"Of what, Jack?"

"Of your and my career. I will die with you."

"No, Jack, drink your brandy. Something seems to tell me that this is not the end. Tom, we are under your orders."

"Come on."

He who had called himself Tom, took the lead, and they followed him at a quick walk through the fair, for a fair it might almost be called, that populous market-day at Southall. In a few moments the little party, in the fate of which we are interested, was all but surrounded by the huntsmen. Their fate hung upon a thread. If they got clear of the men in red before the officers entered the High-street and spread the alarm, the odds were in their favour, for it was not likely that those who came out dressed for a day's sport, would spoil it by turning aside for the purpose of lending their aid to police officers, although if Tom and his friends could be caught by the stretching out of a hand, it is possible enough caught they would have been. And now the greater number of the men in scarlet had been passed, and Tom was beginning to quicken his pace, when the officers came thundering into the market-place.

"Stop thieves! Highwaymen! Highwaymen!" they cried. "Stop them! There they go!"

"Now for it," cried Tom. "Tally-ho!"

He touched his steed with his heel-spurs he had none—and it gave one of those terrific bounds that covered such an amazing stretch of ground, and then took to a gallop.

Claude and Jack likewise pushed their steeds to their utmost speed, and off they all were. The officers did not pause, but dashing on, upsetting pigs, poultry, stalls, and everything in their way in their eagerness, they kept on crying—

"Stop thief! Stop thief!"

Two or three of the huntsmen on the impulse of the moment turned their horses' heads in the direction of the retreating party; but a second thought caused them laughingly to abandon the chase, and one said—

"Ten to four on the fellow with the black mare."

"Done," said another—"against who?"

"The field!

"Done again! Ha! ha! ha! By Jove, he'll lead 'em a dance, Sir Harry, I think."

A quarter of a mile was passed over, when, directly in front of our party, from out of a lane to the right emerged five keepers or whippers-in, on horseback, accompanied by a score of pointers—for that was to be a day of hunting after various fashions.—These men were not of the class that had allowed the chase to go on without interference; and when they heard the still repeated cries from the officers, or rather, from one of them, who seemed to have a throat of iron, of "Stop the highwaymen!—Stop them!—Stop thieves!" they made a dash at the flying party. Tom stooped down to his saddle nearly, and catching the foremost of the men who tried to stop him by the knee, he dismounted him by a sleight-of-hand that appeared quite marvellous.

"Forward!" he shouted.

One man laid his hand upon the reins of Claude's horse, saying as he did so—"I'll trouble you to stop, my fine fellow."

"The trouble's a pleasure," said Claude, and with his right hand he grasped the man by the throat with such a vice-like pressure that his face got black. The two horses flew along neck and neck for a few seconds, and then when Claude let the man go, he fell to the ground in a state of insensibility. The other three keepers dashed after the fugitives. The dogs followed them howling and yelping, so that the confusion upon the road, and the dust that was kicked up, was something tremendous, as the rain had not been sufficient to lay it thoroughly. Tom now, who was somewhat in advance, slackened his speed slightly, until the others were abreast of him, and then he said to Claude—

"This won't do, Duval."

"I know it."

"The turning to the left which we must take is close at hand. We must turn and fire."

"Very well.—Jack, get your pistols ready."

"All right."

"Give me one," said Cicely."

"My brave girl!" said Claude, "but—no, no,—you, at least, shall be out of these contests."

"Are you all ready?" said Tom.

"Yes. Yes."

"Then wheel round, and fire low."

Tom, nor Jack, nor Claude, saw Cicely reach out one of her hands and take a pistol from the left-hand holster of Claude's saddle, but she did so. In another moment the three horses faced their foes, instead of dashing from them. Bang! went the four pistols as if they only made up one report. Two of the keepers were hit, and made such a howling that the very dogs were alarmed. One of the horses, too, was wounded and fell. The officers came on like an avalanche, and, unable to stop themselves, they dashed among the dogs. The wounded keepers and the half-maddened wounded horse, who in his struggles occupied nearly all the road, and over the most of them went sprawling man and horse, making such a scrambling and tumult as never was known. The two or three of the officers who were not mixed up in the melee drew up, and one cried aloud—

"For God's sake be off. I won't stir another step after you, Claude Duval. No, not if I live a hundred years."

"Nor I," said another.

"All I want to know," cried a third, "is, who that man or devil is, on the black mare."

"Ah," said Tom, "would you like to know?"

"We would! we would!"

He lifted off his hat and showed a slightly bald head, and a singularly fine brow, as he said in a clear ringing voice—

"Folks that know me, and can take the liberty, call me Dick Turpin!"

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

A MORNING'S ADVENTURE.

What pen shall picture the consternation of the officers—professional and amateur—to whom this sudden and most unexpected announcement was made; and at the same time we may add, what language would be sufficiently strong to depict the astonishment of Claude Duval and his friend Jack. The vague and undefined rumour that no less a personage than Turpin, who had achieved by that time a reputation only second to Claude's, was in the neighbourhood, had certainly met Claude's ears, but that he had become his travelling companion he certainly had not suspected. Cicely, too, heard the announcement with conflicting feelings, for while she could not but admire the chivalrous spirit in which Dick Turpin had come to the aid of Claude, she feared much that his companionship would only tend to form another link in the chain of those seeming fascinations that held Claude to a career she could not but look upon with horror and loathing. However, that period of the absolute recognition of who and what their new acquaintance was, certainly did not present a favourable opportunity for reflection, as they were still in the greatest danger. Self-preservation was the dominant feeling in all their breasts, now, as they darted madly on.

"Forward! Forward!" cried Claude. "They will be on us soon. Forward!"

"Yes," added Turpin, "it's a case of the devil take the hindmost now. Push on, all of you."

They did not require much pressing to do this, for putting aside every other consideration, Claude would have been cut to the heart if Dick Turpin had been captured while fighting so gallantly for him. They put spurs to their horses, and galloped on like madmen. The officers were recovering from their pains, and a gentleman belonging to the hunting cavalcade, who although too much of a gentleman to join in the pursuit of the highwaymen without any personal provocation, nevertheless spoke his mind fully enough.

"If you are officers of the police," he said, "and let such a chance as the capture of two such men as Claude Duval and Dick Turpin slip through your fingers, you will deserve all the censure that can be heaped upon you."

"But what are we to do, sir?"

"After them!"

"Come on—come on! Oh, hear what this gentleman says, comrades. We must have them."

"Besides," added the gentleman, "they are but men, and their horses are but flesh and blood. If you keep up the chase, and get fresh cattle, as you easily can at every post town you come to, you must run them down at last."

There was sound reason in all this, and the officers, to the number of nine, at once commenced the pursuit again with the viciousness that promised by no means an easy relinquishment of it. The little rest they had had, no doubt did the officers' horses some good, for they went off at a good pace now, and if we may have an opinion, we think that the danger of Claude Duval and his friends was much greater from those nine determined and angry officers than it had been from all the disorderly rabble that had been opposed to them in the Market Place of the old village of Southall. Dick Turpin turned his horse's head when they reached a piece of high ground, and looked wistfully towards the village.

"Yes," he said. "Yes."

"What is it?" said Claude.

"It is as I thought. The boldest of our foes will keep upon our track, and, unencumbered by the others, they will get on much better. Now for a race. Oh, if it was but night."

"Yes," said Claude, "that would indeed befriend us."

"What will become of us?" said Cicely.

"Nothing particular," said Dick. "On—on—on!"

He gave the reins to his beautiful steed and swept onwards like the wind. It was soon to be perceived that the horses of Claude and Jack could not keep up with the pace of Turpin's Black Bess, and Claude in a loud voice called to him—

"Don't pull in for us. We owe you many thanks already. Push on, and let us hope that some day we may meet again."

"Woa, Bess. Gently, lass, gently."

He turned and cantered back to the little party.

"What did you say just now about meeting again, Duval?"

"I saw that we were a clog upon your speed, and I begged you to leave u the same time that I expressed a hope that we might meet again."

"Pho! I am never in a hurry to leave good company. Introduce me."

"This, then, is my wife."

Turpin whistled, and looked surprised. He then lifted his hat respectfully to Cicely, and no doubt observing her confusion, he turned to Jack, and said—

"This is—is——"

"Sixteen-string Jack."

"What! Sixteen-string Jack! Oh, another—another."

"No. The only Sixteen-string Jack. The original."

"Who was hanged at Tyburn," added Jack, "Anno Domini seventeen——"

"Stop," said Dick Turpin. "Don't be joking till we get a rest. Come on. Don't you hear the horses' hoofs skurrying the road behind us, as if a lot of mad persons were at work?"

This was not at all an inapt simile as regarded the sounds that came upon the ears of those who were flying for life itself, and although Claude would have wished, even at such a moment as that, to disabuse the mind of Dick Turpin of the idea that they were joking with him, he felt that he was called upon to give all his attention to his horse. They had by no means paused as they carried on the little conversation we have recorded, but yet, as it had proceeded, the speed of the cattle had considerably slackened, and consequently they had some ground to make up again, to place the same distance between them and their pursuers, that had been but a few moments before. For now the space of about a quarter of an hour, they proceeded without exchanging a word, and it was quite evident that Turpin was accomodating the speed of his horse to the powers of the animals bestrode by our friends. But yet the pace at which they all went was highly respectable. They had not got far beyond some cross-roads when a carriage was seen advancing towards them, and at the rate they were going, although the carriage travelled but slowly, they seemed to near it with great speed indeed.

"Business," said Dick Turpin, as he drew rein. "Business, my friends, is business."

"What is it?" said Claude.

"Ride on. I'll overtake you. Times have been bad lately, and I really cannot allow a chance of earning a trifle to go by me. Ride on, I pray you. I will soon be by your side.

Claude dashed onward, and Jack followed him, while Turpin, suddenly wheeling round to the side of the road, took a pistol from his pocket, and without a word, deliberately took aim at the coachman, who began bobbing his head from side to side, as though, by that means, he might puzzle the shot.

"Murder!—murder!" he cried; and then he drew up, and rolled off the box into the road.

The horses began to kick and plunge. Turpin dashed up to them, and in a few moments, with a knife he took from a small sheath in his bosom, cut the traces, and the cattle went off, down the road to Southall, at a gallop. All this was done with such tremendous rapidity, that the occupants of the carriage had not really had time to know that anything was amiss. It was only the cry of "Murder!" from the coachman that let them know he was not paying some toll merely, and then the glass was let down, and a head popped out.

"What's all this?" said the owner of the head, a stout, passionate-looking, elderly man.

"Ah! sir, it's dangerous to do that," said Turpin, as he fired a pistol so close to the enquirer's ear, that the head popped in again with the most frightful rapidity.

"Good God!" said an affected voice, "what is it, uncle? Oh, dear!—oh, dear! is there any danger?"

Turpin was by the window of the carriage in an instant, and placing his hand upon the sill of it, he said, in a calm voice—

"Money, watches, and jewellery, gentlemen, and be quick, if you please, for my time is limited."

"Well, of all the impudence," said the elder gentleman of the two, "of all the impudence that ever I met with, this is the——"

"Yes—yes," said Dick, "we know all that, and you can talk about it at your leisure. Your money, watches, rings, and so on, is all I want at present. Quick—quick."

"But, my dear sir," said the younger of the two, who was dressed in the extreme of fashion. "My dear sir, screw me up if I can understand—aw—aw. You see our property is our property—aw—aw——"

"Then you will have it," said Dick, as he took a pistol from his pocket, and thrust the barrel right into the open mouth of the exquisite, whose complexion immediately turned of a dirty yellow.

"No—no," said the old man. "Here!—here!"

As he spoke, he handed to Dick his purse and his watch.

"Your ring," said Turpin.

"If you must have it you must, but it is a mourning one, and I prize it."

"Keep it, sir."

"Thank you. Richard, give your watch and purse. We might have fallen into worse hands than his."

"A great deal," said Turpin. "You might have gone to law, and been robbed that way, in a protracted manner, and not allowed the privilege of any grumbling, while I rob you off-hand; and when I am gone, or even now, if you like, you may d—n me to your heart's content. Come, Richard, be quick."

Richard, however, was so completely overcome by the pistol having been placed in his mouth, that, although upon the old gentleman so handsomely surrendering at discretion, Dick had immediately withdrawn it, he could only sit shaking and chatter his teeth together like castanets, and positively had not power to take his purse from his pocket, or his watch from his fob. The old gentleman was obliged to take both from him, and hand them to Dick.

"Well, Richard," said Turpin, "I think you will never make a hero; but if you like to recover your own and your uncle's property, I'll fight you for it, if you will get out."

Richard's teeth only chattered together more energetically, and Dick, waving his hand to the old gentleman, said—

"Adieu, sir; you will remember Dick Turpin."

"The devil!" said the old gentleman; "it's you, is it?"

"Exactly," said Dick. "Ah!"

At this moment a turn in the road brought the nine officers in sight, and at the appearance of the carriage and Dick, they raised a loud shout, which he replied by a quiet smile, as he patted the neck of his horse.

"Ah, Bess," he said, "my lass, shall we show them how to do it?"

Even as the words left his mouth, the gallant creature darted forward with a bound that would have speedily unhorsed any less practised rider than he who spoke them, and then off she set, at a speed that made anything in the shape of pursuit look hopeless indeed. The officers reached the carriage, and saw at a glance what had happened. They did not stop to say a word in the way of sympathy to those who were thus robbed, and left in the middle of the road without horses, but plunging on, they still hoped to be enabled in the long run to come down upon the fugitives, who, alive or dead, would be to them the most valuable of prizes. The little episode between Dick Turpin and the occupants

of the carriage, had taken much less time in the reading than it has necessarily taken us to describe; but yet the lapse had been sufficient to enable Claude and Jack to get a long start of Turpin. It has become proverbial with us that "a stern chase is a long chase," and, notwithstanding the astonishing speed at which Dick travelled, and that too upon a good road, it was some time before the sound of his horse's feet came upon the ears of Claude.



THE FLIGHT FROM THE FARM-HOUSE.

"He comes," said Jack. "Do you hear?"
"Yes—yes. Let us draw rein for him. Cicely, how fares it with you?"
"Well. Quite well, Claude, while you are safe."
"Alas! what a life this is for you."
"You are with me, Claude."
He could make no reply to this, but by a slight pressure of her hand, which

said much more than words could have done, and then Dick Turpin rode up to them.

"Well done," he said. "Push on."

"Our foes? Are they close?" said Claude.

"Not very, but there's a gravel-pit near here. I have hidden in it twice, and without looking down it, my pursuers have ridden on, fancying me still upon the upper road."

"Will you chance it again?"

"Yes. If they do see us, we are not much the worse off, for they can only get at us by going round by the road-way, while we can scramble out of the pit by a path I know, and still have a good mile the start of them."

"A mile," said Claude, "is as good as a hundred. Come on."

"There's one good thing, too; about these halts," added Dick. "They give the cattle breathing time. The game of these fellows, who are so hotly after us, will, no doubt, be to get fresh horses, and so run us down in time, but that they cannot do for six miles yet. This way."

"Where are we now?" said Claude, as he kept his horse's head close up to the neck of Black Bess.

"To the left, in Langley Marsh," said Turpin; "but by keeping as we are we shall get on the high road to Maidenhead. If they do baffle us at the gravel pit, we will strike for the Marsh."

"Do you know it?"

"Well."

They now reached a very singular bit of road. It was a cutting by the side of a precipitous kind of bank, upon the top of which the original road had evidently run, but no doubt, on account of its dangerous steepness, the lower road, as it was called, had been formed. Dick Turpin, to the surprise of Claude, took the upper one.

"This way," he said.

Claude and Jack followed him closely, and after proceeding about a hundred yards, he paused and dismounted.

"We must walk the cattle into the pit," he said. "We can easily get out of it mounted, if that is any consolation; but as I have a regard for my neck, considering it is the only one I have, I would rather go down this steep descent with my own feet beneath me than Black Bess's."

They all dismounted now, and Dick Turpin leading the way, while Cicely hung upon Claude's arm, they descended into one of the most singularly romantic places that they had ever beheld. At least, it was new to all but Dick Turpin, and he appeared quite familiar with its intricacies.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

THE MURDERER'S DEN.

When Dick Turpin had spoken of a gravel pit, Claude had thought that he meant to introduce them into one of those disorderly-looking excavations where stones and sand formed the principal appearances. His surprise, therefore, at being conducted into a little woody glen, full of the most luxuriant vegetation, was great.

"Is this a gravel pit?" he said.

"Yes, an exhausted and long since deserted one," replied Dick Turpin. "I ought to have told you that."

"I am agreeably surprised. Is not this beautiful, Cicely?"

"It is indeed."

"But how comes it," said Jack, "that so much vegetation is to be found in a place that one would have thought a great foe to it?"

"Ah, my friend, is that you?" said Turpin. "Where did you say you were hanged?"

"You think that a jest," said Claude, who saw Jack give a shudder, and well knew how unwelcome a theme that was to him, "but I assure you it is no such thing. This is Sixteen-string Jack. Hanged he was, and then brought to life again by a Jew."

"You surprise me, indeed; and at some more fitting time, I should like much to know all the particulars. At present we have too much upon our hands to attend to anything that does not press."

"True—true."

Dick Turpin, with the look of one perfectly well acquainted with the place in which he was. led the way, and in the course of about three minutes, they were all at the lowest depth of the old deserted gravel-pit.

The rank and vile vegetation at the bottom of the pit was high enough to reach the girths of the horses, and here and there the animals smelt out a mouthful of sweet young grass, which they eagerly devoured, as no doubt it was deliciously cooling to their mouths.

"We can get no further," said Dick, "without ascending, and that we don't want to do yet."

"Certainly not. Then this place has not been worked for a long time?"

"Not for sixty years. It was only a vein of gravel, and was soon used up. The excavation was then left. Rains and winds germinated and scattered seeds into it, and now you see it is quite a little wood, and any one not accustomed to it would find no small difficulty in threading its many winding intricate paths."

"Not a doubt but they would."

"Moreover, here and there, there are deep holes, which have been carelessly left, and at the bottom of which there is in all weathers and seasons water, and into which any unwary explorer might fall with but a poor chance of getting out again."

"Hush!" said Jack.

"What is it?"—

"They come."

"Ah! so they do indeed," said Dick Turpin, after listening for a few moments; "now absolute silence is requisite, for any sound from below here goes up the sides of the excavation, and is heard more clearly above than below,"

The hard gallop of the approaching officers now came plainly upon the ears of the little party. Not a word was spoken. The caution of Dick Turpin was by no means thrown away, for whatever risks they might have felt disposed to run themselves, they had certainly no right in the world to tamper with his safety."

"The attention of them all was strictly directed to listening if the horsemen stopped, or continued proceeding at their maddening pace upon the lower road. On, on they came, and the gallop of nine horses made no inconsiderable tumult. On—yes—on—on. They pass—no—they pause—a loud voice cries "halt."

"D—n them!" muttered Dick.

Claude spoke not a word.

"Halt!" again said the loud voice.

The horsemen paused. No longer could the sound of the fierce gallop be heard, but distinctly the laborious breathing of the horses came upon the ears of our adventurers, even so distant as they were from the road where the officers paused.

"I don't hear them," they heard a voice say. Then another, "Not so loud, Griffiths,—if walls have hears, holes and corners in woods may likewise."

After this the consultation of the officers was carried on in a tone of voice which forbade the slightest word of it from reaching the ears of those in the gravel pit, who would have certainly been better pleased to have heard the whole of it. Dick Turpin placed his mouth close to Claude's ear as he said—

"Duval, this has been tried once too often."

"What? What?"

"Hiding here. They have been thrown off the scent before at this spot, and do you know it strikes me forcibly we shall have a run for it yet."

"I am sorry we kept not the road then."

"Hush, man, hush, you speak an octave too high; whisper as low as you can. If we could have got the cattle to lie down it would have been better.—Bess will do it at a word, but it is too late now, much too late."

"What is to be done then?"

"We must wait a little. We shall soon find what they are about. If they come down here—why, their fate be upon their own heads; but if they fire upon us from above, I, for one, will not be made an animated target of."

"Nor I."

"Then we must make a rush for it. Keep your party ready to mount at a moment's notice."

"I will."

Bang! went a pistol shot, and a rushing sound amid the branches of an alder-tree, close at hand, attested that the shot had come pretty near to the place of concealment of our party. Claude shifetd his position so as completely to shield Cicely from any chance shot, and then he felt more satisfied. Claude was too intent upon shielding Cicely to notice that Jack took up a very similar position as regarded himself.

"Don't speak," again whispered Turpin. "They may not have seen us yet. We can be no judges down here of what sort of obstructions may be in the way of their seeing clearly into this dark excavation. The bough of a tree may screen us."

Claude and Jack both felt the truth of this, and were perfectly still as statues. Cicely trembled. In the course of a few moments another sharp crack proclaimed that a pistol shot was among them; but this time it did not come so near as before. They all breathed more freely.

"It's nonsense," they heard a voice say. "Come on."

"Nonsense or not nonsense I am going no farther," said some one in reply.

"No farther?"

"Not an inch. If you think you can find, and when found catch, you can do it. I am not in condition to go further, nor my horse either. Don't you hear him blowing?"

"Who?"

"My horse, stupid."

The conversation ceased abruptly at this point; and Turpin once more inclining to Claude's ear, whispered,—

"Do you think that little conversation was genuine, or only intended to deceive us,—possibly to our destruction?"

"I can hardly say."

"Nor I. I am in doubt. Let us listen for more."

Scarcely had he done speaking, when one of the previous voices again broke the silence, and the following conversation took place—

"And so you think it of no use to go further in the chase?"

"Not a bit; it's all gammon. They are off and far by this time; at all events, I look upon it that there's an end to the whole matter."

"What will you do then?"

"Go back to the 'George' at Southall, and order a good dinner."

"Well, that ain't a bad idea. What say yon all, gents, to it. Shall it be as Jones says, or shall we go on putting our heads into danger in looking after fellows who would just as soon put a bullet into us as eat a sandwich."

"Oh, let's be off," said a chorus of voices. "We have had quite enough of it. Better luck next time, that's all."

"Come along, then."

Apparently, off they all went at a trot, and while the sound of the horses' feet was still upon the air, Cicely spoke, saying—

"Oh, what a mercy this is."

Turpin shook his head.

"I don't mean to say that it is not a mercy, because that's all as it turns out; but if any of you here imagine those fellows are gone, in my humble judgment you will make a great mistake."

"That is my opinion likewise," said Claude. "The attempt to hoodwink us was too transparent. But we may talk a little freely, for they are with their horses."

"Nay, we cannot be too cautious," said Turpin. "Do you think it unlikely that they have left one of their number to listen if any sound should come up from this place?"

This was a supposition which was too natural not to place a restraint upon every tongue. Claude and Turpin only continued to converse in very cautious whispers.

"And so," said the former, "you think they suspect we are here?"

"I think they know it."

"What do you advise, then?"

"Simply, that at present we remain were we are. I think, for the purpose of deceiving us, they will leave their horses some hundred yards or so away and come themselves on foot; if so, we shall have a good advantage, for we can take to our steeds at any time, and be off."

"Confound them."

"Exactly, and if my pistols don't misfire—a thing they are not in the habit of doing—I will effectually confound some of them."

"I regret, though, that you should be much exposed to danger upon our account. There is no reward for you."

"Yes, but there will be some day. Come, come, Duval, unless such men as you and I make common cause when we do chance to meet, the Philistines will be too strong for us. If your young wife was in some place of safety, there would be no better fun going there for you, and I, and Jack; for Jack, you say, he is to cope with these fellows above."

"Alas, yes," said Claude, "I would give all the world were it mine to dispose of it, if I could feel that she was, as you say, safe."

"Never mind. I will go and reconnoitre the enemy. Just be as still as you can until I come back."

"Shall I hold your horse?"

"No, thank you. Let her be. Bess, lass, Bess."

Dick Turpin placed his hand upon the shoulder of Black Bess, and gradually pressing upon it, the animal yielded and lay quietly down upon the little grassy spot where they were all standing.

"She will not stir until my return," said Dick; "I won't be long gone, you may depend."

Cautiously, now he crept away from them, stooping so low that he was quite hidden by the tall brushwood that grew in such profusion and luxuriance at the bottom of the excavation.

"Oh, Claude, what will happen to you?" said Cicely.

"Nothing, dear one, nothing."

"Yes, but——"

"Nay, while you thus torment yourself with fears, you withdraw my attention from the means of safety. Hush!—what is that?"

"Only me," said Turpin.

"So soon returned?"

"Yes, the vagabonds are slipping quietly down into the excavation like Indians one after the other. We shall have something to do with them yet, I think. The fools, we fight for our lives, they only for money. Ha! ha!"

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

THE CITY MILITIA.

The state of affairs were getting serious.

"Do you mean that they will actually venture to attack us?" whispe ed Claude to Turpin.

"Ay, do I, and from what I can hear, they have got something in the shape of a reinforcement, for there are two men with them, whom they address as gentleman of the city militia."

"The city militia?"

"Yes; but I don't think we need put ourselves much out of the way concerning them, for I never yet heard that they were any very redoubtable warriors. I think, however, with all deference to you, Duval, as I know the locality hereabouts perfectly, you should give me over the full command of our party."

"Take it in the name of all that's fortunate," said Claude; "you may depend upon our following your directions in all things."

"Very good. Then you will remember that there are eleven men after us, and we are but three."

"Four to fight," said Cicely. "It is little that I can perhaps do, but that little I feel myself called upon to do by every principle of sound justice."

"Good," added Turpin; "mount then all of you, but take care to stoop so low down in your saddles, that your heads are not higher than those of your horses. I am convinced by the manner of our foes, that in consequence of some intervening obstacles, most probably some boughs of trees, they cannot see us at present, and if we rise no higher than the cattle stand, we shall still preserve the same sort of advantage."

While Claude assisted Cicely to mount again, and whispered to her to be sure to stoop low in the saddle, Turpin spoke to his mare, saying—

"Now, Bess, up and stirring, lass."

As he said these words, he placed his hand again upon the creature, and it got up from the ground so softly and with such an amount of positive caution, that it was really difficult to suppose that the sagacious animal did not bring to bear upon the occasion an amount of reflection that was quite out of the question. It is difficult to say, though, where instinct and memory end, and mind begins.

"All right," whispered Turpin.

"Yes—yes."

"Then get your pistols ready; and when I say 'Fire!' take care that you do so, and fire low."

"We will.—Can you see the foe?" asked Claude.

"No. But hark!"

Claude listened intently; and he heard a crackling sound as if some dry fern was being broken up. It was the beast of the officer upon the grass and decayed leaves that strewed the pathway. They were looking to the capture, as they thought, of Claude Duval and his new ally, the well known Dick Turpin.

Unde. stand me," whispered Dick Turpin. "Keep your horses' heads to the right here; and the moment you have fired your pistols, give them the spur and the rein, and follow me."

"We will—we will."

It was really an anxious moment now, for none of the fugitives could exactly calculate either upon the mode of attack or the amount of valour and determination which would be brought to bear upon the affair by the officers, and likewise the two men mentioned as members of the City Malitia, might be men of courage. It did not follow to the mind of Claude, that every soldier East of Temple Bar must be a Major Sturgeon. Duval could feel that Cicely trembled.

"Dear one," he said, "it is for you and you only that I feel deeply anxious.

Let me implore you, if anything should happen ot me, to go to London at once, and find out Mark Brereton and May, and throw yourself upon their protection."

"No more, no more, Claude. Say no more in such a strain. I cannot, dare not, think of such contingences. You must not ask me to do so."

"But, Cicely——"

'No—no—no, I can truly say in an.wer to you,

"That way madness lies!"

I implore you to say no more, Claude.''

Duval was silent; but if anything could have nerved him to throw aside all feelings of hesitation, in opposing those who came against him, or regret for the necessity, perhaps, of taking their lives, it certainly was the conviction that if he fell Cicely would be something worse than desolate. He closed his lips firmly, mumbling to himself—

"Let them come: it is their own selection."

And so, indeed, it was. If those officers sought, in a manner of speaking, to coin the blood of Claude Duval into gold, they had no right to expect that he should spare them, while they attempted to carry into effect such a process. But all time for reflection had now passed away.

"Steady!" said Turpin, in a low voice.

"Surrender in the king's name, or we will fire upon you!" cried one of the officers.

Probably they were alarmed at the profound stillness in that place, which they knew to be peopled by foes. No answer was returned. Turpin, from between his clenched teeth, uttered a low "Hush!"

"Once more, before we fire upon you," cried the voice again, "we call upon you to surrender! You must be killed if you are foolish enough to resist! Claude Duval, the game is up!"

"Fire low!" said Turpin.

Bang! went the pistols, as if all the triggers had been pulled by one finger, so simultaneous was the report. A shriek of pain mingled with the sound, and in another moment, obeying the furious injunctions of Turpin, they all darted to the right; but no sooner had they done so than a rattling discharge of pistols from the officers right into the spot they had occupied, convinced them how necessary t had been to leave it.

"Back again! cried Turpin. "Turn—turn! Back again!"

He was quickly obeyed; and then, in a voice that rang loud and clear in the pit, he shouted—

"Forward!"

They dashed after him. The route which Dick Turpin took might well have appaled any one who for the first time looked upon it; for, to all appearance, it seemed as if he had an intention of clambering right up the face of the excavation. Now as that was, at the very least, some 200 feet in depth, any one might well be excused for looking upon it with a feeling of dismay. But, as the reader may suppose, Turpin knew better what he was about than to make any such wild attempt. The fact was, that there had existed an old cart track, by which the ground had been brought from the lowest part of the pit to the surface, and although that cart track had become very much grown over by weeds, yet it was there, and it was in pursuit of its windings that Turpin went. By keeping a light hand upon the near rein of his steed, there was little danger of its slipping off the road-way. If it had, instant destruction must have been the consequence; for nothing could have saved a fall to the very bottom of the pit. The speed, too, at which they went, was something in their favour; for it prevented the cattle from looking at their own perilous position; and so pursuing the zig-zag and circuitous route of this long disused road, our party slowly worked its way towards the mouth of the deep excavation. Now, the officers were in what, in their own parlance, they would have called rather a fix. Two of their number had been killed outright by the pistol shots, and one was wounded. They saw their prey escaping,

and there they were in a gravel-pit without horses, by the aid of which to follow upon their track, if they could have, after what had happened, summoned courage enough with a reduced force to do so. The two military men backed out of the fray. They were both as pale as death; and one of them said—

"We have given all the time we can to the affair, and must go now."

"Afraid by G—!" exclaimed one of the officers.

To this taunt the military men made no reply, but turning round, scrambled back again as quickly as they possibly could from the gravel-pit, with a profound hope of finding their horses, and being of an equally profound determination never again to interfere with highwaymen at bay.

"We have only one chance," cried the boldest of the officers.

"And what's that?" said another.

"Why to take up as good a position as we can here, and blaze away upon them. Who knows but we may hit our men yet, before they get out of the pit?"

This was certainly the very best thing for the accomplishment of their purpose that they could do; and as the others naturally fell into the opinion of him who chose, at such a moment, to take the lead, they all scrambled on to a little height, from which they could command a tolerable view of the fugitives amid the brushwood, and commenced firing upon them. Six men, none of whom were at all disabled, could manage to keep up a tolerably brisk fire with a pair of pistols each; and it was only a wonder that our friends did not suffer immediately from the discharge. Those who are acquainted with pistol shooting, however, know how many trivial circumstances and accidents will be sufficient, at any time, to prevent the success of a shot, especially in a strange place, and when the objects fired at are in motion. Each of the officers had fired twice, and yet there were the horsemen gaining rapidly the mouth of the excavation.

"Confound them!" cried he who had taken the lead. "Can we not hit horse or man?"

"It seems not," said another.

"Fire away! We can but try. Ah! there they are! By George they will give us the slip! Now is not that provoking?"

Even as he spoke, Dick Turpin, with his Black Bess, made one vigorous dash, and reached the summit of the excavation.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "Come on."

The officers could hear the cheer.

"Fire upon him! Blaze away at the one on the top! There can't be a better mark! D—n the fellow! has he sold himself to the devil for the privilege of being shot-proof?"

Dick Turpin was sufficiently in advance of his friends that, as he stood upon the brink of the chasm, playing to them the part of a guide-post, the whole of the officers had a shot at him, and the whole of them missed him.

"Now what a set of rascals," he ejaculated, "to go blazing away at a man in that way! Why, Bess, if they had hit you, I'd go down among them, and sell my life for three or four of their's!"

As he spoke, he took from a pocket that would only just hold it, a particularly long-barrelled pistol. He fixed his eyes upon the officer who had taken the lead among his comrades.

"So," added Turpin, as he took deliberate aim at him, "you have fired at me twice, and you are, I suppose, what is called an active and enterprising officer. I will see if I cannot put an end to your activity and enterprise, my fine fellow."

In another moment he fired. A cry reached his ears, and the officer was gone. The bullet had hit him in the chest, and he had fallen to the ground among the bushwood.

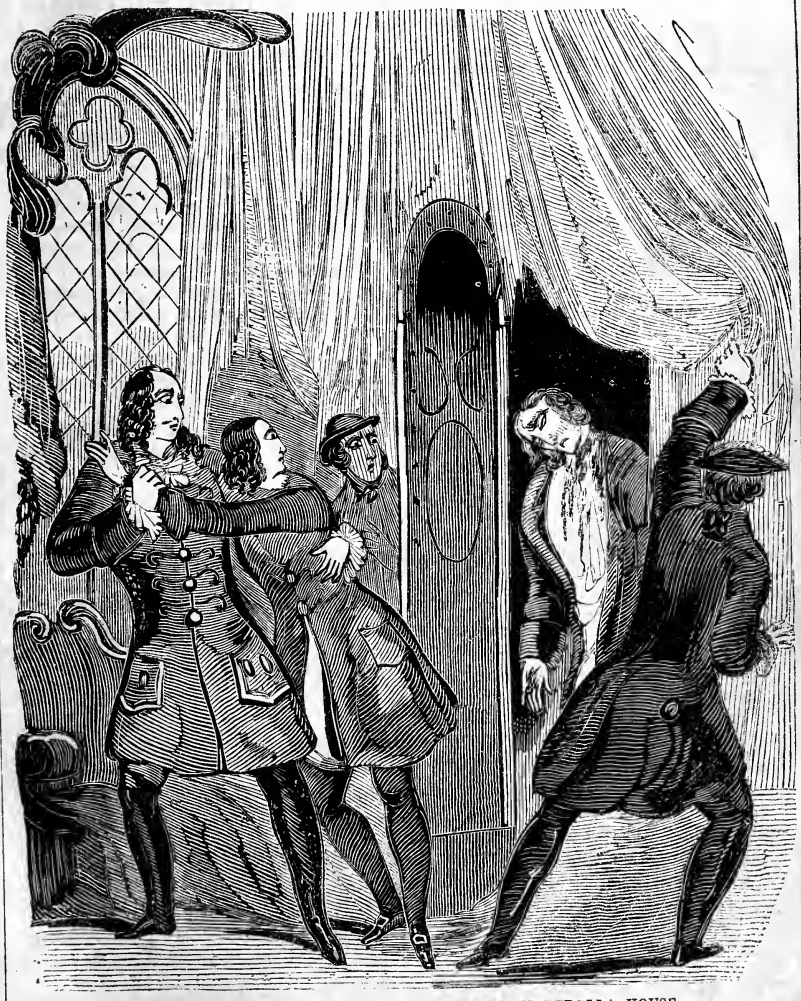
"Done at last!" he said. "Oh God!"

The others suspended the firing to look at him, as he lay there with such a look of horror upon his face, that for some few minutes they were struck dumb with horror

"Come away, there," said one, slightly recovering sufficiently to speak. "Oh, come away! This won't do!"

The dying man tossed his arms about, and spoke something that was quite inarticulate.

"Are you very bad, Mouldy?" gasped one.



JACK DISCOVERING THE MURDERED CORPSE IN BEDELLA HOUSE.

He tried to speak again, and the blood oozed from his mouth—flowing down his breast in an ensanguined stream. He seemed to be struggling to rise, and they thought they had better hold his head up a little, for fear he should be choked. His face was awful to look upon, and he who held him up partially shook, so that the dying man's agony was much increased thereby, if his life was protracted.

"Are you better?" said one.

"Oh God, no! There they come! There—there!"

"Where?"

"Don't you see? All with the ropes round their necks! Oh, it is too horrible!"

"Why, he is raving!"

"Hush!—hush! Down with the old man! Don't let that child escape!—There! Now—now! One smash! There go its brains! Tell?—who can tell? This will come upon me when I die, do you say? Ha!—ha! No—no—no!"

The dying man fought the air with his hands for a few moments, and then a gulph of blood come from his mouth, and his head fell forward upon his chest as though his neck had been suddenly broken. The officer was dead! No wonder his companions looked on with horror-struck wonder. No effort was made to stay the rapidly retreating fugitives. All spirit had gone from the hearts of the remaining officers, and with their dead, they remained in the gravel-pit, looking at each other with consternation upon every countenance. Surely the affair had turned out to be a very different one to what they had projected it should be. But not for long was this state of total inaction to continue with them. It so happened that the "gentlemen of the hunt," had by this time started a fox, and had got round to the meadows in the immediate neighbourhood of the gravel-pit. There they lost the scent, for the fox took refuge in some secret covert, close to the pit; and the horsemen, some fourteen or fifteen in number, who had, with the utmost enthusiasm followed the dogs, assembled to consult about what was best to be done next, close to where the officers had left their horses. They had hardly had time to make a remark to each other about their disappointment, when the two members of the City Light-Horse arrived, and hastily mounting their horses, cried—

"Oh, gentlemen, there's a horrid murder taking place in the gravel-pit, down yonder."

Then, without waiting for a word in reply, they darted off as hard as they could to town.

"What is the meaning of all this, gentlemen?" said one of the "hunt." "Let us trot on and inquire. If we have lost the fox, we may find some other game."

"I'll be bound," said another, "that it's those highwaymen we saw at Southall."

CHAPTER CXL.

THE LONE HUT.

Dick saw that he was recognised by the "gentlemen of the hunt," and lifting his hat a little from his head, he cried in a voice that was quite loud enough to go across the pit—

"Hark away, gentleman! If you are inclined for a race, come on. We have not a bit more the start of you than we mean to keep.—Tally-ho!"

He only paused long enough to see that his taunt had had the effect of inducing the huntsmen to come after him, and then turning to Claude, he said—

"They are not upon our track, but a stern chase is indeed a long one; so let them come. Now for it—off and away, at once, for we must throw away no chances."

"But they are quite close to us," said Cicely.

"In appearance yes, but not in reality."

"How so?"

"Why, we are upon one side of the gravel-pit, and they are upon the other. It is three quarters of a mile's ride to get round to this spot; and although it is not the odd quarter to come through the pit, I'll warrant, if they try that game, it will take them longer than it would to come round."

"Yes," said Claude, "we have as fair a start of them as we could desire. Calm yourself, Cicely, there is nothing to fear now, nor do I think there will be."

"You are right," said Duval; "all we have to do is to push on until we reach some shelter, and then double upon our foes."

"Can we do so on this road?"

"Yes, easily. Ah! what is that?—Woa, Bess!—Woa, mare!"

A brilliant flash of lightning had suddenly lit up the whole scene with such a lurid glare that, passing, as it seemed to do, immediately before the faces of the horses, it alarmed them all; and it was some few moments even before Turpin could succeed in calming the terror of his exquisitely trained steed.

"A storm," said Claude, as he looked up.

"Yes, it's coming."

"But where's the thunder?" said Jack.

The inquiry had scarcely passed the lips of Jack, when the thunder came with such a startling explosion that it seemed as though a hundred field-pieces had been discharged at once in 'mid air.

"That is terrible," said Cicely.

The horses swerved and shook; but by voice and hand their riders strove to console and manage them so that they galloped on through the now rapidly darkening air, as though they had wings.

"Our friends in scarlet," said Dick, "will get a wetting, which, I think, will cool their courage a little."

"It ought to do so," said Claude. "Ah! there it is again! What a flash that was."

The forked lightning had seemed now to pass exactly between them and some trees that were by the road-side; but such could either not have been its exact direction, or it must have swerved with wonderful velocity, for a loud crash, as though the very vault of heaven was rent assunder, succeeded, and an immense elm tree fell across the road, rent and shattered from its topmost branch to the very roots by the formidable fluid.

"Hold in! hold in!" said Claude, "till the thunder is over. It is coming now."

Mechanically they obeyed him; and it was well they did so, for what with the tremendous reverberations of the thunder, and the alarm previously occasioned by the lightning and the fall of the trees, the horses were begining to be unmanageable. Claude's steed reared; and it was quite as much as he could do by dint of coaxing and main strength to keep the creature from tearing off at a wild mad gallop.

"Humph!" said Dick; "we are in for it now, I rather think."

"We are, indeed.—What shall we do?"

Pat! pat! came some large drops of rain.

"We shall get drenched," added Turpin. "Let us get into the meadows, and see if we can find a house."

"But, our persuers?"

"Oh, you need think nothing of them, I fancy. You may take your oath they have all turned tail upon the storm, and are off to Southall, just as hard as they can put hoof to ground. What should they see in us that they should spoil their Jim-crack hunting finery in coming after us? Ah, here is a gap in the hedge. Come on, and let us trust to fortune for a shelter, somewhere."

The gap in the hedge, to which Dick Turpin alluded, was only just large enough to allow one horse to pass through it at a time; and then they all found themselves in a delightful, soft, and verdant meadow, skirting the road-side.

"Follow me," said Dick, "I see something like a homestead right out some distance."

Another flash of lightning, certainly not so brilliant as the former, and followed by a roar of thunder, that convinced Claude the storm was nearly overhead, accelerated their movements, for the natural result of this contention of the elements would be sure to be a fall of rain, that in Cicely's delicate state might do her

much injury. As they proceeded across the meadow, Claude spoke to her in a low voice—

"Cicely, this is, indeed, hard fortune for you; but cheer up, dearest, and all shal yet be well."

A mute—but, oh! how eloquent—pressure of the hand was the only response. That slight touch was sufficient for Claude. It was such things that spoke to his heart, and told him how much he was beloved.

"Ah!" cried Turpin, suddenly, "I see the chimney pots."

"Where—where?" cried Claude.

Turpin drew up, and pointed in the direction of a clump of trees, at about a couple of hundred yards distance; and there, sure enough, Claude saw some giant-looking, ornamental chimney-pots, lifting up their heads against the darkening sky.

"Alas!" said Cicely, who likewise saw them, "some lonely cottage would be a much more likely place in which we should find some shelter, than in such a home as, probably, lies imbosomed among those trees. What think you, Claude?"

"I think with you, Cicely, that we shall find no welcome there."

"We can but reconnoitre the place," said Dick. "Do you know, it strikes me, that these chimney-pots belongs to Bedella House."

"And what is that?"

"A deserted mansion, supposed to be haunted. They say no one has slept a night in it since Queen Elizabath ruled in England. But that to me is a very doubtful proposition, indeed."

"It will afford us a shelter, if one can gain admittance," said Claude, "against the weather, I suppose."

"Certainly it will. Let us push on for it. I see we shall have to cross another meadow. I hope we shall find a gap in the hedge, or a gate, for our cattle, I don't think, are in any humour for jumping just now, whatever they may be for a sharp run."

They reached the confines of the first meadow from the high road, and it was only, after skirting the hedge for some distance, that they come to a small gate, made for the convenience of cattle, through which they passed. And now the rain, that had been, as it were, only threatening, began in a very unequivocal manner to descend. The worst of the storm clouds had, certainly, not broken over the spot upon which our adventurers were; but at times there would come such a dash of water against them, that it would really seem as if some one had deliberately cast it in their faces. Cicely shrunk closer to Claude.

"This is pleasant, indeed," said Dick Turpin, "and the worst of it is, it don't at all seem inclined to get any better. Come on, we can but try our luck at the old mansion. A roof over one's head, will be something to-day to boast of."

"It will indeed," said Claude.

They had pased through the small cattle gate, into the second meadow; and as it was made narrower than the last, and they had but to cross it at its least dimensions, they soon reached an iron hurdle fence, which separated the actual grounds of the old house from the meadows. Jack dismounted, and quickly removed a couple of the hurdles, so that the horses could pass through with ease; and then upon all sides they could see what had once been high culture, and abundant evidences of a carefully kept place. To be sure, the gravelled pathway was now almost completely overgrown by tall weeds, but still its ruinous course could be plainly enough traced; and some flower-roots that had grown wild and gigantic—losing much of their beauty, while they gained so much strength and freedom—looked strange and new to the eyes of our friends.

"This way, I think," said Claude.

"Yes, you are right," said Dick. "That leads evidently to the house. Ah, more thunder; did any one see the lightning?"

No one had; and from the character of the thunder it would seem as if the

storm was going off in an easterly direction. The rain, however, although it still pursued its fitful varying character, became more annoying each moment.

"What a strange old pile," said Claude, as they advanced a few yards further; and suddenly upon rounding some laurel bushes of most luxuriant growth, come in front of the house.

Cicely thought it beautiful. That it was of the Elizabethan order of architecture could be seen, and that was all; for the whole face of the building, without exception, was completely overgrown by ivy. The windows were blocked up by the beautiful creepers, the doors were covered over, and it was only some few of the chimney pots that had escaped being covered. From want of care, too, hundreds of young green shoots of the ivy stood out from the house, waving about like so many green arms, that might be supposed to be either welcoming or warning off a visitor, as the fancy of those that looked at them might choose to dictate.

"Well," said Jack, "I think this is worth coming to see.,"

"And so do I," said Cicely.

"It is curious enough," said Turpin; "but now let us try if any one lives here, which I fancy, after all the show of its desertion, must be the case."

He hit heavily with his riding-whip upon the sill of one of the windows of the house; echo alone returned any answer to his blows. The darkness now was, for the time of day, something absolutely appaling; and the birds flew scanning by with terror, sufficiently manifest by the irregular manner of their flight. The horse's snorted and pawed the ground with an impatient restlessness, while a strange moaning sound, from some gathering gale of wind, seldom heard upon shore, come mournfully and fitfully upon the ears of the little party, who stood apparently so fair a chance of being exposed to the

"Pelting of the pitiless storm,"

as shelter was denied them.

"I won't stand this," said Jack.

"Nor I," said Claude. "I will force an entrance."

"Ah, here is an old knocker," said Turpin. "By the lord they shall think a dozen London postmen are at the door."

The hard knocking of Turpin produced no effect whatever; although he repeated it twice.

"Well," said Claude, "what is to be done now?"

"I can hardly tell," replied Dick, "unless we can manage by our united force to break in one of the doors."

"I think we may do better than that," said Jack. "Skill to overcome an obstacle, I take it, is always better than force; and I have the means of opening, I am quite certain, some one door of this house, provided no one is within."

"Indeed. What makes you say some one door?"

"Why, whoever last left the house, may have bolted every door but the one he left by. That he must only have locked, and I have tools with me that no lock ever resisted yet."

"I," said Dick, "you are right. Now I should hardly have thought of that. But, come Master Jack, if you can make us free of Bedella House, do so as quickly as you can, or we shall be drenched in the rain, which you cannot fail to perceive is thickening each moment."

"Indeed," said Claude, "it is, now, no despicable kind of shower."

CHAPTER CXLI.

SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES.

CLAUDE was right enough as regarded the rain, for it began to come down with that perpendicularity which is incidental to the discharge of the contents of storm clouds. Jack, with a picklock in his hand that he knew well the use of, took his

way to what appeared to be the principal door of the house, thinking that such was the most likely one of which the persons last occupying had left.

"Ah, that will do," cried Dick. "We shall get shelter now."

"No," said Jack, as he tried the lock, "no—yes—stop, yes.—It yields. It is only rusty, I suppose from long disuse, that is all. There it goes; now if this has been the last door opened, there are no bolts to it."

As he spoke he gave a push to the door, but although it was evidently not made fast by any legitimate means, something impeded its opening; and then, before Jack could make a surmise upon the subject, a gruff and somewhat surly voice, cried—

"What's the row now? Who's there?"

"Hilloa!" cried Dick, "we have roused up somebody at last. Push it open, Jack. Push it open."

"Help me!"

Dick sprung at the door, and his strength united to Jack's forced the door open, to the distraint of a hulking ill-looking fellow in the hall, who had been striving to hold it shut, and who was fairly thrown down in the violence with which it was forced open.

"What do you mean by this?" he cried.

"Just what you see, my friend," said Dick.

"But this is not the way to come into an honest man's house, confound you all."

"If it be an honest man's house," replied Dick, "it cannot be your's, so you have no cause for grumbling, for if nature took the trouble, my friend, to write rogue on any one's face, she did upon your's. But, I suppose, you have been told that before, and if so, I beg to apologise for mentioning it to you."

The fellow who was dressed in a half-gamekeeper, half-ploughman sort of style, looked perfectly aghast at these words, as though in all his life no one had dared to be so impertinent to him.

"Come in—come in," cried Dick; "it's all right. Come in."

"Is it all right?" said the man.

"Yes, my friend. Quite so."

"Don't you make too sure of that."

The fellow advanced before Dick and barred the way, showing a frame of Herculean proportions, and a countenance of the most savage ferocity.

"I never say anything is all right," said Turpin, "unless I mean it; and now, bully, get out of the way."

"I won't."

"You won't?"

"I told you so; and if you don't be off, I'll soon make you."

Dick retreated a step; but it was only to get the fellow out from the doorway, and it had the effect, for the man supposing he had produced some effect from his threats, followed him closely and raised his arm. Dick, with a spring, closed upon him.

"Oh, that's it," said the fellow. "You want a fall, do you?"

"I have no objection if you can give me one."

"Haven't you? then look to your neck."

"Keep off, Claude," cried Dick, as he saw Duval was about to interfere; "keep off. Let him alone. I can manage. Get inside all of you out of the rain. I'll come directly."

"Will you? Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the brutal fellow, as he clasped Dick in his arms. "Ha! ha! That's a hug!"

"Is it?" said Dick; "and that's a fall."

In an instant the fellow's legs flew up from under him, and he fell upon his head with a violence that left him insensible upon the ground for a few moments.

"Ah!" said Dick, as he shook himself and drew a long breath; "I thought that I could show you a dodge in wrestling, unless you had been to a better school than was likely to have had you for a pupil."

During the time of this brief contest, our friends had all taken refuge in the hall of the house, and then Dick joined them. The discomfited bully rose to a sitting posture and rubbed his head. He uttered some awful oaths.

"Silence!" cried Dick. "I won't have any swearing here."

The fellow was silent. He seemed to have a thorough dread of Dick, and slowly rising, he staggered into the hall, saying—

"If it's shelter you want, I havn't got no objection. Come in."

"Thank you for nothing," said Dick; "we are in."

"I always wishes to make everybody comfortable," added the fellow; "I am sure, that I do."

"Oh, you are disposed to be civil now, are you? If you had taken the same thought some time ago, you would have spared making that hole in the gravel there, outside the door, with your thick head."

"Oh master, let by-gones be by-gones," said the fellow, with a rough attempt at good humour, which sat most awkardly upon him; "I don't bear any malice."

"Very well," said Dick. "Light us a fire then somewhere, and we will pay you for your trouble."

"This way master. I lives here, and takes care of the old house. I've got a bit of a fire here in one of the rooms. This way, master, if you please. This way—this way—to the small parlour—a-hem!"

The man brawled out these words so loud that Dick, said to him—

"What are you making all that noise about? We are none of us destitute of the sense of hearing, thank God."

"Did I speak loud, master?"

"Did you? To be sure you did."

"Ah, it's only one of my little funny ways, master, that's all. If you comes to know me, I'm full on 'em."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, master. This way if you pleases."

Claude took the opportunity of the fellow being a little in advance to whisper quietly to Dick Turpin.

"We had better be fully upon our guard with this fellow. I am quite convinced that he has confederates in the house, and that his loud talking was merely to give them a hint to keep out of the way while we went to the room he speaks of."

"I am of the same opinion."

"I thought you would be. Let us be careful."

"Yes, and keep close together."

The man suddenly turned, and said—

"You will excuse my being all of a muddle here, gentlemen, as I live all by myself, you see; and there ain't no woman folks in the place to put it a bit to rights, you see. This is the room, master, if you pleases."

He called Dick master, and evidently stood in fear of him since the heavy fall he had had from Dick's superority in the art of wrestling, in which skill is so superior to mere brute strength, for as regards the latter, the man could have eaten Dick up. They all followed him across a long hall, and though two empty rooms, and then down six steps into a small apartment that at one time had been a sort of waiting-room. There was no grate in the place usually so filled, but upon the hearth a wood fire was slowly burning. The smell of tobacco was powerful in the room. As regards furniture, there stood in the centre of the apartment a table which, from its shape, had evidently at one time been fixed to a wall, and in its best days had been, too, rather a gorgeous piece of furniture, for the legs of it were carvred and gilt. Some chairs of all sorts and sizes, from the low *prie-Dieu* to the large old fashioned arm-chair were there likewise, and they completed the furnishing of the room, for upon the floor there was nothing in the shape of a carpet.

"Sit down, and rest yourself," said the fellow. "There's plenty of seats, you see, master."

"Yes," said Dick, "and of all sorts. I suppose these come from some of the other rooms of the house?"

"Oh, yes, master, there's no end of old traps in the place."

"Indeed. Is it furnished then?"

"Why, you may say it is, master."

"Who owns it?"

"The lawyer, old Griffiths, is the only one as I sees. He gives me, you see, a trifle to look after it, and keep the doors and windows shut."

"And you live here all alone?"

"Oh yes, master, all alone. I wander about a little, and looks after the garden, and so on; but as you say, master, I lives here all alone."

"A solitary sort of life."

"Oh, very, master, very. Would you like to take anything just to keep the damp out, master?"

"No," said Claude, quickly.

The fellow looked at him as though he would have said—"I did not ask you," but he suppressed the inclination to be uncivil, and merely added—

"Perhaps you will, master, though, for all that."

"No," said Dick. "I don't drink anything before dinner. We will only wait till the rain has gone off a little, and then push on. You are sure you tied up the horses inside that porch, Jack?"

"Oh, yes," said Jack, "they are safe enough, and under cover, too. I think we had better go now. I don't hear the rain."

"Let us listen."

"I'll go and look out and see how the weather is," said the man.

Before they could have said a word in objection, the fellow left the room, and they heard him walking very quickly away.

"Dick, I don't like this place," said Claude. "Let us get out of it as soon as we possibly can. The rain without is better than danger within."

"I am of your opinion," said Turpin. "I feel as certain as I am of my own existence, that yon fellow is a scoundrel of the first-water. Ah! what's that?"

The door of the room was suddenly slammed, but it did not close perfectly. Some one uttered an imprecation on the outside, and when Dick Turpin and Claude both rose and made towards the door, they distinctly heard footsteps running from it at a hard rate.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Claude.

"Why," said Jack, "it just means that we should have been shut in here, if I had not, as we first came into the room, slipped the little bolt at the under part of the lock out. That, as you see, prevented the door from going close, and he who came to shut it was in too great a hurry to stay to see what the obstruction was."

"Confound his impudence," said Dick.

"Look to your pistols," cried Claude.

"Ay, we shall perhaps have a fight for it yet."

"When, oh, when will all this end," said Cicely. "Oh, Claude, let us leave this place at once."

"We will, dear one, if we can."

"Come on," said Jack. "This way to the outer door. This way. We ought to lose no time now. Up those steps. Don't you recollect now the way?"

"Yes—yes. Quick, oh, quick," said Cicely.

They ascended the steps and rushed through the empty room to which they led. They reached the door of it—It was fast shut, and seemed as firm as a rock!

"Ah! we are caught!" said Dick.

"It looks like it," replied Jack.

"This is too ridiculous!" exclaimed Claude. "Yon rascal can hardly suppose that we are going to stand any of his nonsense, or that a closed door is to bar the way against three men."

As he spoke, Claude flung himself against the door vigorously, but the solid oak of which it was composed effectually resisted any effort of his to force it, and he was compelled to give up the attempt in some chagrin a its complete failure.

"It won't do," said Dick.



"So I see."

"What will become of us?" said Cicely.

"Be under no apprehensions," added Claude. "We arerather too strong a party to play any serious tricks with. How is the window situated, Jack?"

"Stop a bit," said Jack. "Never mind the window; here is something better. If I mistake not, this is a door, although well enough for ordinary purposes, concealed in the panelling."

They all proceeded to the part of the room where Jack was, and there they saw sure enough that there was a door which had been at one time, after the house had been built, doubtless cut out of the panelling, so that moulding and all fitted tolerably exact, giving it the appearance as though it had been made for a concealed door, when, in all likelihood, no such notion was entertained by its architect.

"Is it fast?" said Claude.

"They would hardly neglect it," said Dick.

"They?" exclaimed Cicely. "Then you think there are many here? Have we fallen into bad hands?"

"Hush! hush!" said Claude; "I pray you compose yourself. There is some little mystery in this affair, which a little time will, no doubt, quite completely disclose."

"People who think themselves wonderfully clever," said Jack, "often neglect obvious precautions. This door is only locked, and now it is not even so well fastened as that."

As he spoke, he skilfully picked the lock of the door. A quantity of dust came from the top and sides of it, and they saw beyond it what at first appeared to be a most particularly gloomy passage.

"Come on," said Claude. "Let this lead to where it may it will be better policy to follow it than to remain where we are; for here in this room we were, no doubt, intended to remain, so that by leaving it we may defeat some plan or combination against us."

"What a gloomy place," said Turpin, as he drew a pistol from his pocket and shook the priming.

Claude had pushed on, and upon feeling the opposite wall, which was not above four feet from the door, that Jack had opened, he came upon something soft like cloth. Upon pushing more strongly it yielded before him, and to the agreeable surprise of the whole party a door, covered with cloth and destitute of all fastenings, swung open, and admitted them into a spacious and most elegant apartment. Situated as this room was into which they now all made their way, it had, doubtless, at one time been the principal dining-room of the mansion. The walls were covered with faded tapestry. The ceiling was richly painted in arabesque, and the five windows were, in some of these compartments, fitted with crimson glass, that gave a sort of richness of colouring to everything within the apartment. One of these windows opened into a small conservatory. It would appear, that from this room some of the furniture of the apartment into which they had been shown by the man had been taken; for they saw in niches in the wall, several tables similar to the one they had noticed in what he called his room. A quantity of furniture, of one kind and another, was scattered about the place, but all in the most miserable state of disorder, and absolute delapidation from sheer neglect. The dust lay upon some things like black snow.

"This is at all events," said Dick, as he glanced rapidly around him, "a change for the better, Claude. Do you not think it is?"

"I do," said Claude. "But you are right to be upon your guard, Turpin, and I will do the same."

Claude took the pistol upon which he knew he could most depend from his breast-pocket, and carefully examined it to feel certain that it was in a state of efficiency for use.

"All's right!" he said.

"The best thing we can possibly do," said Jack "is to make our way to our horses, and be off. The storm has abated, so I don't think we need wish to protract our stay here."

As though to give the most startling contradiction to the words of Jack, there came, at this moment, a clap of thunder that seemed as if it shook the house to its foundations. The echoes appeared perfectly interminable, and rolled and rattled about the wings of the building as though some wild animal was seeking admittance. Cicely clung to Claude's arm. Dick made his mouth up with a whistling

expression ; and Jack placed his hands over his ears to shut out the dismal and startling reverberations of the

"Loud-mouthed artillery of Heaven!"

"Well," said Dick, "what do you think of that?"

"It was terrible," said Jack.

"It was, indeed," exclaimed Cicely; "oh, let us leave this place, for the very atmosphere is full of horrors. From the first moment I crossed the threshold, a shuddering feeling came over me, and it seemed as though a voice not of this world whispered to me, 'Turn and fly.'"

"My Cicely," said Claude, "you do, indeed, now allow your imaginations to play with you."

"Well," said Dick, "I am not in love with the place, and storm or no storm, I am willing to leave it as soon as you like, Claude. Only say the word."

At this moment, when they were in a state of doubt and hesitation as to what to do, a door that they none of them had noticed, suddenly opened, and an old man with white hair, and quite a patriarchial look, made his appearance.

CHAPTER CXLII.

DANGER THICKENS.

THEY all looked in astonishment at the old man, and the old man looked in astonishment, real or pretended, at them. For a few moments not a word was spoken on either side, and then Claude, advancing and adroitly placing himself between the old man and the door at which he had entered, said—

"Pray, sir, who are you?"

The old man made a half-kind of bow, as he replied—

"Really, gentlemen, I might, considering all things, ask that question of you."

"We are overtaken by the storm, that is all," said Claude, "and took shelter here, where we have encountered some strange treatment."

"Strange treatment, sir?"

"Yes, a man locked us in a room, with what intention is best known to himself."

"Alas! alas!"

"But we are prepared for anything, and if violence is the object, we are just about the worst people it could be tried upon."

"Dear! dear!" said the old man, as if in great grief. "Was the man tall, sir? and, though I say it perhaps who ought not, was he rather ill-favoured."

"Yes, tall," said Claude.

"And most decidedly ill-favoured," said Dick.

"Then, gentlemen, I grieve to say it, instead of encountering me, you have unfortunately seen my poor deranged son."

"Deranged?"

"Yes, gentlemen; mad—quite mad. His manner is sometimes to strangers all courtesy, and he will declare, to the surprise and confusion of the people, that he has known them for years, and insist upon treating them as old acquaintances; and then at times he will be so rude and insolent, that people will fancy this rather a den of malefactors, than a peaceful old deserted house. Alas! alas!"

The old man wiped away a tear.

"This is extraordinary," said Dick.

"My poor, poor, boy," muttered the old man. "You see, gentlemen, if I did not live with him, who would?"

"But what do you mean?" asked Dick.

"Why, you see, sir," replied the old man, "the house now belongs to Colonel Vesey; and as I was many years with my old woman (rest her soul! she's gone now) in the service of the family, they gave us this house to live in, and what with the kitchen-garden, and the grapes the ladies used to take some of in the summer-time, when they come to view the house, we did pretty well."

"And brought your mad son here?"

"Alas, sir, he was in a lunatic asylum, but they said he was incurable, so we took him back to us, with the hope that love with something like liberty, and old well-remembered faces about him, he would be a little better. Alas! alas! I think the sight of him hurried my poor wife, rest her soul! into the other world."

"This is melancholy," said Cicely.

"Yes, sir, it is. It is."

"And so," said Claude, "you live here all alone with the poor lunatic?"

"I do, sir, I do. God help me!"

Conversation was now for a few moments put an end to by the rain, which came down so tremendously, and made such a clatter upon the glass roof of the conservatory close at hand, that it would have been difficult indeed for any one to make himself heard. Jack was the only one who had said nothing to the old man; but he was not an unobservant spectator of theinterview between his friends and that venerable personage.

"It's coming now," said Dick, as he glanced through one of the windows. "It can't last long though at this rate."

"Impossible," said Claude; "it would be a second flood if it did."

"Pray, gentlemen," said the old man who had been wiping his eyes, and doing what he could to recover his composure, after conversing upon such a dismal subject as his mad son. "Pray, gentlemen, make yourselves at home here, I beg of you, as long as you like."

"Thank you."

"You need not at all tarry. I can find you clean seats in the drawing-room, for we keep that always in good order, for visitors you see, gentlemen; but this room has not been come into for I don't know when."

"Indeed?"

"No, gentlemen. But as I heard you here, I thought it was my duty to come and speak to you."

"You are very kind."

"Dear, dear, how the rain does come down to be sure. Please to follow me, gentlemen, and I will lead you to the drawing-room in a minute. This way, if you please, gentlemen, this way."

The old man led the way through a little ante-room; and then opening one of a pair of folding doors, he said—

"That is the green drawing-room, which used to be the most favourite room in the house, they tell me, long, long, ago; and to tell the truth, it's quite a pleasant lightsome room, now."

The room into which they all entered fully merited the encomiums of the old man, and no one, to look at it, could doubt that it had been a favourite apartment. The walls of this drawing-room were hung with pale green damask; and what made that hanging much more estimable was, that it was not deformed by the odious figures with which old tapestry is mostly covered, presenting such vile and abominable imitations of humanity, as must be offensive to any one with the smallest pretentions to real taste. This tapestry had flowers richly embossed over its entire surface; and the roof of the room was painted so as to give by its shadowing an excellent appearance of a dome ceiling. The heavy and voluminous window curtains, the rich carpeting, and the covering of the old chairs and couches, were all of green silk worked with flowers, and similar to those upon the tapestry, so that there was quite a charming unity about the decorations of the place, which is as rare as it is really attractive.

"This is, indeed, a handsome room," said Claude.

"Very," said Dick; "and what a view."

They all went to the window, from whence there was a view into a garden, tolerably well kept.

"We are at the back of the house," said Claude.

"Yes," replied the old man. "The back contains all the principal rooms, as it looks to the south; and has a pleasanter aspect than the other portions of the mansion. Ah, gentlemen! will you excuse me?"

"For what?"

"For my great anxiety to look after my poor boy, which compels me to leave you by yourselves for a short time, if you will permit me to be so very rude."

"Certainly—certainly," said Dick. "Go, by all means."

"I will bring you a bottle of my poor wife's—rest her soul! she is dead and gone—ginger wine, gentlemen. It will keep the cold and damp out of your stomachs."

The old man, with looks of anxiety, left the drawing-room by another door, which he carefully closed after him.

"Poor old man," said Cicely. "What a cheerless life his must be; indeed, I pity him from my soul."

"You do?" said Jack.

"Yes; and do not you?"

They all looked at Jack, who had his finger upon his lip, as a sign of caution; and then he added, in a low tone—

"Does he not look venerable with his white hair?"

"Yes—yes," said they all.

"Hush!—hush! I——"

"What—what?"

"I saw it was a wig!"

They were all silent for a few moments, and then Jack added—

"Yes, a wig!—Actually, a wig! Now a man may wear a wig; but there is no occasion for his wearing a white one."

"Not the least," said Dick. "But are you sure, Jack?"

"I am."

"Then he is an old rogue. By heavens! there was, at times, a something about his manner, that I did not like."

"But what do you suspect?" said Cicely.

"Everything," replied Jack.

"That is as vague as it is comprehensive."

"Yes, but when a man disguises himself in such a way, it cannot be for a good purpose."

"Let us search the room while he is gone," said Claude Duval. "You see that odd stain on the carpet—what is it?"

There was a large stain upon the rich carpet close to the table, that occupied the centre position in the room; and the more they all looked at it, the more suspicious they all thought it was, and yet could not tell what made it so exactly. It is strange how the thoughts of several people will take one direction, and yet each dread as it were to be the one who shall become the actual exponent of the idea. Thus was it with our party as they looked upon the stains in the carpet. One and all, if they had spoken interrogatively upon the subject, would have said——

"It is blood?"

This was a word, however, that they each appeared to dread to give the slightest utterance to. Perhaps if the men had been alone they would have spoken firmly, but they none of them wished to alarm Cicely

"It is—strange!" said Dick.

"Very," said Claude.

"I think so, too," said Jack.

This word "strange," stood to them all in lieu of blood.

"Stop," said Jack. "Before we search this room, let us see if we can in any

way secure ourselves from interruption; I should think that these doors—and I see but two—have some mode of fastening.

He approached the doors and found that they were easily to be secured by little bolts. He did so, and they all began a vigorous search in the really magnificent room.

It was strange, very strange how suddenly, as it were, they should all be inclined to the opinion that something was to be found in that room, confirmatory of their suspicions that they were in anything but good company in that old uninhabited house; but such was the case.

Gradually, however, this notion weakened, as they found nothing upon which it could be fed.

They looked behind all the cumbrous pieces of furniture, and beneath all the tables that had covers, but they found nothing that could be construed into having the slightest suspicious tendency.

"Are we mistaken?" said Dick.

"No," said Jack, "I'd lay my life we are not."

"But candidly speaking now," said Claude, "what is it that we suspect, and what is it that we expect to find by all this searching in holes and corners?"

"Don't know," said Jack, as he pressed his hand upon his brow. "Call it superstition if you will, but I feel as though we were in this place surrounded by an atmosphere of murder."

"Murder?"

"Yes, that is the word—murder!"

"Oh, horror!" exclaimed Cicely. "Is that the translation of all our thoughts? Let us fly from here, Claude. Let us fly at once. All the dangers of the road are as nothing compared to the uncertain and unknown horrors of this place."

Claude drew a long breath.

"Cicely," he said. "Banish fear. I ask you as a favour to me, to permit that we stay and unravel this frightful mystery."

"Claude— Claude!"

"Nay, if you feel that you are quite unequal to the task of remaining here, we will even go. What say you friends? Shall we go at once and brave the rain without, or stay and have our imaginations trifled with here?"

"I for one," said Dick, "would stay; but as Cicely is with us, I think we all owe to her so much deference and courtesy as to leave the decision on her words entirely."

"I thank you," said Claude, "for those words."

"And I too thank you," said Cicely; "and when I beg that we go, believe me I please myself with the idea that I am perhaps doing you a service likewise, by removing you from this place."

Dick with a smile upon his face, was about to say something kind to Cicely, when they were startled by an exclamation from Jack, who had been diligently continuing the search in the room, by lifting up the tapestry that hung from the walls in different places, and carefully looking behind it.

"A cupboard!" he cried.

"A what?" Jack.

"A cupboard; and—and—upon the threshold of it a—a—a—"

"A what?"

They all rushed to the spot.

"A pool of blood," said Jack, in a low deep voice. "Look at it. Can any one look upon those stains and for one moment doubt their origin?"

A feeling of thorough conviction that the stains were those of blood came over them all, and as they gazed at them a shuddering feeling of horror crept across their minds. If they had all spoken at once they would have said, with one voice—

"What is in the cupboard?"

Jack knew what they all meant by the expression upon their faces, and nodding his head, he said—

"We will see."

The cupboard-door yielded the momen a button was turned. It swung open; and slowly, with a hideous fall, the corpse of a murdered man, dabbled in gore, fell to their feet!—Bang! bang! went some one's fist at one of the doors that Jack had fastened—bang! bang!

CHAPTER CXLIII.

THE FIGHT IN THE GARDEN.

Cicely did not shriek, but her eyes were fixed in horror upon the corpse which had fallen at their feet from the cupboard. It was at once the most awful proof that could have been tendered to them of all their worst suspicions regarding the place in which they were. No longer could Claude now doubt the fact; and, without heeding the knocking at the door, he said to Dick Turpin—

"Let us fight our way out of this place at once. The very air of it seems full of blood. It is a den of murderers."

Bang! bang! went the blows upon the door again.

"Who can that be?" said Dick; and then advancing to the door, but standing not in a line with it, for he knew not what amount of trickery might not be intended, he said, in a loud fearless voice—

"Who is there?"

"Fly!" said a voice from the other side of the door. "The officers of justice are at the great gate leading into the grounds, and they ask for persons such as ye are. Fly from here, and save yourselves."

"What shall we do?" said Dick in a whisper to Claude.

"Do you think the information regarding the officers is true?"

"I do; for how else could those people know anything of our being pursued at all? It must have some foundation."

"True.—true. We have enemies, then, both within and without this place; but we will not shrink from any of them."

"What are you about to do?"

"Secure the one, for I don't think there are more, who is at this door. You may depend the great object is to get us out of this room, so as to avoid the chance of the discovery we have already made."

"It may be so. But would you open the door?"

"Yes. Hark, what is that?"

The loud tingling of some heavy bell at a distance reached their ears, and the voice from the other side of the door cried—

"Open—open and follow me; I will lead you clear. The fact is, we are no better than we should be in this house, and I confess that we sometimes commit robbery; therefore if you are the persons sought for by the officers, we have a kind of fellow-feeling with you, and the sooner we can expedite you on your way the better we shall be pleased."

The mouth of the speaker of these words was very near the key-hole, so that they were all distinctly enough heard by our little party in the room. Suddenly, and without by a single word giving the man who was without the least idea of what he was about, Claude opened the door. The fellow half fell into the room, and Claude completed his entrance into it by seizing him by the head and dragging him completely across the threshold of it, while Jack closed the door again. This man was one whom they had not seen before, and he struggled with Claude fiercely, and actually succeeded in getting a knife from his pocket. He had, however, met with his master in regard to strength, for Claude clutched him by the throat and held him at arm's-length, until he got black in the face, and the knife dropped from his useless hand.

"Hold open the cupboard-door, Jack," cried Claude.

"Yes—yes."

"We will get rid, for the time present, of one of these rascals."

"And you could not put him into a more appropriate place," said Dick. "Cram him in, Claude, and there is some company for him."

Not without a feeling of repugnance, Dick lifted the dead body by the clothes, and crammed it into the cupboard along with the half-strangled ruffian, and then Jack slammed the door and fastened it.

"Now then," said Dick. "It's off and away with us as soon as possible. Come on, and keep your arms in readiness, for I am getting more uneasy than I can well express about our horses."

"And I, too, feel somewhat more than uneasy about them," said Claude "and would go through any danger to get at them. They are our only hope."

Cicely now crept close to Claude, and looked interestingly at him, as though she would have implored him not to fly into unnecessary danger for her sake; and he answered that look by whispering to her—

"Fear nothing, my Cicely; I feel convinced that we shall pass scatheless through this danger. My time has not yet come."

Cicely shuddered.

Those words, in their extended implication, might be a prophecy that his time was to come—a time at which he should die a death of violence. How she prayed that before that happened she should be even

"As a clod of the valley."

"Are you ready?" said Dick.

"Yes."

"And your pistols well primed? A miss-fire might be our destruction now. We may have to fight our way."

"All ready," said Claude. "Lead on. I have an extra care, you know, here in Cicely."

"No," said Dick, "no. We will all perish rather than desert her, or permit a hair of her head to be injured. Yourself, Claude, cannot do more. Now, come on. You and I, Jack, will lead."

"No," said Jack. "Let Claude and Cicely be the main body. You take the advance, and I will bring up the rear, for remember, that our foes are just as likely to strike from behind as in front."

"True—true. You are right, Jack. Keep a wary eye, and I fully believe after all that your post is the one of the greatest danger."

All this passed very rapidly. Much of it was spoken simultaneously, so that not above a few moments were consumed in the arrangements before they left the room in which they had confined the living and the dead in the cupboard. Their great object was to get out of the house by the front, if possible, and so reach their horses, which once obtained, they would find that their danger was not half what it now seemed. But that house had such a world of intricate passages about it, and so many windings and turnings, that it was next to impossible they should find their way easily. Perseverance, however, will do wonders; and if three men, with a brace of pistols each in their hands, and three such men too as our adventurers were, could not get out, any other persons might well indeed despair of doing so. Heaven only knows how many had so despaired in that haunt of the murderer; for that the house was a den of that description, there could be now no shadow of a doubt. Jack performed his duty as a rear-guard well; and as they passed a staircase he fancied he heard a shuffling noise, as if some person was hurriedly going up it. He had only just time to glance up, when, from a great height, there came down an immense feather bed. If it had fallen upon Claude and Cicely it must have struck them down, and then they might have become an easy prey. Two men ran partially down the staircase at the moment, but Jack had called out, "Forward—quick!" in good time, and Claude had caught Cicely round the waist and darted on a couple of yards, so that the bed fell between them and Jack. Turning then, he saw the two men descending the stairs; Jack and he both fired at once, and a loud cry of pain sufficiently testified that the shot had taken effect upon one of them.

"On—on," cried Dick. "I can see the conservatory, and our horses cannot be far off. This way—this way!"

Dick had opened a door which led into a very pretty, although small, apartment, at the further end of which was a glass door, most of the pains in which were exquisitely stained and wrought in flowered devices. Through this glass door a conservatory could be plainly seen, and the party now hurried forward full of the hope that it was the one not far from which they had tethered their horses.



To their chagrin, however, when they reached it they found that it opened upon the back of the house instead of the front, and that they stood upon the verge of a large garden. Still they saw no enemies.

"We must have our cattle," said Dick, "and the easiest way will be now to get to the front of the house by the garden. Stay here, all of you, while I go upon the expedition."

"Nay, let me go," said Jack.

Dick shook his head.

"You would have a little more difficulty than you are aware of in getting Black Bess along," he said. "Your cattle probably not have been made such pets of, and will come with me; but my Bess is my friend and companion, and from the great indulgences she has had, is as self-willed as a spoilt girl."

He darted off as he spoke, and Jack then climbed up some iron lattice-work which was close to the conservatory, to get a good look about him, which otherwise was prevented by the mass of flowering shrubs that grew in great luxuriance around. They had all concluded, that if there were any officers in pursuit of them, that it was in the front of the house they were to be found; but the moment Jack got a clear view over the shrubs, he cried to Claude, in a voice of alarm—

"By Heaven, they are here!"

"Who? Who?" said Claude.

"Our foes—the officers."

"No—no. Surely—"

He was up the lattice-work in a moment, and there he saw, over a portion of the garden-wall, a considerable distance from where he was, no less a number than half-a-dozen men scrambling. From their appearance he had no doubt in the world that they were officers. The highwayman was quite as good a judge, in those days, of a Bow-street runner as the latter prided himself upon being of a highwayman. Two of them had dropped into the garden, and the other four were partly upon the wall and partly in the act of dropping from it into a soft flower-bed that was at the foot.

"How easily they could be picked off," said Jack.

"They might, indeed."

"And yet it would look almost like murder, would it not, Jack?"

"It would be absolute murder, Claude. No—no. Let them attack us and get into fair fight with us, and I would as soon put a bullet through one of them as look at him; but I must own I should not fancy firing at them as they are now clinging to yon wall."

"And yet," said Claude with a sigh, "I doubt much if they would be one half so scrupulous towards us."

"Of course they would not. But let us think ourselves something better, Claude, although we are knights of the road, than thief-catchers."

"We will, Jack."

"Thank the fates, here is Dick Turpin with the horses all safe. At all events, that is something gained."

"It is everything," said Claude, as he sprung down from the lattice. "It is everything. Stay, Jack, and watch them a moment or two."

Jack remained upon the lattice watching the officers who were making so determined a descent into the garden of the house, while in a few words Claude managed to inform Dick Turpin of the state of affairs.

"So," said Dick, "they will fight it out with us at last, will they?"

"So it seems."

"Well, they must have their own way so far."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, as regards the fight. Here are the horses all safe and sound, but they would not have been so but for Bess."

"Indeed!"

"No. You will be amused to hear that when I got to the railing by the balcony to which we had secured them, I heard some one groaning and swearing alternately. Upon getting nearer, I saw, sitting upon the ground, about as disreputable a looking scoundrel as I ever looked upon. 'Hilloa!' I said, 'friend, what's the matter?'—'That mare,' he said, pointing to Bess, 'is a fiend in the shape of a horse.'—'Why so?'—'The devil kicked me.'—'Then you must have interfered with the devil,' said I.—'Yes,' he replied with ferocity, 'and if she had not kicked me in the extraordinary way she did—for, confound her,

she twisted round to do it—I'd soon have cut off your retreat by securing your horses.' "

"Then we ran a risk, indeed," said Claude."

"We just did."

"What did you do with the rascal?"

"Oh, I only laughed at him and left him there. I think he was too much hurt to get up, to tell the truth."

"He deserves it."

"He does, indeed; but here are the horses all safe and sound, and refreshed, too. My advice is, that we had better go round the garden close to the wall, until we find some door, which we may be able to open and escape by. The vegetation, you see, is quite high enough to be above the horses' heads, although if we were to mount we should be above it."

"True—true."

"They are all over," said Jack.

"Which route do they take?"

"None at present; they are consulting about it."

"Then this is our time," said Dick. "When officers begin to consult, you are sure of some time before you. They are like a parcel of old women to talk. Each one will have his own opinion, resting upon some limited kind of experience he has had; and they will stick to it as destinctly as—the duce! What is that?"

A sharp crack sounded in the air; and something whistled over the heads of our little party.

"It sounds marvellously like a pistol bullet," said Claude.

"They have seen us," said Dick.

"Then it must have been Jack holding on to the lattice. Let us shift our quarters, or we shall have a few more such messages; and if they only chance to fire a little lower they may do some mischief to us."

"They may, indeed. Come on."

Turpin led his own mare, while Jack and Claude each led their respective steeds; Ciccly kept close to Claude; and so at a very slow pace, and making not the slightest noise, they crept along in a flower-bed close under the garden wall, hoping to double upon the officers. They heard another pistol-shot discharged at the spot they had just quitted, and Dick muttered—

"I do think the muddy-fated rascals will let us fairly give them the slip, in this simple way, after all. There they go again. Come on a little faster."

CHAPTER CXLIV.

THE ESCAPE.

They quickened their pace. The soft ground of the flower bed upon which they trod still concealed all sound of the horses feet, and Dick, who was foremost, looked carefully along the wall, with the hope of finding one of those doors which, for convenience, are commonly, at not very distant intervals, placed in the walls of very large gardens. None such appeared.

"Confound it," he said. "We shall get right round to the house again if we don't mind, and then there will be the devil to pay."

"The wall is high," said Claude, as he scanned it with his eyes.

"Ah," said Dick, "I know what you are thinking of; but it won't do. Bess knows what a jump is, but she could not clear that."

"So I was thinking."

"Stop," said Jack.

"What for?"

"I have an idea."

"Out with it, then," said Dick, with a smile. "I will not say as the man said to his friend, when he made a similar speech, 'Where did you steel it?' Out with it, Jack; I have no doubt it is a good one."

"This wall is of brick."

"Ha!—ha!"

"Upon my word, Jack," said Claude, "it needs no

"Ghost to come and tell us that!"

"No," said Jack. "But if you keep yourselves profoundly quiet I will endeavour, seeing the decayed state it is in, to pull down enough of it, with the assistance of my knife here, to enable the horses to get out of the garden; and if the hole is big enough for them, we will conclude it is for us."

"Good," said Dick.

"Yes, that will do," said Claude. "Work away, Jack."

"We will all work away," said Dick. "I happen to have a good large knife, that some folks would call a small cutlass, about me, and if it don't displace the old rotten brick-work quickly, I don't know what will."

"Claude! Claude!" said Cicely.

"What is it?"

"Look!"

She pointed in the direction of a large bush of variegated laurel which was not far off, and there he saw one of the officers holding back two of the boughs, while, upon his knees, he glared at the party. The moment Claude saw him, the boughs collapsed again; and the man was gone, no doubt, to warn his comrades of where their prey was to be found.

"Did you see him?" said Claude to Dick.

The latter had a pistol in his hand, which he was presenting in the direction whence the man had disappeared, but he did not fire.

"It's a thousand to one," he said, "about killing him now. A leaf will turn a bullet in another direction, sometimes. We shall have to stand a siege."

"I fear we shall."

"Never mind. I like Jack's idea so well, that I think we may endure a few shots here, rather than not carry it out. Let us work away at the wall."

"Agreed.—Cicely?"

"Yes, Claude."

"Lie as flat upon the grass as you can, and you will be out of danger of any of those chance shots that may be whistling about our ears shortly."

"And you, Claude?"

"I must be up and at work. But if I do not know that you are safe, I shall be fit for nothing, Cicely."

"But—but—"

"Nay, dear one—time is precious, and we owe something to those who are risking their lives. Let me implore you to make no difficulties."

Cicely flung herself, weeping, upon the little edging of grass that shielded the flower bed, upon which the horses had been walking and where they now stood.

"Be under no undue apprehension," added Claude. "All will be well."

"I pray it may."

"Stay, you may do us some service. As you lay you can hold the bridles of the three horses. There, that will leave us at liberty to work upon the wall."

By this time, Jack, who had let nothing disturb him from his operations upon the wall, had got out several bricks; and as the commencement of any operation of that nature is one-half the trouble, they went on capitally. They were not to escape, however, without some interruption. Suddenly they heard a voice say—

"Surrender, in the king's name; or your deaths be upon your own herds."

"Hush: don't answer," said Claude. "Work away."

"We know you are on the other side of these laurels," added the voice; "and if you don't give yourselves up we will fire."

Not a word was spoken, and in the course of a minute or two more the same voice added—

"We are unwilling to shed blood, but we must and will take you all, alive or dead. Once more, as a last chance, will you surrender?"

There was no answer.

"Fire!" said a voice.

Both Claude and Dick stooped, and Jack darted aside, so that they escaped the bullets; but one of the horses was slightly wounded in the shoulder, and began to be restive in consequence.

"Confound it," said Dick. "I'd rather they hit me than Bess. Let us move the cattle on one side a little."

This was done, and hardly was it so, when Jack said in a low tone—

"All's right. I can see daylight through the wall now. We shall have it down by a good push."

"Think you so? Then here goes."

"All together," said Jack. "Now, Claude, push away. Once—twice—ah, there it goes. That will do."

A good portion of the old wall fell outwards, and immediately that it did so, Dick cried—

"Give them a volley. We owe it to them, and I really should not like to go away in their debt, even to the extent of a few lumps of lead."

They all three fired in the direction from whence the officers had discharged their pistols at them, and then, before even the smoke had cleared away, they fired again. A few dropping shots from the officers replied to this, and then a voice of a far different character to that which had spoken before, cried—

"Forward!"

In a moment, round the screen of laurel bushes rushed the officers, boldly determined to seize their prey.

"All's right," said Dick; "give it them."

He caught up a brick, and dashed it at the foremost officer, whom it hit in the face, and at once sent headlong to the earth insensible. A short but decisive contest now ensued. The officers grappled with their foes, but they soon felt all the disadvantage of fighting with men whose lives hung upon the issue of the contest. One of them was felled to the ground by a blow upon the forehead, with the butt-end of Claude's double-barrelled pistol. Dick threw one a tremendous fall upon the bricks, and Jack got another down, and was sawing away at his throat with the knife he had used to pull down the wall. It was lucky for this officer that his cravat was thick, and the knife blunt. In the course of three minutes our adventurers had all the field to themselves, and the only noise consisted of the shouts of murder of the officer Jack had got into so precarious a position.

"Let him go, Jack," cried Claude.

"You rascal," said Jack, not hearing what was said to him. "You rascal—so you thought you would get the better of us, did you?"

"Oh! murder—murder!—mercy!"

"Mercy, you vagabond. I wonder what sort of mercy you would have had upon us? But I'll send your head to the Secretary of State, that I will."

"No, no, Jack; let him get up," said Claude, as he laid his hand upon the shoulder of his old companion.

Jack slowly arose. The officer would have done the same, but Claude gave him a look, as he said,—"You had better not." And the man laid down again as flat as possible, looking as white as a sheet.

"Very well," said Jack. "The next time will do as well; and if I catch you again coming after us, off goes your head."

"I have had quite enough of it," said the officer. "I'll be off to London, and not trouble you any more, you my depend upon it, gentlemen."

"Now for it," said Dick.

They turned and saw that he was mounted.

"Let's off and away," he added. "We have had too long a stay here already. Mount, and let us be off."

"And no one is hurt?" inquired Cicely.

"Not I," said Dick.

"Nor I," said Claude.

"Nor I," said Jack. "So we are all right, you see, after all, and have cleared the road too."

"I am sure we have," said Dick. "But what is to become of this house, and the scoundrels that live in it?"

"That ought to be seen to," said Claude. "Ah, I have it. Here, Mr. Officer, get up; I want to throw a little job in your way.—Come here."

The officer was full of suspicions that some practical joke, of perhaps not a very pleasant character, was about to be played off upon him, and he only gave an odd sort of groan, as he replied—

"Thank you all the same, I'd rather lie down here till you are gone."

"Come here, I say."

"I won't look after you, gentlemen, indeed I won't."

"No mischief is intended you; I have only something to say to you. Come quickly or the consequences may be unpleasant, as we have no time now to throw away."

The officer thought it was best to comply. When he got close to Claude's horse, the latter said to him—

"This house is inhabited by murderers, who make a habit of waylaying persons who come to see it. You will find the corpse of one of their victims in a cupboard in a room hung with tapestry. I leave you to make of the information what you please. It is your business to see to it."

The officer looked aghast. Before he could say a word in reply, Claude, who had Cicely safely upon the horse with him, galloped away. He was closely followed by Jack and by Dick Turpin. They went on about a mile before they exchanged a word, and then Claude drew up and spoke to his friends.

"I must get back to Ealing Common."

"Well," said Dick, "this is not the way."

"No," said Claude, glancing at the sun; "it is not, I can see; but can you tell me, as a last favour, of any near route to that place?"

"Last favour?"

'Yes, I feel that I and Cicely are but as clogs in your way. We lead you into all sorts of unprofitable adventures and dangers, distracting you from your pursuits; and we feel that we ought to bid you good-by with our best and most grateful thanks for the service you have done us.'

"Oh, nonsense! I will see you safe to the common; as for fancying you are in any way indebted to me, don't think of it. Recollect, Claude, that we have one common enemy—the officers of the law; and that while contending with them, let the precise circumstances be what they may, I am fighting my own battles."

"To some extent, but——"

"Nay, now we will have no buts about it. Say no more upon this head; I am very well pleased to have made your acquaintance; and when you have placed her who, I do not wonder, is dearer to you than all the world beside or life itself, in a place of safety, I will bid you adieu; for the same road ought not to hold you and I. We should be too much for society."

"I thank you with all my heart."

"Come on, then: and as we trot gently down a lane here, which will lead us right, I will try and persuade you, Jack, to tell me more particularly how you escaped the—the gallows—that is the word, although it is an awkward one for gentlemen of our profession to utter."

Jack shuddered.

"Nay," said Dick, "if the theme be disagreeable to your feelings, say no more about it, Jack."

"No, no. There are people whom I feel that I can tell, and you are one of them; so you shall know all."

They now turned abruptly into a shady lane, that was entered close to some wheat-ricks, that cast a shadow over the mouth of it; and Jack was about to say something to Dick, when the sound of carriage-wheels came upon their ears.

"Ah!" said Dick, "do you hear that?"

"Yes," replied Claude; "it is in the lane too."

"Ay, as luck will have it; and I don't see why I should not combine a little business with pleasure."

"You will stop it?" said Claude.

"Why, yes, I thought of doing so. If you have any objection, though, only say so, and I will let it go by at once. It don't much matter."

"Oh, no, now. I have no sort of objection, Dick. Business after all is business, and the world scarcely will give us any credit for forbearance, I take it."

"Forbearance? oh, dear, no; it is quite impossible, let us do what we may, that we can be so bad as the kind, good-natured world is willing to make us out. But here it comes; what a close affair."

"It is, indeed."

The carriage, that now appeared at a turn of the lane, was a charioit, the blinds of which were all closed. A postillion drove it, and it was as plain a coach as could possibly be. It came on at a good pace. The postillion, when he saw our party, waived his whip for them to let him have a clear road. This was not exactly what Dick purposed doing. On came the carriage at an accelerated speed, and the postillion, with gestures that betrayed more passion than prudence under the circumstances, again made signs he would ride over Dick, if he did not get out of the way. Turpin drew a pistol from his pocket, and shutting one eye as he presented it, he affected to be taking a deliberate aim at the postillion, who first decreased his speed—then stopped entirely—and at last slipped off his horse in the road, calling out as loudly as he could—

"Murder! murder! there's a highwayman with a pistol as long as my arm taking aim at me! I'm a dead man! I'm a dead man!"

CHAPTER CXLV.

A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

"You will be a dead man if you don't stop that howling noise," said Dick as he rode up to the carriage. The postillion was silent. Claude accompanied Dick towards the carriage, for although he looked upon it as Dick's affair, yet he thought there might possibly be some danger which he would willingly assist to get over. The postillion had crept now to the road-side, and there he sat trembling, it being quite evident that there was nothing to dread from him. The only thing that a little surprised Claude was that he kept saying—

"It will be all blown! It will be all blown! Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

What it was, in the peculiar parlance of the postillion, that was to be blown, Claude could not conceive, but he turned all his attention to the carriage, at the door of which was Dick making ineffectual efforts to let down the blind, and see who was within the vehicle.

"They are shut up close enough," said Dick.

Scarcely had the words left his mouth than the blind was alertly let down from within, and to the surprise of both Dick and Claude there appeared at the window a young girl of such beauty and intelligence of feature, that for a few moments they could say nothing, so absorbed were they in contemplation of her exquisite countenance. This young creature was about fourteen or fifteen

years of age. Her dark hair hung in masses upon her neck and shoulders. Her complexion was the purest that could be imagined, and she had such liquid transparent blue eyes that it was truly ravishing to look upon them. And joined to this there was such an elegance of expression, that she fascinated them both beyond all power of withdrawing their eyes from so fair a vision. Truly, any one might have obtained an easy victory over them both at that moment, so completely thrown off their guard were they while in contemplation of that most lovely sight which God has given man the joy of looking upon—a young, beautiful, and innocent girl. A voice, however, from the interior of the carriage at once restored them to a consciousness of their position. The voice came from some one whom they could not see, inasmuch as the young girl blocked up the window. The tones were harsh and discordant.

"Say it! say it!" cried the voice.

The girl started.

"Yes—yes," she replied, "I will, Phillip."

'Say it at once!" cried the voice.

"Gentlemen," said the young creature, addressing Claude and Dick, "gentlemen, I beg of you to allow me to proceed; I am going to visit a dying father. Oh, gentlemen, if you have any pity, let the carriage proceed. I do not know but that this short delay may be the cause of imbittering my poor father's last moments, by denying him a sight of his child, and rendering him unhappy that I was too late to receive his blessing.

"Yes—yes. Oh, yes," said Claude.

"God will reward you."

'Hold!" said Dick.

"Nay, this must not be," said Claude. "Dick, you surprise me. You are not now acting in accordance with all I have heard, and all I know of you."

"Yes, I am, Claude."

'No—no."

"Yes, Claude, I am; do not prejudge me."

The young girl burst into tears, as clasping her hands, she said—

"Is there no feeling of pity in your breasts? Have you no compassion upon me? Oh, gentlemen, I pray you let me go!"

"Do not fancy, my dear," said Dick, "that it is from any want of feeling towards you that I detain you; I have a fancy to say a word or two to the gentleman who is with you in the carriage."

"No—no. Postillion drive on," said the voice.

"That he cannot conveniently do," said Dick; "Claude, remain where you are, while I go round to the other door."

"No, no," said the voice, again. Murder! help!"

"Oh, have mercy upon him," said the girl. "He is my friend now."

"Now?" said Claude; "was he not always?"

"No—but—but he has repented."

"Ah," said Dick, "I am glad to hear those words; I think I am upon the right scent; I thought I knew the voice of the person in the carriage; I will see if I know the face as well."

Dick had now got round the vehicle by the back, as being the nearer way, and notwithstanding some resistance from the inside, he wrenched the door open, and beheld a man fashionably dressed sitting in the carriage. The man tried to hide his face.

"Come," said Dick; "let me have a good look at you."

He forcibly turned the man's face round to the light, and then he added—

"So, it is you, Phillip Manning. You rascal, what do you do her?"

"I—I—you—I—"

"Come—come, no stammering. Who is this young girl?"

"My cousin."

"Cousin?"

"Yes," said the young girl, "this is my cousin Phillip. He is not a bad young

man as he used to be, and my father has forgiven all, and trusted him to bring me home to the lodge."

"Trusted him?"

"Yes, oh yes; I pray you to let us proceed at once. Remember, gentlemen, that it is my dying father that I am hastening to see."



PHILIP THREATENING GRACE IN THE PRISON.

"My dear, what is your name?" said Dick.

"Grace Manning."

"And your father?"

"Is Judge Manning."

"And do you know, for a fact, that this man is your cousin?"

"Oh, yes—yes; my father has told me so often."

"That is good authority. It is true that this rascal, Phillip Manning, who is perfectly well known in London, always represented hmself as the nephew of Judge Manning, but we never believed it. It seems, however, from what you say, that it must be true."

"Well," said the fellow, gathering courage, "what have you to say against it?"

"Nothing, Phillip. Do you know me?"

"I do not."

"Do you know Colonel Stillkey?"

"The devil!"

"No, not the devil, but Colonel Stillkey, to whom, you made, about a month ago, a certain proposition, which the colonel pulled your nose for insulting him by making. Perhaps, if you look at me more attentively, you will see some resemblance between me and the colonel whom you met at the hotel in St. James's."

"He—he—had a moustache."

"They are in my pocket."

"And lighter hair."

"The wig is in my travelling vallise."

"Confusion!"

"Yes, Mr. Phillip, I think you have named it rightly; it is confusion to you rather, you unmitigated scoundrel."

"What is the meaning of all this?" said the young girl." "What is the meaning of it all? Oh, sir, will you not let us proceed?"

"Where, my dear, do you suppose you are going?" said Dick.

"To London, to my father's house."

"Well, London lies east of here, and you are travelling due west. Now, listen to me. This precious cousin Phillip of yours, is deceiving you. Your father is no more ill, in all likehood, than I am, and this is a new scheme to take you away and secret you somewhere. It's a providential thing that you found us, or rather that we found you."

"It's false," cried Phillip. "It's false, I say. The old man has been lying ill in his bed for a week; and only when he was given over, he sent me to bring him his child, and you would, for some base purposes of your own, hinder me upon my errand of mercy and kindness."

"Ill in bed for a week?" said Dick, as he put his hand into his pocket. "Here is a newspaper, now—you need not look incredulous of what it contains; it is not the "Times," but really an honourable paper, and under the date of only the day before yesterday; here is the report of Judge Manning's speech at the opening of the sessions, at the Old Bailey."

Phillip fell back in the carriage with a groan. In his eagerness to lie with effect, he had, like most perverters of the truth, overshot the mark. The girl smiled through her tears, as she cried,——

"My father is not dying?"

"No, Miss Manning, certainly not."

"Oh, Phillip! Phillip!"

"Phillip, how could you be so wicked?"

"Yes, you now see what a pretty rascal this cousin of yours is; and you see you have had a narrow escape."

"You are deceived, Grace," said Phillip. "This man, who has taken so much upon himself, is evidently, by his appearance, a highwayman."

"But he has saved me from you, Phillip."

What language could have conveyed such a world of reproach as these few simple words did! If the villain had any heart at all, it must have been deeply wounded at that moment. He shook for a moment or two as though he had been suddenly seized with the ague, and then he said—

"It is all false. All false."

"It is for you to decide," said Dick to Grace.

"Decide? Oh no, there is no decision wanted. The truth is manifest. Oh, sirs, protect me from this bad man."

"With our lives," said Dick. "Now, Mr. Phillip, I will trouble you to get out of this vehicle. You see how your fair young cousin shrinks from you. She feels that your touch is contamination."

"But——"

"Get out, I say; get out, or my method of compelling you may not be quite so gentle or so pleasant an one as you would like, Master Phillip."

"You—you won't——"

"Won't what?"

"Kill me?"

"You don't suppose, now, that I would cheat the hangman in such a shabby way, do you? No, Phillip, hanged you will be some day, and it is not for me to interfere with the proper destination of such a personage as you are. Get out of the carriage at once, I say."

"Have mercy, I say—have mercy!"

"Get out!"

Phillip got out of the carriage, looking like some wretch who was condemned to death. The glance with which he regarded Dick had something in it that was essentially ridiculous, as fear in its more abject manifestations alway is. He fell or flung himself to the ground. Dick Turpin stooped over him for a moment, and then, with an exertion of strength, such as one could hardly have looked for from him, he fairly lifted Mr. Phillip and flung him into a stagnant ditch, the surface of which was plentifully covered by duck-weed, and which was close to the side of the road. The shriek of the discomforted ruffian mingled with the loud splash which he made in the water; and there he lay floundering about, and from the slimy slippery character of the mud, in which he found himself engulphed, quite unable for a time to extricate himself. Dick turned all his attention to the young lady in the coach, and speaking to her in a kind tone of voice, he said—

"Now, my dear, where would you like to go?"

"Home—home."

"But which? Back to the place which you call the Lodge, or home to your father?"

"To my father. I shall still be afraid of Phillip, if I go to the Lodge, for he may follow me there. Oh, you do not know how wicked he is, and how much I have had to forgive him."

"You can tell me nothing of his wickedness that I cannot fully believe. But will you trust yourself with us?"

"Yes—yes. Am I not much beholden to you?"

"But we are strangers."

"But you saved me from Phillip."

"Well, that is true. I will consult with my friends here, as to the best method of proceeding."

Dick turned to Claude, and said in a low voice—

"This young thing ought to be taken, for safety's sake, to her father, Judge Manning.—How can it be done?"

"He is the severest judge upon the bench, is he not?"

"Yes, and we will take a noble vengeance upon him, by restoring to him his only child."

"It is indeed a noble revenge."

"I knew you would agree with me in that."

"And I, too," said Cicely, who was just near enough to hear what they said, "I, too, fully agree with you, and honour you for the feeling which has dictated those words."

"Thank you," said Dick. "But the means of carrying out this resolution, do not readily present themselves. What do you advise, Claude? I regret

that some imperative business will prevent me from riding into London with the young creature."

"Then I will do it."

"You, Claude?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Oh, think of the danger."

"Nay, it may be

"——That nettle, danger,
From which we pluck the flower, safety;"

and besides, I have thought of a plan. Do you, Cicely, get into the carriage with the young girl. I will take the postillion's cap and jacket, and drive, while Jack follows on horseback leading my horse, who, as he has been for some time carrying double, will be glad of a rest."

"That will do," said Dick.

"And—and," interposed Cicely. "Do you think, Claude, you run no great risk?"

"In good truth, I think I run little, if any; I will first drive to the town at Ealing and lodge you in safety, after which I will take Grace to London.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

CICELY IN SAFETY.

THIS was certainly not a bad plan of operation, although as regarded the latter portion of it, namely, the taking Grace Manning to London by Claude, very much could not be said for the safety of the proceeding. Claude, however, as the reader has long since discovered was not one to allow himself to be turned from a purpose by considerations connected with his personal safety. He thought as little of the large rewards for his apprehension that were promulgated, as if no such sums of money had been in existence, and if he could but provide for the safety of Cicely, and then do a good turn to a young and innocent girl, he was happy.

"That rascal, Phillip, though," said Dick, "must not know of the route we take, I will tie him with his face to the tree."

Dick turned and glanced at the ditch where he fully expected to see Phillip, but no Phillip was there."

"Hillio! Gone!"

"Who? Who?" cried Claude.

"Why, that scoundrel, Phillip, to be sure."

"Jack, Jack," said Claude. "Why did you not look to him?"

"I—I, really," said Jack, "I was looking at what one so rarely sees, and yet what at the same time is the sweetest sight in all nature, the fresh, child-like, beautiful face of an ingenius young girl, that I thought of nothing else in all the world."

"Oh, Jack, Jack, you ought to be past all that."

"I hope when I am past all that," said Jack, "that I shall not have got past my grave, Claude. But this fellow must be near at hand."

"Surely, yes," said Dick.

As the latter spoke, he scrambled up the hedge, and took a long look around him. But no Philip was to be seen, and what was, if possible, more provoking too, Claude suddenly called out—

"And where is the postilion?"

"What! is he gone?"

"Yes."

"Now," said Dick Turpin, shaking his head, "I call all this rank negligence upon our parts. It is too bad. Here, under our very eyes, two persons, with neither of them courage enough to stand up like men, have fairly given us the slip."

"I know the reason," said Cicely.

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Then pray favour us with it," said Claude. "I see you smile, so it cannot be a very serious one, Cicely. What is it?"

"Perhaps I ought not to tell you; but the fact is, if the blind of the carriage window had been up, and neither of you had been able to take repeated glances at the, I will own, beautiful and engaging face of Grace Manning, you would have kept a far better guard upon your prisoners."

Claude and Dick glanced at each other.

"Guilty!" said Dick.

"Guilty!" said Claude.

Jack laughed as he said—

"Ah, Love's magic has, indeed, wrought. Come, let us search well for these fellows: they can't be far off. I will gallop down the lane this way, and one of you can take the other. I dare say we shall find them by a little perseverance."

The search was duly instituted, and although not a little perseverance was brought to bear upon it, not a vestige of either of the runaways could be found to reward it. This was especially provoking, inasmuch as it complicated the whole affair, by rendering it probable that Philip might yet attempt something to the discomfiture of the party; but Dick suddenly said—

"No; upon consideration, I do not see that we have much to dread; for when we come to consider the whole facts, we have no reason to believe that Philip Manning or the postilion, either, have the smallest idea of who we really are.

"There is something in that," said Jack.

"Well, then," said Claude, "let us pursue our original intention. Are you all agreed to that?"

"Yes—yes."

"Then the sooner we carry it out the better. Cicely, get into the carriage at once; and if you see any occasion so to do, I would not hesitate to confide to Grace Manning that she is in company with one of her own sex."

"It will ease the girl's mind much, I am sure," said Cicely, "if I be at once allowed to do so, Claude."

"Then do so, in the name of Heaven. Tell her to respect your secret, as we are at some pains to protect her."

"I will—I will."

"But mind, Cicely, do not bother this young thing with more secrets than cannot be helped. She need not know to whom she ows her rescue. If she should, as most probably she will, ask who we are, give the general name of Smith to us all, and say we are private gentlemen merely."

"I will, Claude."

Cicely now made her way to the carriage, and at once got into it. At the sight of a young man, which Grace Manning took her to be, she slunk as far off as possible into a corner; but when Claude shut the door, Cicely took her hand, saying—

"Be not afraid of me, I am not what I seem."

"Oh, do not touch me—do not be as bad as Philip, who would hold my hand while I loathed him."

"Nay, Grace, I am not a man. Look at me!"

Grace Manning looked long and earnestly in the face of Cicely, and then the soft, feminine, and really beautiful features of Cicely presented themselves as convincing proof that it was a female with whom she conversed."

"Ah, this is joy," she said.

"You are satisfied?"

"I am—I am. You are like me—some persecuted girl?"

"I am the wife of him who will take you in honour and in safety to your own proper home," said Cicely.

"How can I thank you?"

Grace threw herself into the arms of Cicely, but then rapidly extricating herself, with a blush, she said—

"I wish you had not this dress on."

"My dear, Grace, will you in return, for all that my husband is doing for you, do me one favour?"

"Oh, yes—yes."

"It is a very simple one. It is, merely, to abstain from asking me why I am thus disguised, and why I am not more communicative than I shall be respecting who and what we are. Will you promise me this much?"

"Yes, anything; and yet——"

"And yet, what, Grace?"

"I would fain, when I pray for the happiness of those who are dear me, know by what name to speak to God of you."

There was something so unaffectedly sincere—something so—if we may be allowed the expression—serenely pious in the way in which the young creature spoke these few words, that Cicely was too deeply affected to answer them for some few moments. She could only turn aside her head and weep.

"Forgive me," said Grace, "I have said something now to you that I ought not to have said. Can you forgive me?"

"Forgive? Ah, no! It is I who ought——"

She wept convulsively. Grace threw her arms round her, and implored her to be calm. She lavished endearments upon her that were worth a kingdom. It was in the midst of this affecting scene that Claude came to the window of the chaise. He had, by the assistance of Jack and Turpin, made himself very well up, from their united vallaises, and looked like a respectable kind of groom, with a top coat on to keep out the cold.

"What has happened?" he said.

"Nothing—nothing," said Cicely. "Only, Claude, you must do all you can for Grace, and preserve her from all danger."

"That will I, as sure as my name is Smith!"

Claude placed an emphasis upon the name of Smith, to awaken Cicely to the imprudence of calling him Claude, and then he added—

"Compose yourself. I am going to mount and be off directly. Do you feel unwell, Cicely?"

"No—no. All is well—go on."

Claude closed the door, and proceeded to depart with the chaise, containing two of the fairest and best of created beings. Claude's feelings were too much interested for the young creature, who had been rescued so opportunely from her rascally cousin, to permit him for a moment to shrink from the full carrying out of the project that had been agreed upon between him and Dick, for her restoration to her father; and yet, if we come to consider of it for a moment, we cannot fail to be struck by the enormous amount of risk he ran by so acting. He had to traverse a number of streets of the metropolis, where if it had only been for a moment whispered who he was, every arm would have been raised against him. Truly it required no small amount of chivalry of spirit, to overcome such feelings as these. But first he meant to proceed to the farm-house, at Ealing Common, where he knew that a friendly welcome, for his sake at first, and afterwards he felt certain, it would grow into one for her own, awaited Cicely. When she should be in safety, he felt with how much more ease of mind and spirit he should be able to devote himself for a few hours to the service of Grace Manning; and after all it was only the work of a very few hours to place her upon her father's threshhold. Dick had not yet parted with them, but he intended to do so now, as soon as they got within sight of the farm-house, which was to be the place of refuge of Cicely. Jack, as had been arranged, followed the carriage, leading

Claude's horse, and mounted upon his own, while Dick rode on, as a sort of advance guard, about twenty yards in the van. They thus proceeded, until by driving tolerably quick, they came within sight, from a rising piece of ground at the top of which Claude pulled up to allow the horses of the carriage to take breath, of Ealing Common. Dick rode to the side of the carriage.

"Farewell," he said.

Cicely put out her hand to shake hands with him; and Grace would do the same.

"We shall meet again," said Claude.

"Perhaps."

"Nay, I feel assured we shall. Something seems to whisper to me, that you and I are yet to execute an exploit which will transend all that has been done upon the road."

Dick waved his hand, and was gone. In another half hour, for in truth the Common was further off than it had seemed to be, Claude drew up at the gate of the farm-house, which the reader is already acquainted with, and where Claude stopped a whole day once before. They did not know him in his disguise, but the moment they really became aware of who he was, their welcome was most cordial. A very few words sufficed to place Cicely quite at home there. Grace Manning alighted too, at the earnest request of Cicely, and partook of some refreshment at the farm; for she had travelled many miles now without having anything in the shape of food. After a time, Claude spoke to her—

"Will you trust yourself alone to my care?" he said, "I will take you safely to your father's house in London."

"Oh, yes, and yet, I—I——"

She glanced at Cicely, whom it was evident she would gladly have had the society of on the road, but Cicely shook her head saying—

"I would, but I feel that I should only, perhaps, embarass, where I would guard."

Grace Manning, young as she was, and all unskilled in the world's ways, could not but see that there was some mystery of a serious character about her new friends, but she forbore to make the slightest attempt to penetrate it; and she took a most affectionate leave of Cicely, with many expressed hopes of meeting her again upon some other, and perchance, happier occasion. Then as the long shadows of the trees proclaimed the decline of that busy day, Claude once more mounted one of the horses, and drove off with Grace for London. A feeling of gloom, which some more superstitious minds than Claude's would soon have made into a presentiment of danger, slowly crept over him; but yet it had not the most distant power over his intention to persevere in the restoration of Grace to her father. The more he had seen of the manner and feelings of that young creature, the more she had won upon his esteem.

"No," he said to himself. "I will not allow a few gloomy fancies to turn me aside from an act which will be a source of pleasureable thoughts to me while I live—I will persevere."

It was full of such thoughts that Claude reached the top of Oxford-street, and heard the din and bustle of the mighty city, in which he had so many enemies.

"Truly," he thought, "I shall owe my safety, I think principally to the fact, that no one will believe that I could think of coming here; and if any one sufficiently familiar with my features to pronounce a judgment upon them, were to see me, they would mistrust that judgment."

Claude was tolerably right. The very outrageous audacity of some undertakings protects the author of them. The lamps—miserable oil substitute for the present glories of gas—were all lighted in Oxford-street by this time, and as Claude rattled along he could see the tradesmen in their shops, lighting up for their evening display; while the streets were each moment getting more and more thronged. Among all the faces that flitted past him, he knew not one; and it was a satisfaction to him to observe that the carriage which he drove only excited an ordinary share of observation. This convinced him that his disguise was tolerably

perfect, and that by night it would pass very well. Had it been daylight when he got into London, he certainly would have run a much greater risk. Once, and once only, an uneasy feeling of suspicion that something might be amiss, came across his mind; as a close chaise suddenly darted down a street to the right at a rapid pace, the driver of which appeared to regard him with unusual earnestness. Claude soon recovered from the slight shock this gave him, and he smiled to himself as he said—

"Truly our fears are the scarecrows that conjure up spirits to attack us at every turn."

CHAPTER CXLVII.

CLAUDE'S ARREST

THERE must have been some sort of entertainment at one of the houses in the immediate vicinity of where he was going; for there was a great concourse of carraiges, and he saw so many men and boys dashing about with links in the restless and disorderly manner incidental to such men, and such boys. The additional care he was compelled to take in driving, very likely had the effect of distancing from his mind more uncomfortable topics. As he neared the square in which Judge Manning resided, he found the throng and confusion to increase, and as he had forgotten the number of the house where the judge resided, he drew up close to the iron-railings of the centre garden of the square where there was the least tumult; and having dismounted he approached the carraige-door to speak to Grace.

"I have forgotten the number," he said, "of your father's house."

"It is forty," she replied. "But you will know it by the first floor being adorned with columns."

Claude looked about him. The only house so decorated was the one that was the very focus as it were of all the bustle and confusion. Its windows were a glare of light; and there was abundant evidences of its being at that time the centre of attraction in consequence of some large *fête* or entertainment go ingon there.

"Look out for a moment," said Claude.

She did so.

"Is that your father's house?"

He pointed to the one where the lights blazed forth with so much brilliancy, and from which came the sonnds of music.

"Ah, yes," she replied, "it is—it is."

"There is something unusual seems to be going on. Shall I enquire? or will you have me drive you to the door at once?"

"I have been thinking," said Grace, kindly, "that my father might not wish that this affair should attain an undue publicity. He can punish my guilty cousin, without any but the members of our own family knowing aught of the circumstances."

"You have but to decide," said Claude, "what you would wish done, and I will do it for you, with the greatest pleasure."

"And—and, besides, my father has many guests to-night," she said, shrinkingly. "I would fain, that by some less public means, than by entering his house, amid such a throng, he knew I was here."

"That is not difficult," said Claude.

"Is it not?"

"No. If you have courage to remain here for a short time, I will make my way to your father, and let him know all that has occurred, when he may take what steps he may think proper, in his wisdom, to get you into his house. Will that be the best way?"

"It will; but it is imposing upon you so much trouble."

"The trouble is nothing," said Claude, with a smile. How truly he might have added—"But the danger is much." He was too generous, however, to let Grace Manning know how much more she was indebted to him, for such a service as he was rendering to her, than she would have been to any other person, upon



THE DEAD INFORMED BY CLAUDE AND DICK.

whose existence a price had been set. There can be no doubt, but that in following out the impulses of his generous feelings in this adventure, Claude ran the greatest risks. But if a courage, as rare as it was admirable, would suffice to carry him through such an adventure, he would be carried through it safely.

"Be cautious," he said, as he closed the carriage door carefully. "Be cautious, I pray you, and speak to no one."

"Depend upon my caution, as you may upon my gratitude," replied Grace Manning, in a voice faltering from emotion.

Claude felt that he could not hope, without creating more observations than was at all desirable, to obtain an interview with Judge Manning in his then present costume; but he was too much of an adept in changes of that sort, to suffer much difficulty upon that score. By taking off his great coat, which he had flung over one of the horses, and making a few other trifling changes in his costume, he was able to look quite dressed enough not to be remarkable, although he certainly did not look as though he was attired for an entertainment. It was easier for a foot passenger than for one in a vehicle to get to the door of the judge's house. Claude soon succeeded in elbowing his way along, until he ascended the steps; and then accosting a powdered and bedizoned flunkey, whom he saw lolling with some companions, he said—

"Are you the judge's servant?"

There was something in Claude's tone and manner which induced a respectful answer, when to any one else, probably, it would have been an insolent one.

"Yes, sir."

"Show me into a waiting-room, then, and let him know that a gentleman must see him on business of importance."

"The judge, sir, is very busy."

"Yes, I know."

"It is a party you see, sir."

"Never mind that. My business will quite satisfy the judge, that I am justified in disturbing him. The world don't stand still because people have parties."

"My good, sir, will you step this way?"

Claude followed the footman, and was shown into a waiting-room close at hand. In another moment he was alone.

"How will all this end, now," he said to himself. "Shall I get clear of this most perilous adventure, or shall I by some cross accident find that by trying to to do good I have brought upon myself evil? Well, well, we shall see. We shall see."

The room was well lighted, although not brilliantly, that is to say it was not lighted as though it formed any part of the fete but only in the ordinary sufficient manner.

The door suddenly opened, and the servant who opened it announced the judge. Claude advanced towards him and bowed. He felt rather surprised that the judge did not, as a gentleman both by education and habits he must be, he did not make the least show of returning the compliment.

"Well, sir," he merely said.

Indeed, thought Claude, this is not exactly the man whose feelings Grace need have been so very particular about sparing."

"It is of your daughter, sir, I come to speak," said Claude.

"Well, sir!"

Claude was thunderstricken to find the indifference of the judge upon such a point; and for some moments he was silent. How very unworthy is this man, he thought, of such a child as Grace.

"Well, sir," repeated Judge Manning, with still more harshness and abruptness than before.

"Shame upon you, sir," said Claude, "that the name of your fair child does not call up gentler emotions. Were I the father of such a piece of gentleness and excellence as Grace Manning, and a stranger came to me with her name upon his lips, my tenderest feelings, my deepest anxieties would be raised. I am sorry that she has such a father."

The judge clutched the back of a chair for support; as in a voice that shook with passion, he said—

"Where is she? What do you demand?,'

"Demand?"

"Yes, speak, ruffian, name the extent of your demand."

"Ruffian! How dare you?"

"Peace. No more of this. I know you, I say—I know you. You may well taunt, to find that it is so, and that by a circumstance quite sufficiently extraordinary to enable me to think it almost a kind interposition of Heaven. I know you, and therefore I say without further parley, how much do yon demand villain?"

"Sir, if you do know me, you may congratulate yourself upon knowing a more courteous, and possibly honester man than yourself."

"Dare you thus insult me?"

"Ay, I dare."

"In my own house?"

"Your own house? What is there in the atmosphere of your own house, I should like to know, what gives you a license to use intemperate language without the ordinary consequences? Tell me that."

"You incorrigible rascal."

"I am sorry to call the father of Grace Manning an ill mannerly old idiot," said Claude.

The judge sank into a chair as he said, in gasping tones—

"I thought I should be equal to this interwiew, but I am not. No, I am not. I feel that I am not."

"That is quite evident," said Claude.

"Torture me no more."

"Torture you! I torture you! Is this man mad?"

"You will drive me mad. What sum of money do you demand for the restoration of my child? Answer me that. Let your demand be exhorbitant and you shall have it."

"There is some horrible mistake here," said Claude. "Sir, the conviction is momentarily creeping over me that by some means, Heaven only knows how, we are at cross purposes."

"Cross purposes?"

"Yes, that is quite clear. I come here not without some risk, to do you a great service, and am met by personal abuse, and some of them strangest questions one man could put to another. You ask me to name a sum; I want no money of you."

"What do you want then?"

"To restore to you your daughter."

"Where is she? I demand to know where she is?"

"Stop," said Claude. "In the first place indulge me by briefly explaining to me, who and what you take me to be."

"Read that, and tremble," said the judge, as he laid a crumpled note before Claude, who took it up and read it with astonishment. It was addressed to Phillip Manning, Esq., and was as follows—

"Sir—Knowing you as the nephew of the much respected Judge Manning and knowing that, notwithstanding some wildness of behaviour incidental to youth, you entertain the greatest respect and love for your uncle, I apprise you of an affair that very nearly concerns his happiness.

Some villains, by way of raising a sum of money, intend by a false tale of your illness, to get your cousin, Grace, to accompany them from her aunts at the Lodge. They will hide her somewhere until your uncle's fears for her safety induces him to pay a large sum, literally, for her ransom.

One of the gang will call upon your uncle this evening, to open the affair as regards the money. It is for you to take such steps, contingent upon this piece of intelligence as your affection for both your uncle and your cousin, may dictate to you.

You may rely upon the perfect authenticity of this intelligence."

"From your well-wisher,"

"A. B. C."

"P. S.—Do not seek to know who I am, as the gang of rascals, whose pro-

ceedings in this case I inform you of, would murder me if they knew I had betrayed them."

"Now, sir," said the judge, when he saw that Claude had perused the letter. "Now, sir, are you convinced how far my knowledge extends?"

"I am astonished!"

"And you do not blush at your infamy? Alas! alas! My poor nephew upon the receipt of this letter, which was slipped into his hands in the street by a woman, who immediately fled, took horse and went to the lodge. He was too late. Too late."

"Too late for what, sir?"

"To save my child. The villains had already got her away with them; and I—I.—But name your price."

"And your nephew, to-night, brought you this letter?"

"Only a quarter of an hour ago."

"Is he here?"

"He is; and I will confront you with him."

"Stop, hear my statement first. It was your nephew, Phillip, himself, who planned this adduction of your daughter. He, himself, is the writer or the dictator of this letter."

"Impossible!"

"Yet true. I rescued your daughter from his hands, at her her own earnest, and imploring solicitation."

"I will have him here to confute you."

The judge rang the bell, and when an attendant appeared, he said—

"Tell Mr. Phillip that I want him."

"He is not within, sir."

"Not within?"

"No, sir. He left the house about a quarter of an hour ago. Indeed, directly after he had seen you, sir."

"And left no message?"

"None, sir."

"Of course not," said Claude. "It would have transcended even his impertinence and assurance to have met with me before you face to face."

"I cannot for a moment," said the judge, after ordering the servant to leave the room, "I cannot for a moment believe your statement. What proof can you bring me of it?"

"What proof has Phillip Manning brought you of his statement, sir?"

"Your presence here is amply sufficient."

"Well, thank God, I, too, have proof of the truth of my statement. Proof before which he would quail, and before which your scruples must vanish into thin air."

"What proof?"

"Your daughter's testimony."

"Ah! That indeed—but no—no—Phillip could not—dared not——"

"Suspend your judgment, sir. Close to the railings of the square garden, and a little to the left only of being exactly opposite to your house, is a plain brown travelling chaise. A great coat is thrown over one of the horses—in that chariot is your daughter."

"My Grace? My child?"

"Even so, sir. After rescuing her from Phillip, her worthy cousin, I only paused sufficiently long to enable her to take some refreshment at a farm house at Ealing, for she was faint and weary, and then I brought her direct to you. Send your servant to bring her here, and I will stand or fall by the statement the young lady may please herself to make."

The judge rang the bell violently, and several servants rushed into the room at once.

"My secretrry!" he said. "My secretary!"

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

THE STRONG CELL.

THE judge seemed to be quite exhausted by the violence of his emotions, after giving utterance to this order, and he sat in a large chair, looking as pale as death itself.

"The company, sir, ask for you," said a servant.

The judge only waved his arm, as though he would deprecate any attempt to withdraw him from the business he then had in hand, but the servant was not used to the language of signs, or he thought the entertainment that was going on above stairs was too important a matter to be disposed of by a wave of the hand, so with more pertinacity, he said—

"Sir, the saloons are full, and Lord John Muscle has twice asked for you, sir, if you please."

"Let him ask again. Begone!"

The servant retired, but those who had gone in search of the secretary presently announced Mr. Atkinson, who was the secretary in question.

A middle-aged respectable-looking man was this secretary, with a remarkably soft voice, and much suavity of manner.

"Atkinson," said the judge, speaking with difficulty on account of the deep emotion he was suffering under, "Atkinson, I am informed that Miss Manning is in a coach close at hand. Will you fetch her?"

"With the extremest pleasure, sir."

"Go, go—let no one know——"

"You will find the young lady," said Claude, "in a plain travelling chariot, without any arms upon it; and you will know it by a great coat being thrown over the off horse."

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Atkinson, "this gentleman will accompany me?"

"No, no," said the judge.

"No," said Claude, "I am a sort of hostage or gage here for the truth of what I assert regarding the young lady being in the carriage at all."

Mr. Atkinson stared.

"But I am willing to be such bail for such a fact," added Claude; "and you will better please both me and the judge by being prompt in your mission, sir."

Mr. Atkinson left the room hastily.

"He will bring her in by the side door," said the judge, "which opens into the next street, if she be there to bring."

"She is there to bring," said Claude.

"Sir, if you should turn out to be right, I shall give you what reparation I can for my suspicions of you."

"And nothing for the service I have rendered you in rescuing your child from the hands of such a scoundrel as your nephew."

"Oh, yes; much—much. Name the price, and I——"

"Price? Price? Really, my lord judge, you seem to think that all human nature may be bought and sold, and to subscribe to the doctrine that every man has his price."

"We will settle all this, sir, when Mr. Atkinson returns," said the judge. "Do not let us enter into what in either event must be a profitless discussion. If you have saved my child, you will find no occasion to taunt me with any want of gratitude. If your statement on the other hand be untrue, your own imagination may depict to you what a father is likely to feel, and likely to do in consequence."

Claude slightly bowed, and then the conversation stopped.

The judge with difficulty rose, and proceeded towards a door opposite to that by which the room seemed to be generally entered. He opened this door and held it partly for self support, and partly to keep it open, as he said—

"This is the way, she will come. Of course if she be there at all, Atkinson will bring her at once to me. This is the way, she will come. Oh, God, if anything has really happened to my girl?"

The fatherly anxiety of the judge, and the evident affection with which he named his daughter made a favourable impression upon Claude, and quite effaced anything in the shape of irritation which his mind had felt upon the occasion of the few words that had passed between them.

"Be at ease, sir," he said. "All is well."

"I hope so."

"You may be assured so. Your child will be restored to your arms pure and spotless, as when she left them."

"She is my only child, sir, and if anything were to happen to—but no, no that is impossible."

He shrank back from the door, and again sank into a chair.

"I hear footsteps," he said.

"Then she comes," said Claude.

"I—I only hear the footsteps of one person, and they are not hers. Do you think, sir, a father's ear would not recognise the footsteps of his child."

Claude approached the half open door. In another moment Mr. Atkinson appeared. Claude grasped him by the arm tightly, as he said, in loud clear accents.

"Miss Manning, sir? Where is she?"

"I only wish I had the supreme happiness of knowing. There is no such coach as you mention—no such horse with a great coat thrown over him, and I grieve to say no Miss Manning."

The judge uttered a deep groan.

"This is false," cried Claude. "It is too absurd. It is—is—good God—it is possible——"

"What is possible," said the judge. "Speak now—speak. I command you to speak to me. What new horror would you suggest?"

"That your nephew, Phillip, may have dogged your child and me to London, and while we were here engaged in profitless discourse, he may have again seized her."

"Oh dear, oh dear," said the secretary, "that I should live to hear that. The blood of the Mannings, sir, would not stoop—could not bear down as it were in a manner of speaking to——"

"This is trash!" cried Claude impatiently. "I will go and search for her myself. Do not despair, sir, I have promised, myself, to bring you your daughter, and I will keep my word."

Claude was moving towards the door, but the judge rising with a sudden energy, cried in a fierce tone—

"Stop that man! Do not let him escape! Seize that man!"

"Is this possible," said Claude.

"Stop him! Seize, I give him into custody!"

Claude had reached the door, when Atkinson shouted—

"Stop thief!"

Stung by the injustice that was being done him, Claude drew a pistol from his pocket, and cried—

"Take your reward for that cry!"

He pulled the trigger, but the weapon was faithless. During his drive from Ealing, the powder in the pan got scattered, and so Mr. Atkinson was saved. It was the only weapon Claude had about him, for at the moment he recollected with a pang of anguish that he had placed his other pistols in the pocket of the great coat he had flung over the back of the horse.

"Ah, I am supremely fortunate," said Atkinson. "Stop thief!"

"Are you," said Claude, as he flung the pistol in his face with a force that sent him retiring to the floor with an awful contusion upon his nose. "Are you. Let him who sets small value upon his life try to stop me!"

The cries of the judge, and of Atkinson, had by this time reached the saloons and the hall, so that Claude, when he gained the threshold of the room in which this singular conversation had taken place, found himself in the midst of a throng of persons.

With a conviction of his fate he said to himself in a low voice—

"I am taken."

But it was only to himself that he made this remark, and not to his foes.

Dashing forward, he endeavoured to make his way through the throng of persons, for he felt that in so doing, upon the spur of the moment, lay his only chance of escape.

He was nearly successful, but in fighting his way he quite forgot that there was a rather steep step at the door, His foot slipped, and he fell.

In another moment he was a prisoner.

"Thank you, Phillip Manning," said Claude, bitterly to himself.

"Hold him tight—hold him," cried Atkinson. "Where's a constable, hold him tight. He seems a desperate fellow!"

Some half dozen men held Claude until a constable came up, who said in a voice of authority—

"What's the charge?"

"Felony!" cried a voice, and the old judge appeared to be in the hall. You know me, officer?"

"Yes, your honour."

"Then I give this man in charge, and you will take him upon my personal responsibility?"

"Certainly, your honour!"

Claude was forcibly held while a pair of handcuffs were put upon him, and then Atkinson coming up to him, said—

"I have the supreme satisfaction of congratulating myself upon the fact, that you will be hanged."

"No," said Claude. "Not this time. You and I will meet again and without witnesses, too, before that happens. You may affect to smile, but you will find me a true prophet."

"Ha! ha!" laughed, or rather tried to laugh, Atkinson, for it was only a try after all.

"Take away your prisoner," said the judge.

"Now, young fellow," said the officer; "come along."

"Where to?" said Claude.

"Where to? Why the lock-up of St. James's to be sure, and there we can accommodate you with a strong cell. Perhaps you know it?"

"No."

"You don't? Well, then, you will another time, if you should escape being lagged or scragged this time, which ain't very likely, you see; for if anybody ought to know what they are, stout old Judge Manning ought to be that individual. Oh, that's you, Morgan, is it; I'm glad you are come, for I don't much like this customer single-handed, though the darbies are on him. There's no knowing how many palls he may have about this ere place."

These words were addressed to another officer who came up at the moment.

"What's he been amusing himself with doing?" said Morgan.

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Then how came you to take the charge? Is he a warrant customer?"

"Not a bit of it; but Judge Manning gave him to me, and says it's felony, and orders him to be well looked after."

"Oh, that alter's the case. I'll come with you."

Morgan walked on the other side of Claude and after some time, he said—

"And pray what do you call yourself, young fellow, when you are at home?"

"What will you give me for that information?" said Claude.

"Give you?"

"Yes. How much will you give me?"

"That is a good one. Well, if you ain't a cool hand. Come, old fellow, just to honour the joke, how much do you want?"

"£500."

"What?"

"£500, and that's cheap too; there's many would like the bargain."

"Well, of all the pieces of impudence that I ever heard of, I think this beats them," said the officer.

"And I too," said the other. "£500! Well that is a good one—and all for the pleasure of knowing what a man's name is."

"We shall see," said Claude.

At that time in the evening there were few, indeed, in the streets to take any notice of Claude and his captors, and probably if there had there would not have been many who, in the prisoner, would have recognised the famous Claude Duval, over whose head there hung rewards equal to within a trifle of £3000.

The old watch-house of St. James's was soon reached; as the constable for the night had just taken his seat, Claude was brought before him with no small amount of affected bustle.

"Hilloa! hilloa!" cried the night constable on duty; "what's the charge against this gentleman? Accommodate him with a seat."

Claude's appearance had had its effect, and the constable no doubt thought it was some street row or practical joke, concerning which, the distinguished-looking personage—for Claude was distinguished-looking—that was brought before him, was about to be charged with.

"Why, your worship," said one of the constables, "this ain't my charge, but Judge Manning has given the prisoner into custody, and desires he be kept fast, and he will make it all right."

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, that's it, your worship."

The night constable—who was called worship, from the same strained courtesy that folks in the House of Commons are called Honourable Members, or in the House of Lords, Noble Lords, or on thrones, miracles of beauty and virtue—turned a fierce look upon Claude, as he said—

"You ill-looking rascal, what have you been doing?"

Claude did not condescend to return any answer.

"What is your name, villain?"

"Don't you know me, any of you?"

They all looked at him, and shook their heads.

"Will any one here give £500 for a knowledge of who I am? I will impart that knwoledge to him secretly, and I don't want to be paid immediately."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the night constable. "Ha! ha! That's good. Oh, what a ruffian this must be, to make jokes in St. James's watch-house, actually."

"Well," said Claude, "if you will persist in considering it merely as a joke, I cannot help it. You can have your own way."

"Ah, my fine fellow, that's just what we mean to have, and what we generally have. There's no doubt you are a great rogue, or Judge Manning would not have taken the trouble to have anything to do with you. Ha! ha! You shall be put in the strong cell, my fine fellow. Jobkins! Jobkins!"

"Yes, sir."

"Is the strong cell vacant?"

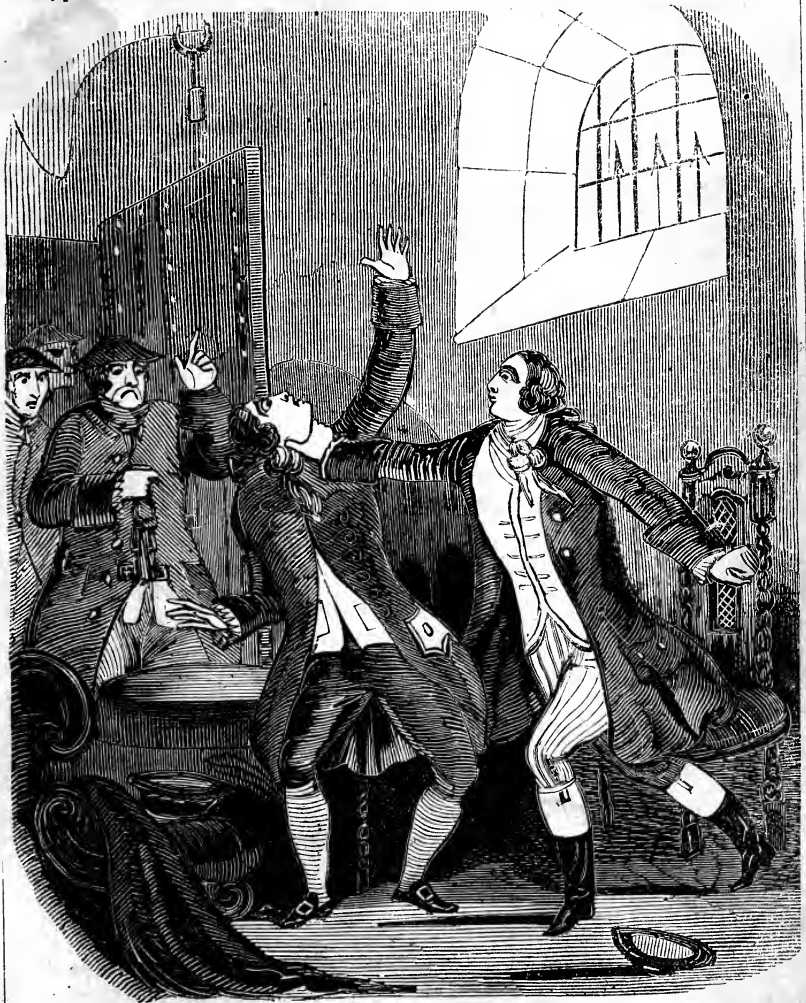
"Yes, sir. All's right; but it lets in the water woundily."

"That's no matter. It's refreshing. You will put this fellow in, and in the morning I will wait upon Judge Manning myself, and ascertain what he has done."

CHAPTER CXLIX.

THE SUPPLEMENTAL SESSION.

This was certainly a novel mode of administering justice, to lock up a man in a strong cell over night, and then go in the morning to inquire what he had done; and, probably, even the non-astute mind of the night constable might have been



CLAUDE SEIZING PHILLIP MANNING BY THE THROAT IN NEWGATE.

a trifle shocked at so unusual a mode of doing business, had he not had the authority of a judge for it.

Mr. Jobkins, who was a great, hulking-looking, good-humoured fellow, with a face about the size and colour of a warming-pan, escorted Claude to the strong cell, according to the orders he had received that way tending.

That anything but desirable location was situated under ground, and reached by a descent of twelve steps. An iron door then opened, and then there were two steps more, after which the strong cell was gained.

It would have been more to the purpose if they had added another syllable to its name, and called the strong cell the strong cellar, for a cellar it was to all intents and purposes.

Now, Jobkins was kind in his way, and he said to Claude, as they descended the stairs together—

"I don't know what you have done; but there's no need that you should be more uncomfortable than needs be, I'll take of your handcuffs for you."

"Thank you," said Claude, "thank you. I will remember this act of kindness, and it will go hard with me but some day I will find a means of requiting it."

"Oh, that's no matter."

"Jobkins took of the handcuffs, adding, as he did so—

"If the cell ain't strong enough to hold a man safe for a night without a pair of darbies on him, it ain't no good at all."

"That is true enough," said Claude. "You spoke of it letting in water, did you not, my friend?"

"Yes I did, and not without reason too. Don't you hear it."

They both paused upon the threshold of the cell, and Claude heard quite distinctly the dripping of water.

"That's anything but pleasant," he said.

"Quite the reverse of pleasant," added Jobkins. "It's not common to put anybody in here at all, unless they have shown fight."

"How do you mean by showing fight?"

"Why made a row up stairs, and tried to get away, but you have not done that at all. Howsomever I suppose the night constable thinks he'll please the old judge by telling of him in the morning what an amazing lot of care he took of you."

"Very likely."

Claude stepped into the cell. It felt sloppy under his feet, and a natural feeling of indignation arose in his mind at the idea of it being a part of the barbarous policy of the state, to confine prisoners in such unwholesome places, and that too before they were convicted of any offence against society.

"You stand still a bit," said Jobkins, "and I'll try to make the place a little more comfortable for you."

How he was to succeed in doing that, Claude could not divine, but he waited for about a quarter of an hour with patience. Then the door of the cell was opened, and a truss of straw was thrown in.

"All right," said Jobkins.

"Yes," said Claude. "Thank you, all is right as you say, and I am very much obliged to you, indeed."

"Don't mention it."

The cell was locked up, and Claude was alone.

Under the circumstances in which he now was, his reflections were not likely to be other than of the most painful character. In addition to the mental aggravation of being apprehended upon a charge of which he was most particularly innocent, he could not doubt but that upon his appearance in the morning at a police-office, some one would be able to recognise him; and in that event he would be at once hurried to Newgate, and his death determined upon as soon as possible.

When he came to consider, he much doubted if, even upon his recognition by any one, that person would get any reward, since he (Claude) was already in custody; but after all, that was a matter that did not much disturb him.

He began quite plainly to understand how the whole affair had been managed by Phillip Manning. That unscrupulous individual had got to town just a little before him (Claude) by some means, and prepossessed the mind of his uncle with

the story that had induced the judge to give him (Claude) such a strange, and, at the time, incomprehensible reception.

Then Phillip had—probably by the assistance of some persons in his service, while he (Claude) was talking to the judge—left the house, and got possession of the young girl, and driven the chariot off with her.

And even amid all his own troubles, serious and affecting his life as they were, Claude felt heart-stricken at the idea of Grace Manning being in the hands and at the mercy of her abandoned cousin.

"And thus," he said, "for a time does wickedness triumph."

After a while he stirred himself to see if there were any means by which he could possibly escape from the cell. He tried the door; but destitute of implements as he there was, any attempt to force it would be utterly futile. The walls he struck in all parts; but from the dead sound they returned he felt certain that the cellar he was in was a mere excavation, and that all around him was solid earth, so that he could only hope that on the morrow something would turn up of an advantageous character, so as to induce the judge to side with a belief in his innocence before any discovery of who or what he really was could be made.

And Claude had some confidence in the usual stupidity of the police. He well knew their great anxiety to identify any one whom they were asked if they knew, and he likewise well knew how stupid they were at anything in the shape of recollection.

Of course, when he reasoned thus of the police, he excepted some of the old experienced Bow-street men, who, if they were to see him, would at once be able to name him.

Wearied with such agitations, and worn out by the great fatigues he had gone through for the last twenty four hours, Claude, at length, lay right in the centre of the truss of straw, that had been so kindly given to him by Jobkins, and fell fast asleep.

The probability is, that he enjoyed a far sounder repose than Phillip Manning, notwithstanding that villain had so successfully, for the time being, got the better of him, by fixing his own guilt upon his (Claude's) innocent shoulders.

Daylight at bright noon, and midnight, were alike in the strong cell of the St. James's watch-house.

Claude started, and rubbed his eyes, when some one called "Hallo! hallo!—Get up, unless you are fond enough of the damp to lie here and rot."

It was not Jobkins who made this speech. Claude rose, and felt his limbs much stiffened by, no doubt, the damp air in which he had slept; before trying to turn his head he found that he had got that most unpleasant companion, a stiff neck. He could not help uttering a malediction upon the place.

"Ha! ha!" said the officer, who came to fetch him, "you don't seem to like it at all. But come on; it's time you made an appearance at the police office."

Claude did not condescend to make this man any answer, but followed him up the twelve steps.

It was broad daylight.

A tin mug, half full of water, and a lump of very brown, coarse looking bread was given to him for breakfast, and then he was permitted at a pump to wash his face and hands.

"Now, you rascal," said the night-constable, bustling up to him, "I have seen the judge."

"Have you?" said Claude. "Is he pretty well after it?"

"After what?"

"After the infliction of a visit from such an ass as you are."

The officers did not want to laugh; but they could not stand this, and a general roar testified their appreciation of the joke against the night-constable, who was not celebrated among them for any large amount of wisdom.

"You villain, do you dare to make a laughing-stock of me?"

"Oh, yes," said Claude.

"I wonder I don't knock you down."

"It's no wonder at all. The simple explanation is, that you are afraid to try it."

The night-constable looked ferocious; but he turned away muttering to himself—

"If I can do you an ill turn, master, I will; you may make up your mind to that. I never was so insulted in all my life."

Claude felt that now was coming the time when he would have to run the risk of detection in his true character. He wished much to prolong the period during which he should be unknown; and he so disposed his hair, and the upper part of his clothing, that he looked as unlike what he usually looked as possible.

He thought it would be prudent to give some name to the magistrate, however; if he did not, he knew that the officers would all be put upon the mettle to find out who he was, and some one might make a shrewd guess, who otherwise might not have his attention directed towards him (Claude) at all.

Police vans were at that time things undreamt of, and the charges over night at the various watch-houses of the metropolis, were taken through the streets properly ironed, and the procession headed by a couple of officers, while two more brought up the rear; and in this way was Claude Duval conducted to Bow Street.

He had hoped that some other less conspicuous police office would have been chosen; but Bow Street it was.

His was not the first case called upon, but when he was conducted into the court, he saw Judge Manning on the bench talking to the magistrate. The judge, looked old and worn.

A general feeling of curiosity was manifest upon the countenances of all who were present, for it had got whispered about that the case was a curious one, and Claude found himself very uncomfortably the centre of attraction.

The magistrate was a short, bloated-looking man with an immense projecting under lip, and features indicative of sensuality in the highest degree. His voice was harsh and discordant.

"Well, prisoner," he cried, "what is your name?"

"John Smith," said Claude. "What is the charge against me?"

"Oh, you want to know the charge, do you?"

"I trust that that is not a very unreasonable amount of curiosity in one so situated as I am."

"You are a scoundrel, sir! Hold your tongue."

"You are a fool, sir, and a liar," said Claude; "and if holding my tongue, in your vernacular, means keeping silent, while you make me the subject of silly and impertinent remarks, I will not do so."

The face of the irritable magistrate turned of a purplish hue. Never had he been before so defied in public, and, like most bullies, he had, when such a circumstance really took place, hardly anything to say for himself.

Judge Manning interposed.

"Pardon me, your worship," he said, "for interferring; but I am quite willing to state the charge against the prisoner at the bar."

"Very well—very well," said the magistrate, wiping his face with a flaring silk handkerchief. "Very well—as you please, my lord. Let it be so."

He spoke as though it was some great indulgence to the prisoner at the bar to state the charge against him. What a famous inquisitor such a magistrate would have made; but then, all this was in the olden time. Ministers are now forced to place men of education and some judgment on the magisterial bench; but it is only the force of public opinion that has made the change, as only the force of public opinion makes all changes in this country of corruption, and dominant rascality. All ministers go into office with but one motto, and that is "Resistance to all change."

"The charge," added Judge Manning, "is for the abdication of a young lady."

His voice faltered as he spoke.

"Not guilty," cried Claude.

"Silence," said the magistrate.

"Not guilty," cried Claude again, in a voice that might have been quite conveniently heard in Bow-street.

"Allow me to state the charge and to call my witnesses," said the judge.

The magistrate waved his hand as though he were the emperor of all the world, and only graciously gave his permission for other folks to breathe a little to keep life in them.

"I charge this man," added Judge Manning, "with the abdication, from the house where she was residing, some distance from London, of my daughter, Grace Manning."

He then briefly and very clearly went through the particulars already known to the reader; namely, the mysterious commission to Phillip, and the arrival of Claude at the mansion in town, with his accusation of Phillip, and assertion that Grace was in a chariot without, and would substantiate it; when no Grace and no such chariot could be seen at all in the neighbourhood.

Claude listened to all this without the least interruption, and then the judge said—

"If the prisoner has any question to ask of me, I shall of course reply to him."

"I would merely ask if your nephew Phillip enjoys your confidence?"

"My confidence?"

"Yes. Is he a person of that character that you consider him worthy of belief?"

"Yes—yes—Now."

"Then there was a time when such was not the case."

"There was."

"I have nothing further to ask of you, sir. I have only to say that you are much deceived."

"Well," said the magistrate, "this is quite clear. The prisoner at the bar has committed a most heinous offence, and I shall commit him for trial."

"Perhaps you will condescend," said Claude, "to hear any witnesses first that may depose to what the prosecutor has stated, and which, with all due deference to him, I would suggest is not yet proved."

"I will call my nephew," said the judge.

"Ah," said Claude. "I shall be glad to see him."

Phillip was in the body of the court; and now looking as pale as death itself, he made his appearance. It will easily be conceived how reluctant he must have been to come forward and confront Claude, and yet how impossible it was that he should not do so under the circumstances.

The oath was tendered to him and duly taken.

"Now, Phillip," said the judge. "You will oblige me by stating as briefly as you can all that you know of this affair; and you will be as temperate as you can."

"I will, sir."

"Proceed then," said the magistrate.

Phillip had time to muster up courage to look Claude in the face, but he could not do so; and the conscience that the eye of the innocent man whom he was going to do all that perjury could do to condemn, was upon him, dazzled him like sunlight.

There surely is something in the very nature of truth that makes it apparent and infinitly superior in its very essence to falsehood; for notwithstanding Phillip had a good tale to tell, and was well backed by both the magistrate and his uncle, no one in the court could listen to him without a lurking suspicion that all was not right with his evidence.

CHAPTER CL.

CLAUDE'S FRIENDS BECOME ACTIVE.

We shall see how he got on with his vile and slanderous tale of infamy and calumny.

Phillip Manning put in the letter that he said he had received, and which pretended to warn him of the projected abduction of his cousin Grace; and then he went on to say how he had tried to thwart the design—been too late, and finally, just managed to get to London again in time to put his uncle in possession of the frightful fact that Grace was actually carried off.

"Look at me," said Claude.

By a good effort, Phillip managed to do so.

"Where have you seen me before?"

"At my uncle's house, last night."

"And when and where before that?"

"Nowhere."

"Then I will refresh your memory. We met in a green lane near to Ealing, yesterday. Do you deny that, upon your oath?"

"I do."

"Do you keep a carriage?"

"Certainly not. My income will not permit me to do such a thing."

"But your income will no doubt easily permit you to hire one now and then, Mr. Phillip Manning, and that was possibly the case as regards the one in which I stopped you when you were conveying off Miss Manning."

"This is monstrous," said the magistrate; "what does the prisoner mean?"

"Ay," said Phillip, "what can he mean?"

"Simply," said Claude, "that I rescued Grace Manning from you yesterday, and brought her to London. By her own request, I left her for a few moments outside her father's house while I went in to prepare him for her sudden appearance, and during those few moments she disappeared. Where she is now, you Phillip Manning can best tell."

"I?"

"Yes, who but you?—who but you stole out of your uncle's house, while he and I were talking, and made off with her?"

"Surely, surely this cannot be true?" said the judge.

"It is all false," said Phillip. "I should be worse than the worst if I could do such acts."

"You would, indeed, Phillip."

"And are," said Claude. "That such has been the case I am now quite certain; and a time will come, I hope, when the only witness who can clear up this affair will do so, to my honour, and to Phillip's confusion."

"What witness?" said Phillip, looking round him with apprehension, as though he feared that from the crowd in the court some one would step forward and confront him, bringing proofs of his duplicity and villany.

"This man asks what witness?" said Claude; "and I declare that the witness I hope yet to see will be Grace Manning."

"Where is she?" said Phillip.

"What!" said Claude, "have you forgotten where you took her to last night?"

"I—I took her nowhere—I don't know anything about her."

"Prisoner," said the judge, "restore me my child, and, even now, I will abandon this charge, and you shall go free."

"I wish I could," said Claude; "ask your nephew."

The judge sunk back upon his seat again, from whence he had partially risen, and uttered a long-drawn sigh.

"I will commit him," said the magistrate. "Prisoner at the bar, you stand committed to take your trial for——"

"Stop a moment," said Claude. "Has Phillip Manning a servant—a stout man with red hair?"

"Yes, yes," said the judge, "he had."

"Then that servant was with him, when I met him in the green lane, and rescued your daughter from him. He was then playing the part of a postillion."

"Well, my servant is here," said Phillip; "put him upon his oath, and let us see where he was last night at the time you mention. Peter! Peter!"

"Here. sir," said a voice; and the identical man who had driven the chaise, and who, it will be recollected, crawled away in the bustle attendant upon Claude's rescue of Grace Manning, made his appearance.

The oath was taken by this man; and Claude said to him—

"Where were you yesterday, about sunset?"

"I was in London all day, and all night too. My master gave me a guinea to go and relieve a poor family with, and that took me all day, for I could not find where they had moved to."

"But you found them at last; and, I hope, relieved them?"

"No; I couldn't for the life of me discover where they had moved to. Please, sir," turning to Phillip, "here's the guinea, as I could not find the poor people."

"That will do," said Claude. "I have nothing further to say to this witness. Time alone can put this affair to rights. I pity you, my lord judge, more, if possible, than I feel for myself, for you, after all, in the uncertainty as to the fate of your child, are the worst victim of this most foul conspiracy."

"But it shall be found out," cried a voice from the body of the court.

"Ah!" said Claude.

He knew the voice. It was Jack's.

"Who was that?" said the magistrate. "Seize that man, and bring him before me—officers, seize that man; I have not the slightest doubt but that it is one of the prisoner's abandoned accomplices."

An active search was made, and a vast amount of bustle ensued, but the officers with all their exertions were unsuccessful in discovering who had spoken the words.

Claude was very anxious to say a word or two to Jack; but all he could venture upon was a few words of a general character.

"If any friend of mine," he said, "be here, let him try to find Grace Manning as well for my sake as for her own and her father's consolation."

"Yes!" cried the voice again.

"Hush!" said Claude. "Hush!"

"Upon my life!" cried the magistrate, "this is very strange and very annoying. Officers, I demand that the person who interrupts the court in this manner be brought before me immediately!"

The officers now felt the necessity of laying hold of somebody, so, as they could not find the real offender, they laid violent hands on the most stupid, inoffensive, harmless-looking person they could see, and dragged him forward, exclaiming—

"Here he is, your worship. Here he is!"

"Well, fellow," said the magistrate, "what have you got to say for yourself for this indecorous interruption of the court?"

"It wasn't me, your wuship!"

"Come, come—be careful what you say, sir."

"Of course he denies it, your worship," said one of the officers.

"Of course," repeated his sapient worship. "I have a great mind, sir, to commit you to prison for a month; but as it is, I will let you off this once with a fine of forty—— Eh?"

The clerk had whispered something to the magistrate, who, after a whispered consultation with that functionary, added—

"A-hem! Will anybody swear that this was the man who disturbed the court?"

The officers had some sort of dread that the real offender might come forward; and they nudged each other to take the necessary oath, which the magistrate observing, induced that potentate to say—

"Well, prisoner, for this time you may go; but don't let me see your face here again—mark that."

"Yes, your wushiip; but I didn't speak."

"Go away, sir, and be thankful."

The man slunk away, and then the judge said, in a low tone, expressive of much dejection—

"May I request that your worship will remand the prisoner for a week? I hope, during that time, that by indefatigable exertions, something may be brought to light that will elucidate the mysteries in which this painful affair is enveloped."

The magistrate assented; and Claude found himself formally remanded for one week.

Claude was rather anxious regarding what prison he was to be sent to; for he knew that there was rather a paucity of jail accommodation in London, and that it was a very common thing for even remanded prisoners from all parts of the metropolis to be taken to Newgate.

"Where am I to be taken?" he said.

"To Newgate."

Claude looked upon his recognition at Newgate as certain, and all he said was—

"I protest against all this proceeding, Judge Manning. You will be sorry, sir, for sacrificing one who has run into much danger to save you much sorrow."

"Save me much sorrow?"

"Yes. I tried to do so by restoring to you your daughter. I failed in that, perhaps, mad-brained, too chivalric enterprise, and here I am!"

Judge Manning was evidently shaken.

"Would to God," he said, "I could see my way through all this tangle of incidents! I shudder to do less or more than justice!"

"The time will come," said Claude.

"Now, young feller," whispered an officer in his ear. "This way, if it's all the same to you."

In another moment he was led from the court. As he passed out he was quite close to Phillip Manning. That rascal glanced around him to see that his uncle was not nigh, and then he saluted Claude with a grin of malice as he said,—

"I triumph now."

"Yes," said Claude, "you fancy so."

"I know it."

"But you dread the result, and that will surely come. Triumph, do you say? Is that cowardly hang-dog-look one of triumph? Why, you are shaking with fear, to your inmost soul. Officers, look at us and say which, in your experience, is the guilty, and which the innocent man?"

The officers only looked at each other, but they made no reply to this remark of Claude's. It was not at all likely, under the circumstances, that they would. As for Phillip he walked away as quietly as possible.

"Shall I keep up my incognito or not?" was the question that Claude now put to himself. After a few moments council, he answered, and in the affirmative.—A coach was procured. He was told that that was done by order of Judge Manning, and in the course of about five minutes more our hero was on his road to Newgate.

He was carefully handcuffed.

If such had not been the case he might yet have made some sort of effort at escape, upon the principle, that it ought to be much easier to get out of a coach than out of Newgate.

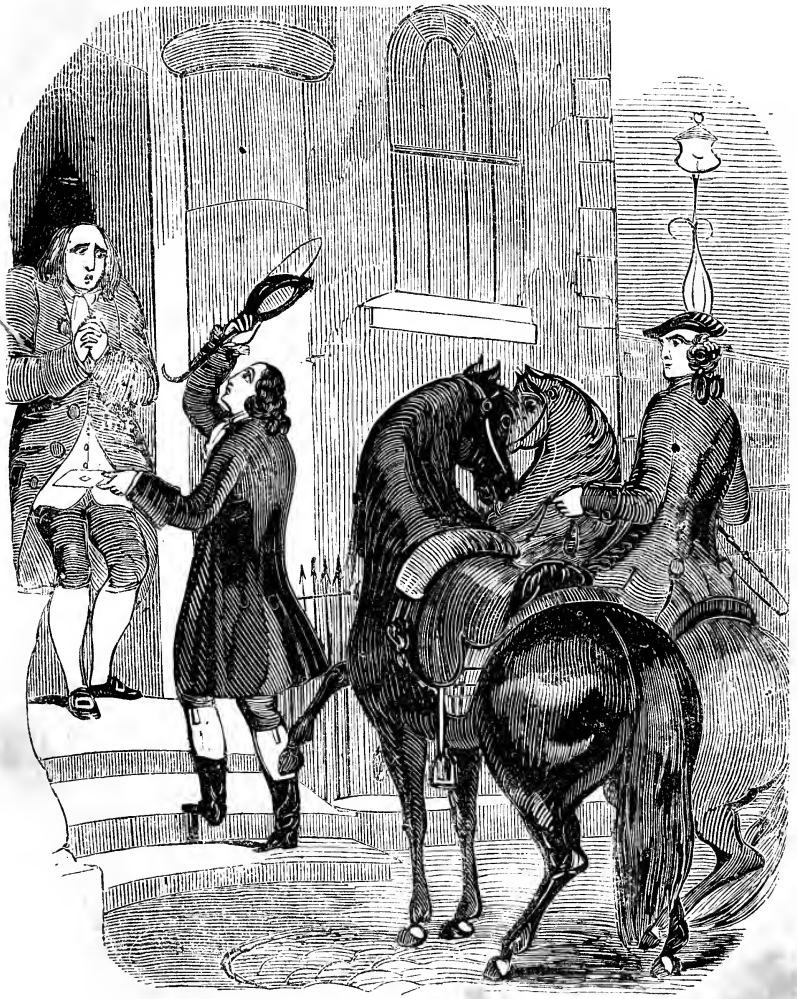
The gloomy portal of the prison was soon reached, and then came the most anxious moment of all—a moment which would decide whether Claude would be recognised or not by the officials.

"What sort of a lot have you got there?" said the man at the wicket.

"I'll be hung if I know," said the officer who had special charge of Claude.—"But I don't suppose it's of much consequence; I'm to give this letter to the governor. Is he up and about?"

"Not he. Didn't you know he's been confined to his bed for a fortnight?"

"Not I."



DICK TURPIN PRESENTING HIS CARD AT THE QUAKER'S.

"Well, it's a fact then, and our fellows say here that he sickened when Claude Duval got away the last time, and has never been his own man again, and won't be, 'till we have Claude under lock and key.'"

"Then the letter must be taken to him."

"Ay, that can be done. Peter, take this letter to the governor; I suppose it's about the prisoner?"

"Not a doubt of it as it's from old Judge Manning. The charge though don't seem to be much, and between you and I and the door-post, Bill, this chap, in my notion of things, isn't the right party."

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, I do. You take a look at him."

Claude had managed, by stooping, to deceive his real height very much, and by slightly puffing out his cheeks, he certainly materially altered his personal appearance, so that one would have needed to be very familiar, indeed, with him to have recognised him.

"Humph!" said the man who was, as it is technically termed, on the lock.—"Humph! It seems, to me, as if I had seen somebody like him somewhere; but I'll be hanged if I know where.

At this moment the lad, who had been sent to the governor with the letter, came back with it opened, and said,—

"The governor is too ill to attend to it; but he says 'I'm to shew it to Mr. Blain, and he is to attend to it.'"

Then, it's no secret," said the turnkey. "Let's have a look at it."

"Ah read it out," said the officer, who had brought Claude from Bow-street. "Read it out."

"You read it, Peter."

Peter, in a school-boy-like drawling tone of voice, without the smallest regard to punctuation, then read as follows:

"Judge Manning present his compliments to the Governor of Newgate, and would feel obliged by the remanded prisoner, John Smith, being placed in a private room, and shown all the indulgence consistent with his safe keeping; as Judge Manning has not sufficient evidence to pronounce confidently on his guilt, and is anxious to commit as little injustice as possible."

By this time some half dozen officers had repaired to the vestibule, and no one seemed to recognise Claude. They all heard the letter read, and then turned away with looks of indifference, as though they would have said—

"Oh, this is nothing; this will turn out no case."

The one named Blain now took the letter, and intimated to Claude that he was to follow him.

Claude did so, affecting to be quite lame of one leg.

"Are you hurt?" said the officer.

"No," said Claude, "this is an old affair."

"Well, you can rest yourself as long as you like in the place I'm going to take you to; I suppose it's all some mistake?"

"Yes," said Claude, "quite so."

"Ah, well you will have nothing to complain of in Newgate; and when you see Judge Manning again, you can say that Blain made you as comfortable as he could."

"I will; and yet it's an awful thing to be put in Newgate."

"Stuff, I live in it. This way—this way.

I'd work not by night nor by day,
But back on my fortune I'd fall,
If I could but find out the right way,
To say 'wanted' to famed Claude Duval.

Ah, sir, he's the fellow we are all sighing after, here."

"Really," said Claude.

CHAPTER CLI.

DICK'S VISIT TO NEWGATE.

If Claude could in those adverse circumstances in which he was placed, have been amused at anything, probably the regrets, both in prose and verse, of the officer in Newgate, at the impossibility of capturing such a prize as Claude Duval, would have had that effect.

But his heart was too full to enable him to do more than faintly smile.

The room into which he was now conducted, differed very much indeed from those sad and dreary portions of the prison which ordinary malefactors, who had no one upon any ground or with any authority to intercede for them, were placed by the officials.

The letter from Judge Manning had done much more for Claude in Newgate than all the appeals to the humanity and sense of justice that could have been made, would have accomplished; and when it is recollected that many an innocent man is taken up and committed to jail until an investigation of the charge against him is made, it is a disgrace to the jurisprudence of this country, that his punishmet should begin before the law has declared him guilty.

But yet such is the case.

It is said in England to be an axiom that the law preserves all accused persons to be innocent, until, by the regular course of judicial investigation, they are clearly and distinctly proved to be guilty; but to any one who has paid attention to the subject, it is quite clear that the administrators of the law, from the lowest policeman to the governor of Newgate, are of a different opinion.

They presume that the suspected and the accused are in all cases guilty, and therefore there is no difference between the convicted thief and the man whose neighbour has "borne false witness against him," in regard to treatment.

Any man in England, who chooses to take a false oath, may place any other man in prison—put handcuffs upon his wrists—associate him with thieves, and characters worse than thieves; and although in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the innocence of the man falsely accused, would eventually be brought to light, who is to undo what is done?—Who is to say that he has not suffered as much up to the point when his innocence becomes apparent, as though he had been guilty?

Hence, then, we say that the treatment of accused persons in England is in all cases most gross and unjustifiable.

That Judge Manning felt this to be the case, is pretty manifest by the care he took that Claude should not undergo it.

The judge had doubts of Claude's guilt, and hence he had sent the letter, which the reader has heard read, to the governor of Newgate. No doubt, in the clear and astute mind of the judge, as the case or presumed case against Claude had developed itself, there had arisen many circumstances to cast a doubt upon his nephew Phillip's statements; and from all that was taking place, Claude entertained a sanguine expectation that if he happened not to be recognised, he might soon find himself at liberty.

There was a carpet upon the floor of the room to which he was consigned, and in other respects it bore evidence of regard for comfort. In a small closet adjoining was a bed, and indeed the only circumstance that really gave it what might be called quite a prison-look was that the windows were well defended by iron bars both within and without.

"What do you think of this?" said the turnkey, as he glanced round with quite an air of pride like the owner of some palace. "You may be as comfortable here as the day is long. Don't you think you can now?"

"I should not wonder," said Claude.

"Only look. Here's a fine view of a bit of the outer wall, and if you only get to this corner of the window and squint downwards, you will see a little bit of one of the enclosed yards."

"Very lively, indeed," said Claude.

"Ah, you may say that. I don't know how they are going to manage about your grub, but I suppose as they have put you into such good quarters as regards your lodging, that will be all right."

"I don't know," said Claude, "what they mean to do, but I know what they ought to do."

"What's that?"

"Why, compensate an innocent man in every way that is possible for an unjust

detention here. Liberty is the dearest possession in the world, and if a man be deprived of that, he may well, provided he be innocent, expect other indulgences."

"Humph!" said the jailor, "as for the innocence, that's neither here nor there. We never yet had anybody in Newgate that, according to their own account, wasn't one of the most injured of individuals; and as for innocence, lord bless you, new born babes afore they begin squalling can't be more innocent than they. Ha—ha—!"

"Ah," said Claude, as he threw himself upon a singularly hard couch that was in the room. "You look, my friend, upon all these things with a professional eye."

"I rather think I do. However, I wish you well; and if I can do you a good turn, I will, for to tell you the truth, I like the looks of you."

"You have my best thanks."

The man smiled and withdrew. Claude heard the sound of the lock of the door as it was carefully secured on the outside, and then there was the unequivocal bang of an iron bar into it's place.

"These indulgences," said Claude to himself, "are not without the usual severities, but this is better than a cell. I wonder now if I owe this to the honest convictions creeping over Judge Manning that I have told the truth and that his nephew is a rogue, or to his fears about his child?"

By a natural movement enongh now Claude commenced a careful examination of his prison.

No place could so little reward a scrutiny. There was literally nothing that could invite a second glance. The walls were stone. The floor was stone. Hobs or cupboards, with the exception of that which held his bed, there were none, and that might be called something between a hole and a cupboard. Less than five minutes sufficed to convince Claude that there was nothing to glean in the way of hopeful information from an examination of the room, if it might be called so, in which he was.

He cast himself upon the hard couch again, and gave himself up to reflections, some of which were of anything but a pleasant or consolatory character. It seemed to him to be next to an impossibility that he should escape recognition from some of the authorities of Newgate, and in that case he, of course, knew that the very worst might be expected. There was only one gleam of consolation amid the sombre darkness of his position, and that was the conviction that Cicely was safe and well cared for.

It cost him much thought, however, and many pangs to know how and in what way he should communicate to her his perilous position.

When he came upon that subject, the tumult of his thoughts would not allow him to be still, and he rose and paced the small apartment to and fro, with rapid and uneasy steps.

In the midst of this state of things, he was startled by the sudden opening of the door, and Phillip Manning stood upon the threshold.

"You will find him there, sir," said a voice. "I will wait, and you have only to call out in a loud voice 'Very,' and I will come and let you out."

"Thank you," said Phillip.

The door was closed, and he stood a couple of paces within Claude's particular prison.

At this moment, the impulse to knock him down certainly came strongly over Claude, but by a powerful effort of his judgment, he restrained it, for he felt how important it was to him not only to hear what Phillip had to say, but likewise to avoid making any commotion in the prison, which might have the effect of summoning round him some who might know him.

He would not speak first, however, but he looked Phillip in the face with a stern defiance, before which the conscious villain shrunk and trembled.

At length, finding that Claude would not ask him the purport of his visit, he was compelled to commence the conference himself.

"You may make me your friend, if you like," said Phillip.

"No," said Claude. "If such a thing were possible I would decline the process. Speak out at once, and say what new circumlocution of villany brings you here?"

"I regret the turn affairs have taken."

"Indeed."

"Yes, in truth I do; and I think, upon mature consideration, we had better back out of it now, with what we can get."

"We?"

"Yes; I say we, because I am quite willing that you should be a sharer in the full proceeds, you see."

"Go on. Explain yourself more fully," said Claude, controlling as well as he was able, which was not very well, the indignation that was swelling at his heart.

"Why, I don't mind telling you because no one else hears me, and if you repeat it, nobody will believe yon, that I did, while you were talking to the Judge, pass out and get possession of Grace."

"I know it."

"That is to say you guessed it."

"Well, well, Phillip, I guessed at it.—What next?"

"I can't help stopping to tell you how well pleased I am to find you so reasonable about this matter; for, to tell you the truth, I fully expected you would have stormed and raved in good style."

"You see how calm I am?"

"Yes, I perceive. Well, as I was saying, I recovered my prisoner and have her safe, but—but the thing is a failure rather, and—and——"

"How a failure? If you have her safe, what do you mean by a failure? You must explain yourself more particularly."

"Well," said Phillip, with a toss of his head. "You know so much of the affair already, and you suspect so much more, that the safest way, if any good is to be done with you, is to tell you all."

"Much the safest," said Claude.

"So I think. In the first place I want money. In the next I was not without a certain amount of admiration of my cousin Grace.

"Good."

"Well, as we were first cousins, and so within the legal bounds of consanguinity, I did not see the least objection to marry her. She is my uncle's only child, and will inherit all his wealth, to a certainty, and he is rich. I proposed to Grace."

"And was rejected?"

"Yes, with great scorn. From that moment I promised myself revenge; but I likewise promised myself that I would be careful in my manner of exacting it. Grace went to stay with a distant relative, from whom I got her away by the story of her father's illness, as you are well aware. You met us and spoiled my plans, or I should have taken her where she would have been quite safe, and I would have forced her into a marriage or blighted her existence in such a way, that it would have been a relief to have had even me to have called by the name of husband."

"The situation," said Claude, "must have been indeed desperate that would have made that a desirable resource."

Phillip continued without heeding this bitter sarcasm.

"But things have turned out differently. She is as obstinate as twenty mules, and I am afraid that she will kill herself. All I have got her to consent to, is, that if she is restored to her father, she will, provided you likewise consent, bury the whole affair in oblivion, and not accuse me. But that is only half the battle gained. I want money, aad surely you cannot be quite indifferent to the claims of a couple of thousand pounds."

"Not at all."

"Well then, I know that for the restoration of his child, the judge, if you ask him, will hand you a draft for £4000 or £5000, and consent to ask no questions.

He will be with you here in the couse of an hour. I ask you to adopt that course. Ask him for the money. Promise him his child by twelve o'clock to night; and then when you hand me the cheque, I will restore you, and to-morrow morning we will meet and share the proceeds."

"Ah!" said Claude. He could not trust himself at the moment to say more.

"Well, is it a bargain?"

"Where is she?"

"You must excuse me there, my friend. That is a secret worth knowing, so I intend to keep it to myself."

Claude covered his face with both his hands and thought. Shall I, he thought, consent in appearance to this villany for the sake of restoring the child to the father, and then afterwards proclaim it? No—no. He, this Phillip, will bind Grace to secresy by some oaths, which her pure spirit will not break; and then I should denounce him in vain; besides, could I go through the interview with the judge? No—no. A hundred times no. The words in which I should cloathe the proposal for the restoration of his daughter for a sum of money, would stick in my throat. I could not—*I could not!*

"Have you decided?" said Phillip.

"Yes!" cried Claude, with startling energy.

"And you will do it?"

"You will find what I will do. Villain! Monster!"

Claude made a dash at him and caught him by the throat. Phillip raised a stifled cry, but it sufficed to reach the ears of the turnkey, who opened the door just as Phillip was turning black in the face.

"Holloa! What's this!"

"Keep off!" cried Claude. "Keep off! There will be one scoundrel the less in the world. Keep off, I pray you."

"No, no, this sort of thing won't do," said the turnkey.

As he spoke he drew from his pocket a whistle, and blew a shrill note, which had the effect of bringing half-a-dozen turnkeys to his aid, and by their united exertions, Phillip Manning was torn, more dead than alive, from the grasp of Claude.

For a few minutes the scene of confusion was most intense; and several of the officers were of opinion that Phillip Manning was dead.

"You have let yourself in for it now," said one; "you will swing for this."

"Such a villain," said Claude, "deserved death from the first hand that could be raised with sufficient power to inflict it."

"Ah," said an old officer shaking his head sagely from side to side. "If all the villains were to be throttled, what would become of the population I should like to know. That would never do."

The door of the room was again closed upon Claude, and fastened securely, while the insensible, and as some thought, the dead Phillip was taken to the Infirmary, for the purpose of seeing if the surgeon could do anything for him.

It was only a case of suspended animation. A little blood-letting soon recovered him. Such folks as Phillip Manning, somehow, always do take a deal of killing, while people whose lives are of both public and private consequence, most easily

"Shuffle off this mortal coil."

There is surely a special Providence for the conservation of blackguardism. Do we not see daily instances of men whose lives, as far as society is concerned, are perfectly worthless, running risks and escaping dangers which would be the instant destruction of any really estimable and valuable member of society? There are men who ride across horses, who patronise gigs, who ride steeple-chases, and daily expose themselves to all the chances of death and accident, and yet upon such men's safety, you may freely wager—and why? Simply because their deaths would be a gain rather than a loss to society.

And so Phillip recovered with his heart full of such unmitigated hatred to Claude, whom, it must not be forgotten, he only knew as John Smith, that nothing short of his complete destruction would now satisfy him.

It was about half an hour after these events, that Claude's door was opened again, and the turnkey said—

"Here's your brother, Tom Smith, as he calls himself. I suppose you won't go far to throttle him!"

CHAPTER CLII.

JACK UNDERTAKES A PERILOUS MISSION.

"My, brother!" exclaimed Claude.

"Yes. But if he isn't, why we can——"

"Stop! Stop!" cried Claude, "it's all right; I only thought he was out of town. That's all. Let him come in directly."

"Ah, John," said a voice, "I knew you would be glad to see me."

It was Dick Turpin.

Claude, at the moment, deeply congratulated himself that he had taken the hint about a brother, and not said anything to breed a suspicion that such was not the case; but he was, at the same time, full of wonder to know how Dick could possibly have found out what had happened to him.

"I am, indeed, glad to see you, Tom," said Claude.

"Oh, it's all right," said the turnkey, as he closed the door. "There will be no throttling this time, I suppose."

The moment they were fairly alone, Claude said,—

"Dick, I am pleased, and afflicted at this visit."

"How afflicted?"

"At the danger you thrust yourself into."

"Oh, don't think of that. Danger is the element such men as you and I live in. It comes as natural to us as water to a fish; but, speak low, and don't pronounce my name, nor will I yours. Walls have ears they say, and I don't feel much trust in anything, even being quite alone in Newgate."

"I will be careful; but how did you find me out?"

"I have many and some very strange sources of information. At some other time we will talk about that. Moments are precious just now; for, although, it is contrary to their orders to forbid me to visit you, upon my stating my near relationship; yet they will cut that visit as short as possible, you may depend."

"True—true!"

"Then tell me, Claude, at once, what is best to be done, and Jack and I will do it. Bother my tongue! I uttered your name just now, after myself giving you the caution not to do so."

"Never mind. You spoke in a very low tone."

"I hope I did."

"Be assured you did, and that, as yet, all is well. There is only one course of conduct that you and Jack can adopt to aid me, and that is to follow Phillip Manning, and find out where he has bestowed Grace."

"He has her, then?"

"Yes; the villain has been here and confessed as much. I have half choaked him, I believe; but I hope I have not wholly done so. The restoration of Grace to her father, untramelled by any promise to keep secret Phillip's share in the infamous transaction, will be the signal for my instant liberation; and if that can take place before any awkward recognition of me takes place here, the whole affair will end well, and do to laugh at on a winter's night.

"It shall be done."

"Then I feel easy; for well I know that if it can be done at all, you and Jack are the persons to do it: and now, as regards Cicely, merely tell her that I am

engaged for a day or two upon a matter that has suddenly sprung up; but it is quite needless to mention me in any connexion with this dreadful building, which is already sufficiently a bug-bear to her imagintaion."

"All shall be as you wish in that respect."

"Hilloa! is the gossiping over?" cried the turnkey. "Ten minutes is all we allow."

"Yes, yes," said Dick. "Good-by, John."

"Good-by," said Claude. "All's right. They are very civil to me here, Tom, and this man has been particularly so."

Both Claude and Dick felt the importance of propitiating the officials of the prison, so Dick at once handed the man a guinea, saying—

"Take that as an earnest of another, when my brother here is declared innocent, which he is."

The turnkey tossed the coin in the air by a dexterousmovement of his thumb; and as he caught it in its descent, and placed it in his waistcoat pocket, he looked aside at Claude, saying—

"He won't fare the worse; but mum is the word about the spangle."

"All's right," said Dick; "I know. God bless you, brother John.—You will soon be out of this."

Claude was again alone, but his reception of visitors was not yet over. Phillip Manning had spoken for once in a way, just because it happened to suit him, the truth, when he said the judge was about to pay Claude a visit, and sure enough, Dick had hardly got well clear of Newgate, when the judge was announced.

Claude rose and received the old man with respect, for he could not quarrel with him, knowing well, that in his conduct towards him he acted as any one would have done under the circumstances, and probably with much more consideration, than any ordinary person would have brought to bear upon the subject.

Claude was aware that the judge placed his own back to the light, which gave him the advantage of seeing Claude's features fully, while his own were partially shrouded; but Claude had no sort of objection to such an arrangement. He had no emotion of his mind, that might find expression upon his countenance, to conceal.

"You will perhaps be surprised at this visit," said the judge.

"No, sir. Your nephew told me of it."

"What, Phillip?"

"Even so, sir."

"Then he has made already an attempt to move you to compassion for a father's sufferings? What has been your answer?"

"Phillip has made no such attempt."

"Do not try to deceive me. For what other motive could he seek you in this gloomy prison?"

"To add to his villany by attempting to get me to participate in a scheme of robbing you."

"Impossible!"

"And yet true, sir. I took him by the throat as my answer. They wrested him from me, or he would not have lived to deny the new charge against him as, of course, he will most freely and distinctly."

"Alas! alas! What am I to think?"

"Nothing is more natural than that you should be thoroughly confused by all that has happened. You would need to have the prescience of the Almighty to see your way through the conflicting evidence that is brought before you. Nothing but the evidence now of your daughter, Grace, can be conclusive to your mind."

"Restore her to me—restore her to me!"

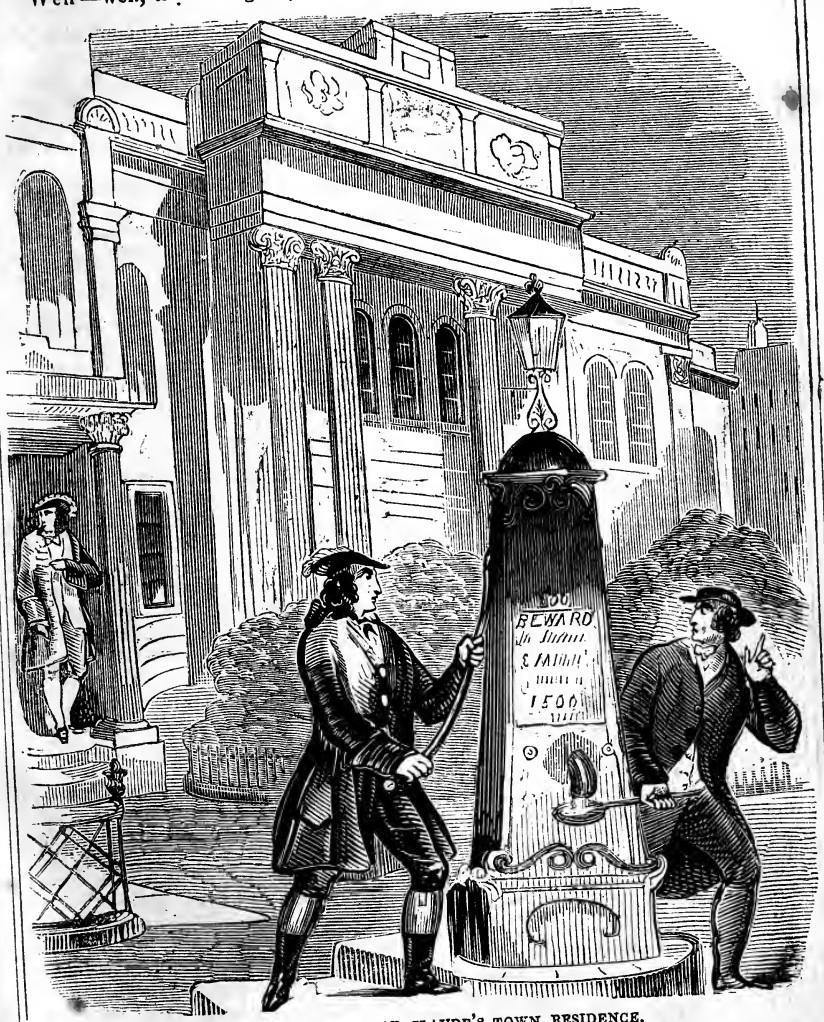
"I would that I could."

"Hark your, sir; this child—this Grace—is the child of my old age. My only

one. Without her I am desolate. God who looks into all hearts as into an open book, only knows if you be guilty or innocent of her abduction; but you must confess yourself that circumstances are strong against you."

"They are."

"Well—well, if you be guilty, I implore you, as you wish that Heaven should



THE OLD PUMP, NEAR CLAUDE'S TOWN RESIDENCE.

overlook that guilt—as you hope for all, ay, more than all, the advantages you even expected to accrue from that guilt—I entreat you to restore her to me upon your own terms; you have only to speak."

"This is hard, indeed."

"What is hard?"

"To be thus appealed to upon the presumption of my guilt. I tell you, sir

judge once for all, that I was your child's defender—that I rescued her; but that she has been torn away from me and from you again. Look to Phillip for a further answer."

The judge groaned.

"Yes, sir; I add, and I add it most emphatically—Look to Phillip, whom you have loaded with benefits—to Phillip, whom you have had occasion to forgive for much, and whom you have so forgiven. Look to him, and to him only, for your child."

"I am as one in a maze, I know not what to think, nor which way to move," said the judge, mournfully.

"Hark ye, sir," said Claude, after a slight pause. "I do not feel any degree of bitterness or resentment against you for this imprisonment which I innocently suffer. I admit it was forced upon you."

"If you be innocent," said the judge, "you are the most generous of men. But if guilty, you are——"

"Go on, sir. Being innocent, I can very well bear to hear what you would say of guilt."

"You are, then, of guilty, the most artful and spurious."

"Excepting one."

"What one?"

"Your nephew, Phillip, sir."

"If I were once only assured of his guilt in the present instance, he should never again reach my heart; but it is too improbable. What could he, of all men, have to gain by the abduction of my child, but shame and want?"

"He knows that you are rich, sir."

"Granted that I am. What then?"

"He knows that Grace is your only child, and that upon her will devolve the greatest amount of your wealth. Thus calculating, then, his great object was to get her to consent to an union with him."

"You are wrong. She has already explicitly refused him."

"Yes, but he hoped that by taking her from all who would befriend, he should be able to place her in such a position that even marriage with him would be far better than the shame which would be her position otherwise."

A flush of angry colour came to the judge's cheeks.

"No, no," he said, "that is too much."

"In what way?" said Claude, speaking quickly. "Do you think that anything in the way of wickedness, that you and I may imagine is in reality, too much for Phillip to perpetrate? I tell you, sir, he has been to me to-day."

"I know it. He has tried to move your heart."

"Move my heart? In good truth, sir, he did move both my heart and brain to that extent, that I could not keep my fingers from his throat. I did not kill him; but it will be some time before Phillip Manning forgets the clutch with which I held him, in consequence of moving my heart."

The judge glared at Claude with an expression that looked almost like insanity, as he said—

"And what is your account of the interview you have had with Phillip?"

"The true one?"

"But its substance?"

"That you will not believe it if I tell it to you; and yet you shall know that he admitted to me he knew where Grace was, and his object in coming to me was to get me to take the guilt off his shoulders, by owning that I was the criminal, and asking of you a large sum for the restoration of your child, which sum he proposed to share with me. That was his errand."

The judge looked astonished.

"And your answer?" he said.

"Look for it upon Philip's throat."

"I know not what to think. I am bewildered. Your tone and manner is so like innocence, and yet the circumstances are so strongly against you, that

you may well suppose that even, with all my experience, I know not what to think."

"Granted, sir. And now I will make to you a proposal."

"Name it. If it tend to the restoartion of my child, you may make your own terms. Go on. Go on!

"The first condition of my proposal is, that you will not insult me by supposing that what I am about to offer to do is for money. Do you consent to that?"

"I do."

"Then, sir, I will make an effort to get back your daughter from the hands of your nephew Phillip, if you will aid me to do so. I have friends without this prison. It matters not who or what they are, but for my sake they will do their utmost to find out where Phillip has bestowed Grace. Their exertions will be something worth thinking of, but from you I must have certain facilities for them."

"Name any sum required."

"It is not money. What I demand is that they come and go as they please to me in this prison, without question or hindrance."

"Granted."

"'Tis settled then. I demand too, that I may correspond with who I please without my letters being subject to the surveillance of the authorities of the prison."

"Send any letter you please, addressed to whom you like, under cover to me, and I pledge you my honour as a gentleman to forward it."

"I am quite satisfied, sir."

"Then you will try your best?"

"Sir—sir. Remember that you still suspect me guilty."

"No, hardly now."

"Why am I here then? Nay do not look confused, sir, at the seeming inconsistency of your acts. Were I in your place, and you in mine, I daresay I should do as you do, and with that feeling, I of course find no fault with you. As soon as I can get any intelligence for you, satisfactory or otherwise, you shall hear it."

"I thank you, and be assured that if in this matter I have done you an injustice, I have both the will and the power to amply indemnify you for it. You shall want for nothing here."

"I thank you. I am certainly not partial to prison fare."

"Then you know what it is?" said the judge, quickly.

"Yes," said Claude, "and I can well see that that admission tells much against me in your mind. But let it go. You will find that there are worse men out of prison by far, sir, than in them, and that piece of knowledge may be of the first importance to you upon the seat of judgment."

The judge rose and went to the door of Claude's cell. A turnkey was within call, to whom he said—

"Is the governor up?"

"Yes, my lord judge," said the man, "and he will be happy to see you."

"Very well. I wan't to speak to him." Then turning to Claude, he said—"You may write to me with safety, and you will find, by the free egress and ingress of your friends, if you send for them, that the agreement is being carried out."

Claude bowed.

The door of the prison room was closed, and again barred and locked, and Claude was alone.

"All may yet be well," he said, as he paced the narrow confines of the apartment. "If Dick and Jack can be but the means of restoring Grace to her father, the tale that she will have to tell will complete my justification, and all I shall then ask will be an instant release. Oh, that I were on the road again, breathing the free air of Heaven from the back of my gallant steed."

The very first thing now that Claude wished to do was to make Dick and Jack aware of the sort of bargain he had made with the judge.

This could now easily be accomplished by writing to them and putting the utmost confidence in the promise of the judge to forward his letters without any examination, provided they were addressed to him, he wrote the particulars of the conversation we have worded, ending by saying—

"To save me, detect Phillip Manning. I leave it to the skill and the friendship of you both, to do so much for me."

CHAPTER CLIII.

JACK AND DICK GO UPON THE TRACK OF PHILLIP MANNING, AND MAKE A DISCOVERY.

The cogitations of Phillip Manning, after his interview with Claude, could not be of a pleasant character. In addition to being half choked, he had, by his folly and his criminality in the whole transaction, placed himself in a most uncomfortable situation.

Gladly, most gladly, would he now have backed out of the affair, if he could possibly have done so without compromising himself beyond all power of redemption with his uncle.

Whatever scenes or follies of extravagance the old judge might from time to time be inclined to forgive his nephew, it was not at all probable that if he came before him in the character of the abductor of his much-loved child, that he could feel anything but the most intense indignation.

Phillip felt this.

We will, preceding the receipt of Claude's letter by Dick and Jack—by-the-by, it was addressed to the latter, for Claude felt that Jack deserved the compliment at his hands—take a peep at the proceedings of Master Phillip.

We have already stated that while Claude was carrying on that most inauspicious dialogue with the old judge, Phillip had gone into the street, and found the carriage which contained Grace.

The young creature had been waiting most anxiously for the return of Claude, and when the coach door was opened, she looked for nothing but to see him, and to hear some message from her father.

When the hateful countenance of Phillip Manning met her gaze, she seemed as though her life were evaporating, and she could only gaze upon him with a speechless despair.

"You are mine," he said. "You are mine. Ha! ha! I have you once again, and your are mine."

Overcome completely by the sound of these terrible words, a dimness, as if the world were enveloped in a mist, came before her eyes, and she swooned, falling to the bottom of the carriage.

"Good!" said Phillip. "Good!"

He at once closed the carriage door, and having carefully fastened it, he mounted himself on the box, and drove off.

Where and how she was bestowed, will be best understood by a slight detail of the circumstances that ensued, upon her coming to her senses again.

When Grace opened her eyes, all was darkness—darkness, too, of the most profound character—so that although she held up her hand before her eyes, she could not see it.

At first her memory was so confused that she could not recollect the various circumstances of the last twenty-four hours; but this state of inertitude did not last long, for gradually circumstance by circumstance then came back to her in detail, all the events that had placed her in her present position, but what that position was she could only conjecture.

She at first felt fearful that she was in some sort of bondage that would prevent her from rising; but she found that that was not the case, and she gained her feet.

"Father! father! Help me!" she cried.

The echo of her own voice was the only answer that was returned to her cry for aid.

"Just Heaven!" she cried, "what will become of me?"

She sank upon her knees, and remained for some time in that attitude of supplication to the Deity, begging for that mercy and consideration which, if extended to any one in this world, surely should be to one so pure and so faultless as she was.

When she rose from this act of devotion, she felt greatly refreshed in spirit, and much more able to reason calmly upon her perilous situation. She did not entertain the smallest doubt as to the fact of her being again in the power of Phillip Manning, and she resolved that, let what might occur, he should not see any evidences of fear upon her part now.

"If I subdue him," she said, "it will only be by showing no fear. His dastard spirit would rejoice in my despondency, as much as it will be cowed by an appearance of courage."

There could not possibly be a juster mode of reasoning than this, as regarded Phillip Manning. His was just the sort of disposition to indulge in weak triumph where he found submission, but to be abashed and shrinking before that real courage, which even in the midst of his power should defy him.

Having come to this resolve, Grace began, as well as the intense darkness would permit her, to feel about the room, in order to ascertain its proportions, and, if possible, find some window or other aperture, by which she could get light.

After a time she did find the window. But the shutters were fast closed. She could only tell by the feel that a window it was; but all her exertions did not enable her to find any means of unclosing the shutters.

Suddenly, while she was engaged upon the attempt, she heard a rattling noise and from beneath a door, she saw a thin pencil of light.

Clasping her hands, she waited in expectation of what might then ensue, fully, determined to defy Phillip to the utmost.

She heard a key rattle in a lock—she heard a heavy bolt drawn from the outside of a door, and then it opened, and Phillip Manning, conveying a lamp in one hand, appeared before her.

The sudden glare of light from the lamp, after the intense darkness she had been in, was painful to her eyes at first; but in the course of a moment or two, that feeling wore off, and she was able to move her hand from before them. Phillip had paused upon the threshold, and was looking into the room with an inquiring gaze.

"Grace! he said, "Grace!"

She would not answer him."

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed, "she has not escaped?"

He rushed into the room with vehemence, but when he saw her standing by the window he drew a long breath of most exquisite relief, and holding the lamp above his head, he said—

"So you are here?"

Still she would not answer him.

"This obstinacy," he said, "will not avail you. Grace, do you know where you are?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Ah! you know?"

"I am in the hands of a villain, so far as he thinks, but in reality I am, as he too is in the hands of Heaven."

"Let Heaven open the door, then, for you," he said, with a sneer; "but I am not going to quarrel with you, Grace. I come to bring you freedom and happiness."

She started and felt her colour come and go at the delightful prospect, but fearing some villany, as, indeed, she had abundant cause to do, she said nothing.

"You have but to acquiese in what I shall propose to you," he added, "and you will be never again subject to such an annoyance as you now suffer from; your fate is in your own hands."

"Go on," she said, finding that he would not continue speaking unless she made some sort of reply to him—"go on."

"You encourage me to proceed," he said. "'Tis well that you should do so, and I am glad, indeed, to find you so reasonable. Now, Grace, you know that I love you."

"You—love—me?"

"Yes, and why not?"

"Oh, no, no, no!"

"You doubt it? I ought to be able to convince you of your error."

"No, Philip, no. Love desires the happiness of its object, but you do not, cannot love but one. It is not in your nature."

"And that one is you?"

"No, no."

"What absurd story have you got hold of to my prejudice? Who could have dared to tell you falsely that I love another? Name at once the author of the calumny? Who is it you would say that I love?"

"Yourself, Phillip. Only yourself."

He looked abashed.

"Pshaw!" he said, after taking a few moments to recover himself. "Pshaw! This is only some foolish delusion. My love for you is so great that, you see, in the face of the most serious obstacles, I have taken you away; and now, Grace, you have only to consent to be mine, and you shall be at liberty."

"Look you, Phillip. Where death by some lingering torture upon the one hand, and you upon the other. I would gladly, if no other mode of escaping from you presented itself, endure the bitterest pangs."

"You only say this, Grace."

"I think it, too."

"No, no, or if you do, your mind will change some day. Perhaps the beauty upon which you, no doubt, pride yourself, will fade after the confinement of a year or two in this place, and you will be right glad to embrace my offer. I will keep you here until you go mad and your father dies, and then I will produce you, and as your next of kin, claim the benevolent care of you and all your property. Ha! ha!"

"O, Phillip do you, can you think there is a God above us?"

"I care not."

"The time will come for you to care, indeed."

"Ha! ha! You would attempt to frighten me by religious terrors, would you? but such a course will not do for Phillip Manning. I am long past all that. Let us kiss and be friends."

"Away! do not pollute me by your touch."

"Now by all that's —— I've half a mind. But no; that would be folly. You will think better of all this, Grace. I am willing to restore you to your father, upon condition that you immediately give me your hand, and likewise to tell to him, to account for your absence, such a tale as I shall concoct for you."

"Never—never!"

"Beware—beware!"

"Beware of what?—Of you, poor villain? No! You have the heart to think of deep crimes, but not the courage to perpetrate them! I am not afraid of you, Phillip Manning, and I never shall be. My first act the moment I see my father's face, will be to proclaim to him you villany, and to ask his utmost gratitude for him who rescued me from you some time since, and to whom some sad accident must have happened, or I should not have again fallen into your power."

"He's in Newgate."

"Newgate?"

"Yes, charged by your father, at my instigation, with your abduction. Your father is fully possessed with a belief that he has secreted you somewhere, and will no doubt, exert the utmost rigour of the law against him. But you can save him."

"I?"

"Yes; by consenting to become mine he shall be released. All that is required is that your father should be to a certain extent mystified in the affair, which will do him no harm."

"Once and for all," replied Grace, "I reject with scorn your proposals. If I suffer—if my generous and gallant preserver suffer—if my father suffer, let the account of all these deeds be asked of you at the judgment seat of the Almighty. It is your work, Phillip."

"We shall see," said Phillip, "we shall see."

He glared at her with such fiendish ferocity, that even boldly as she had hitherto maintained herself towards him, she almost shrank before him, fearing that he might descend to personal violence.

This no doubt would have been the result of the interview, but really, Phillip felt a degree of terror at the young girl, half a child as she was, which kept him back; and besides, he knew that there could be no hope of anything in the shape of a reconciliation if he once laid his hand upon her in anger.

He drew back.

"Thank my clemency," he said.

She did not condescend to contradict him. Her attitude and the expression upon her face were fully sufficient to show him what her feelings were upon the subject.

For a few moments now, a death-like stillness subsided in the room; and finding she was not likely to break it, Phillip said—

"Perhaps you are not quite aware, that by the law as it stands at present, it is death to abduct from her home a person of your age? When he who now lies in Newgate upon that charge, suffers on the scaffold, I will bring you an account of his last moments.

Without waiting for her reply to this, which he thought likely enough might be one he did not wish to hear, he abruptly left the room.

All was dark again.

When she found herself alone, the feelings of Grace underwent rather a sort of revulsion, and she trembled excessively and wept. But her natural good sense—her education and her courage, soon rose up against the longer continuance of such a state of depression, and she rallied amazingly.

"No—no," she said, "I may suffer, and all who are dear to me may suffer, but I will not deviate from that path which I know and feel to be the right one."

She found her way, notwithstanding the intense darkness in which she was, to the couch upon which she had been lying before her recovery, and sitting upon its edge, she began as calmly as she could to think over her position, and its meagre prospects.

While she was thus occupied, she heard the voice of Phillip in the passage, if passage it were, outside the door of the room, saying—

"Be quick—be quick!"

The door was opened, and while he held the light, an old decrepid hag of a woman came in with some bread and a pitcher of water.

"Here, my honey," she said, in a strong Irish accent, "don't say we starves you, any way."

"Peace!" cried Phillip.

"Musha! master, I was only saying to the little ladybird that any how we——"

"Peace, I say.—Come away."

The old woman hobbled out of the room again, and Phillip carefully fastened the door. She heard him fumbling at it for some time, and it was clear he was most particular about the fastenings.

CHAPTER CLIV.

JACK REPLENISHES CLAUDE'S PURSE.—THE PURSUIT OF PHILLIP.

THE letter that Claude sent through the orders of Judge Manning to Jack came duly to hand.

Dick had completely forgone his intentions of leaving that part of the country, and now signified to Jack, that he would devote himself entirely to the service of Claude, in the matter of his most unjust imprisonment.

To say that Jack was pleased at this determination is to say very little, for in point of fact he was overjoyed at it.

"It is such brave friends as yourself," said Jack, "that Claude wants, now he is in difficulty and danger."

"Well," replied Dick, "he shall not be either in difficulty or in danger for long, if our exertions can rescue him. Let us set about it, Jack, with good will, and if we do not succeed in finding out where this rascal, Phillip Manning has bestowed the young lady, it will, indeed, be an odd thing to me."

Where there's a will, there's certainly, in a vast number of cases, a way, and so Dick and Jack set about placing themselves upon the track of Master Phillip.

They both remounted at the farmhouse, where Cicely was in comfort and security, and at a brisk trot went towards London. Jack seemed to be considering something, and suddenly he said—

"Money is a good thing to have plenty of in Newgate."

"In good truth it is," replied Dick. "The power of money by no means ceases at the vestibule of Newgate."

"Well, then, I know it is quite impossible, what with one thing and another, that Claude can be even moderately well provided; so the only thing I can think of doing is to get him some."

"I understand you," said Dick, with a smile; "you would levy a contribution upon some traveller?"

"I would."

"Don't let me, then, be at all in your way; and if I can render you any assistance, depend upon me."

"Many thanks. I am resolved to stop the first traveller we meet, who shall look worth the robbing. If there are two, I shall, of course, be glad for you to tackle one of them while I make free with the purse of the other; and who knows but we may be lucky enough to get him a good round sum by our exertions?"

Dick could not help smiling at the seriousness with which Jack spoke of their exertions, as though it was some legitimate business affair; but he said, jocosely—

"Yes, Jack, and I promise you that I will manage to keep up the supply to Claude, as long as he is not in a position to help himself. Who knows but some of these fine nights I may get a wound which may so far disable me as to make me fall into the hands of the Philistines myself?"

"It may happen to any of us," said Jack.

"Well," added Dick, "you may rely upon my co-operation with you, if it be necessary."

Jack expressed his acknowledgments with infinite gravity, and the two made their way at an easy canter to London.

At that period, the environs of the metropolis, to the west and to the north in

particular, presented a strikingly rural appearance, and you got quite among the houses before you lost the aspect of the country. To a greater extent than any other roads out of London, these environs now present rural aspects; for when the traveller reaches Hampstead or Acton, he might, by a very small stretch of imagination, fairly enough fancy himself many miles from the giant city.



PHILIP MANNING RESOLVES TO MURDER GRACE WHEN DICK SEIZES AND SECURES HIM.

Thus, then, although both Jack and Dick were very close to Oxford-street, they by no means despaired of meeting with some one whom they might ease of a little ready cash. They were passing through a long avenue of trees, not far off what is now called the New-road, leading towards Acton, when they became conscious of the sound of wheels behind them.

"I hear the sound."

"Shall I leave you to the adventure if it be only one man?"

"Yes, if you will be so good, and another time I will give you the road in the same way."

"Don't mention that. I know your motive, and am quite contented that you should have all the spoil, upon this occasion, to take to our mutual friend, Claude."

Dick accordingly left the side of Jack, and rode so close to the trees on one side of the road, and with so quiet a step, too, that it was next thing to impossible he could be seen.

Jack posted himself in the centre of the road.

In the course of a few minutes the sound of the approaching wheels became very distinct, and Jack's experience told him that it was only a two-wheeled vehicle that was coming. A feeling of great disappointment came over him, for it might only be some commercial traveller, after all, with nothing worth the stopping him for. Still he resolved upon making the experiment, and when the gig, for a gig it was, came sufficiently near, he called out—

"Stop!"

The voice in which he spoke was quite loud enough to have reached further than the gig, and its occupant, and the result was an instant draw-up of the vehicle.

Jack galloped towards it, and when he got quite close, he said in calm determined tones—

"Your money, or your life and money both?"

The person who had been driving was evidently in such a state of terror that he could not speak; but Jack could hear his teeth chattering together like a pair of castanets.

"Comply with my demand quickly," he said, "and you are in no danger."

"I—I have only got eighteen-pence—"

"Pho! pho!"

"Oh, good Mr. Highwayman, it's a melancholy fact, it is, indeed. I'm a very poor fellow, upon my word I am."

"Who are you?" said Jack. "I fancy I have heard your voice before, somewhere; and if I know any good of you, I will let you off. I cannot see your face. Why don't you have lights to your gig?"

"Yes—yes, good sir, I had."

"Where are they, then?"

"They—they blowed out, good Mr. Highwayman. I've only got a small matter of eighteen-pence. Indeed, that's all."

"We shall see. Who are you? Speak at once, or I shall take some means of unloosening your tongue that you won't like."

"My name, sir, is—is Thomas."

"Thomas what?"

"Brereton, sir. I'm usually called plain Tom Brereton, sir; of course, a gentleman like you, sir, may call me what he likes. Take my eighteen-pence, and spare my life."

"Ah," said Jack, "I thought I knew your voice. Why, you are a terrible rascal, Mr. Tom Brereton. I have heard of you. Do you know anything of Claude Duval?"

"I'm done, I'm done. I'm a dead man! I'm as good as done for. The Lord have mercy upon me. It's Claude Duval himself. Oh, don't cut me off in the flower of my youth, don't; I'm too great a sinner, indeed I am, and ought to have time given me to repent."

"You are a sinner I know," said Jack; "but don't be going off with the idea that you are stopped by Claude Duval, for I am not he. You ought to know that well enough by my voice, which is so strikingly different from his; nor is he in my company, nor in any way connected with this affair. Yet by chance I happen to know you are a great rascal, and have behaved yourself as badly as possible to him."

"Oh, no, no, no——"

"I say yes."

"Good Mr. Highwayman, you really are quite mistaken. You don't know how fond I am of Claude Duval."

"Fond of him?"

"Yes; I value him next to the apple of my eye, indeed I do. If you come near him, pray give my respects to him, and tell him how glad I shall always be to see him. Good night, sir, good night. I hope you may do a good stroke of business to night. Good night, sir."

"Move one inch, and I will blow your brains out."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear. What's that?"

"What?"

Quite involuntarily Jack looked in the direction that Tom Brereton pointed to, and at that moment, relying probably upon having a fast horse in the gig, Tom made a desperate attempt to be off, but Jack was one too many for him at that game, and darting to the horse's head, secured him in a moment.

"This is very uncivil of you," said Jack; "you wanted to leave me, did you, without any acknowlegements for your civility? but I will put it out of your power to play such another trick. I have wasted too long a time upon you already."

Tom translated these words into a direct threat to murder him, and throwing himself out of the gig, he fell upon his knees in the road, crying—

"Spare my life, and take all I have. I have got a £100 with me, good Mr. Highwayman, that I stole myself, for you can't think how I have been taken in in marrying."

"You deserve any fate," said Jack.

With this he at once cut the traces of the horse, and set the creature at liberty from the chaise, so that Tom Brereton had no opportunity of again trying to give him the slip. He then approached him, and clapping a pistol to his face, said—

"The money. Give it up at once."

"Here, Sir. Here good Mr. Highwayman. Here. Do you know, sir, I stole it from my wife, who stole it from the dressing room of a lady, that she has gone to live with as maid. I was going to make off with it, sir, if you please, out of the country; and I stole the gig too, sir, and I stole the horse."

"Why, you incorrigible rascal, you will tell me next that you stole the coat that is upon your back."

"Ah, sir. I stole the whole suit, that I did, sir."

"Then you can't blame me," said Jack. "You may depend upon my giving your compliments and kind regards to Claude Duval, if ever I should come across him, and in the meantime I wish you a very good night."

"Won't you give me back some of the money, sir?"

"Give you back some? How absurd. No, Mr. Tom Brereton, you must do the best you can with what you have left."

"Left! Gracious! I have not one farthing."

"Nonsence, you know you have eighteen-pence in change which you were kind enough to offer me, so don't tell me you have nothing. Good night."

Tom Brereton fell with a groan to the ground, and Jack galloped back to join Dick, who, by going at a very easy pace, gave him an opportunity of easily doing so.

"Success," said Dick.

"Yes. Ample. A £100 in gold."

"Hurrah, that is good. It will relieve Claude from many a disagreeable in Newgate, that otherwise, without money, he would be compelled to submit to. I congratulate you."

"Yes, and what makes it more pleasant by a great deal," said Jack, "is that I have taken it from an old enemy of Claude's, and a man whom I know to be one of the most contemptible scoundrels the world ever saw."

"That is better and better."

"It is; and now we have nothing to do, but to push on for London as quickly as possible, for I long to put myself into communication with Claude."

"Will you venture within the walls of Newgate?"

Jack gave a slight shudder, and then he replied—

"Yes, I will to see Claude; and perhaps it will do me good, by preventing the thought of that building being such a bugbear to my imagination as it is now."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Dick, "and I encourage your visit, for I am quite convinced Claude would not have told you in his letter it might be made with safety, unless he had had ample reason to say so."

"That is precisely my opinion."

By this time they had reached Oxford Street, and Dick proposed that they should halt for a moment or two at a noted hostel on the left-hand side of the way called "Hercules's Club," where knights of the road were accustomed to bait.

"We shall hear the news of the day there," said Dick. "For my own part I am full of apprehension that Claude will not be able to preserve his incognito in Newgate; and in such a case, the whole aspect of affairs will be changed, and any visit to him might be attended with the most dangerous of all consequences."

"What?" said Jack.

"The arrest of the visiters. But here we are at the 'Hercules's Club,' and we will take a glass without dismounting, and ask the news of the landlord."

"Does he know you, Dick?"

"Perfectly well, and if he knew you likewise it would be no matter, for you would be as safe as you are now. But do not fancy that upon that account I am going to tell him a word about you. Your secret is your own, not mine."

Jack was quite satisfied with this assurance.

A very few moments brought them to the door of the hostel, which Dick had spoken of in such terms of commendation; and in answer to his call, a man appeared at the door, who said in rather a crusty tone.

"Who are you, I wonder?"

"Look again," said Dick.

"Eh? Bless my soul, yes it is you. Well, who would have thought of seeing you in this quarter of the world. Come in?"

"No, thank you. I can come in. It is not my part of the country this certainly. But I have business in London. Bring us out a cup of wine, such as I know you have at hand for a friend, and then we must be off again."

"That will I," said the landlord.

The wine was brought in an antique silver flagon, and Jack and Dick divided it between them. Then Dick, in a careless way, said to the landlord—

"Is there any news stirring?"

"No. None that I know of."

"By-the-by, have you heard anything of Duval's lately?"

"Only that he is still on the Western Road, that is all."

CHAPTER CLV.

THE RESCUE OF GRACE MANNING.

From this reply of the landlord's, both Dick and Jack were quite satisfied that up to that time Claude's incognito had not been blown upon. If he had been discovered in Newgate, the news would have got to no place with greater alacrity than to the "Hercules's Club."

"Thank you," said Dick, as he returned the empty flagon to the landlord. "The next time I come I hope I shall be able to step in, and have a gossip with you about old times."

"I hope so too," said the landlord; "you have been a good friend, Dick, to me, and mine, and there is no man I should be more glad to see at all times."

Dick shook hands with him, and then Jack and he rode off at a rapid pace down Oxford Street.

"I will take Claude the money, Jack," said Dick, "if you in the least way feel any repugnance to going into Newgate."

"No. I have made up my mind to it," said Jack; "and I am so bound up in the service of Claude, that I feel confident now I shall be able to go through with the affair."

"Very good. I am glad to hear you say so. We will find a place to put up our nags, and I will make what changes we think necessary in our costume; and we will, in a serious manner, undertake this job of unasking the villany of Phillip Manning."

"And we shall succeed Dick."

"In good truth it will go hard with us, as well as with others, if we don't; for a trifle don't stop me when once I undertake a thing."

"Nor shall it stop me."

"And in addition to my feelings," added Dick, "for Claude in this matter, and my great anxiety to see him safe out of the stone pitcher, in the Old Bailey. I have got used to the road, and the free balmy air of the open country, and the sweet smell of the hay, and the songs of the birds, that it is quite a sacrifice for me to spend twenty-four hours in London."

"I, too," said Jack, "love the open air, and the birds, and the trees, and the flowers."

"Ay, Jack, as all must, who compare such beauties with the grimy town; but business, my friend, is business, and must be attended to. We will see Claude free, and then hurrah for the road again, and the open sky. After all, Jack, what life is like ours?"

"What indeed."

"We enjoy existence with very few of its cares. With a good steed; a pair of pops that can be depended on, and a light heart—we are happier than kings."

"Yes," said Jack, "I was once, but I am now spirit-broken."

"Not so, old fellow. You will come round again in good time, and the name of Sixteen-string Jack will yet be spoken as it was once spoken of. Why, folks used to delay journeys on your account once upon a time; and you were as well known upon the great north road, as any old sign. It was always a question if any one came off a journey in that direction, 'Did you meet the famous highwayman, Sixteen-string Jack?'"

Jack's face glowed for a moment with the remembrance of old times, and he said in a voice of emotion—

"I never was grasping, or cruel either."

"No, Jack, I never heard that you were, either. It is not in your nature to be cruel or grasping. But here we are."

"Where?"

"Why, close to Soho, where I will find you a lodging in which you can sleep securely, and where our cattle will be well taken care of. In the morning, then, you can make yourself up for your visit to Newgate; and after that we will be like bloodhounds upon the track of that scoundrel, who has got Claude into this mess."

"We will."

Jack fully expected to find Dick stop at some house of ordinary entertainment, the landlord of which he knew; but to his surprise Dick drew up at the door of a quiet looking house in Dean Street, which, from its private and respectable exterior, looked as though it belonged to some people who were highly proper, and well to do in the world.

"Why surely you don't bait here?" said Jack.

"Yes," said Dick.

"Well, you know best, of course."

"I know the people, Jack. This is one of the safest cribs in all London. I don't mean to say that the master of this house will be quite delighted to see you and I; but for all that, he will pay us every attention in the world, and we shall be quite safe."

"Who is he?"

"I can better tell you, Jack, what he is than who he is. In plain terms, he keeps a fence."

"Ah, a receiver?"

"Yes, and one of the richest in London. He don't intefere with petty spoil, nor is he at all known to petty thieves; but to such as I and Claude, and to such as you, Jack, he is quite a patron, and keeps his house open to us, although he does not wish any of us to come except upon an emergency; but of that he can be no judge; so he will make us welcome, fancying this is one."

"Must he know me?"

"He does know all you have to tell him, I suspect."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, Jack; he told me the last time I saw him, although at that time I was far from believing it, that you were alive, and expressed a wish to see you, and a desire to be of what service to you he could. How he came by the secret of your resuscitation I know not; but such men as he have a thousand unknown resources of information. At all events, you may depend upon your absolute safety in his house."

Jack was a little shaken at the idea of his being known; but the assurances of his safety, which he knew Dick would be the last person in the world to make if he did not feel quite confident upon that subject, reconciled him.

"In that case then," said Jack, "I prefer that I should be named to him at once. If a man be trusted at all, let him be trusted wholly."

"That is good, both in principle and in practice, Jack," said Dick. "There is no knowing the mischief that results from half-confidence; I will at once introduce you to Josiah Franklin."

"Oh, is that his name?"

"Yes, and he is one of the most respected quakers in London."

"Quakers?"

Dick laughed.

"I thought, Jack," he said, "that would surprise you; but our friend here is a quaker. He knows Claude very well, and has upon more than one occasion accommodated him with a suit of quaker's apparel."

"I have seen him so attired," said Jack.

"Then he got the clothing from Franklin; and after that I hope you trust in his good faith, and in your own perfect safety, beyond a doubt."

"It was beyond a doubt before, Dick; and yet I am glad to hear that Claude knows and trusts this man. I wonder he never mentioned him to me."

"He could not. Franklin makes his intruders promise that they will not mention him to their nearest and dearest friends; and I should not now have dreamt for a moment of bringing you to his house, if he had not, as I have already mentioned, expressed a wish to see you."

Jack held Dick's bridle while he dismounted, and when Dick rung at the door bell, it was answered by one of the most serious-looking domestics that could be imagined.

"Is Mr. Franklin within?"

"Friend," said the servant, "hast thou a card?"

"Yes," said Dick.

He took a card from his pocket-book. It was an odd enough card, for there was nothing upon it but a diamond, such as is used in playing cards. In fact, he presented to the serious footman the ace of diamonds.

"Verily, humph!" said that personage. "Wilt thee walk in?"

"Yes, and my friend likewise."

"Has thy friend a card?"

"No, but he will have. It's all right. We want the horses taken care of for a day or so."

"Leave them to my care, friend, and thou shall not be disappointed," said the serious domestic, without altering a muscle of his countenance.

Dick beckoned to Jack to come in, while the serious domestic called some one up from the lower part of the house, who took immediate charge of the cattle.

In another moment Jack and Dick were both in the passage or hall of the house, and the door was closed.

This house, which for many years was inhabited by Josiah Franklin, the quaker, is still standing in Dean Street, Soho. Perhaps the present proprietors would not thank us for pointing it out, so we will content ourselves by saying that it is a large one, and on the right hand side of the way going southward.

The hall—and it was not a mere passage as is too often the case, dignified by the name of one, but a really large space—was handsomely got up. Dingy-looking busts, with a respectable amount of dust upon them, stood grimly upon brackets looking down upon the intruders; and some large pictures hung against the ample wall.

"I will announce thee, friend," said the serious domestic, "if thou wilt have patience for a short time."

"Don't hurry yourself," said Dick.

"Well," said Jack in a low voice, when they were alone in the hall. "This is a place worth knowing. I suppose Franklin makes it well worth his while?"

"Not a doubt of that. When a quaker is a rogue, he is an outrageous one, you may depend. The garb of sanctity in this world forms one of the most admirable cloaks for all sorts of iniquity."

"Not a doubt of it."

"Now, Jack, I look upon you and I as bold, honest men, compared to such a fellow as this Franklin. It is true that we say, 'Stand to a true man upon the king's highway,' but we say it boldly, and he may have a shot at us for our pains; but there are thousands of men in this great city of London, who rob their neighbours with a smirk and a smile, and go to church regularly, who would, if you were to call them anything but honest men, be ready to leap down your throat."

Jack was rather amused at the vehemence of Dick, but he could not help fully agreeing with him in what he had just said. It was too true to be disputed.

In about three minutes the serious domestic came back to them, and said—

"If thou wilt follow me even to the room that is at the back of the dwelling, I will introduce thee to Mr. Franklin, as the vain and the giddy call him, but to plain Josiah as he is called by the devout."

"Lead the way, then, you hypocritical rascal," said Dick.

The serious domestic did not seem at all put out of the way by these words. He only shook his head and uttered a sort of groan, which might be supposed to be deprecatory of the sinfulness of mankind in general.

Dick and Jack were presently ushered into a large, handsome room, situated at the back of the house, and they found there seated a small man, plainly attired in a quaker's costume, who rose at their entrance, and with a grave air said—

"Be seated, friends. Thou both art welcome. Leave us, Aminadab."

When the door was closed, Dick pointed to Jack, and said—

"This is Sixteen-string Jack."

The quaker did not suffer the least emotion to be visible upon his face, as he said—

"Friend, I am glad to see thee, to which end indeed I did express a wish to thy friend, Turpin, here. I heard that, notwithstanding thou hadst been hanged by the neck at the place called Tyburn, that thou wert still in the land of the living."

"Yes," said Jack. "I was recovered after execution."

"Truly friend, thy case is a singular one. Hast thou any swag?"

"No," said Jack; "I have nothing."

"No doubt, Turpin, thou hast some."

"Not a scrap," said Dick.

"Then what the devil, friend Turpin, I ask thee, didst thou come here for If thou hast no swag, d—n thee, why didst thou trouble me?"

"Be patient," said Turpin, "and I will tell you. Claude Duval is in the stone pitcher at last."

A slight shade of increased colour at these words seemed to pass over the face of Franklin, but he did not speak.

"Yes," added Dick. "He is there, sure enough, and it is about that business that Jack and I, much otherwise against our own inclinations, have come to town."

"It is very strange," said Franklin, "that I did not know of this. Thou must, friend, be misinformed thyself. My information is generally tolerably close upon the fact. I will ring and inquire."

"Spare yourself the trouble," said Dick, arresting the hand of the quaker as it grasped a bell-rope. "Spare yourself the trouble, friend Franklin, and you will soon find out from what I shall tell you how it is that you know nothing of it."

"Proceed, friend."

Dick, then, in as few words as possible, told him the whole story of how Claude had got into his present condition, and how, up to the last intelligence he and Jack had, he still continued, to preserve his incognito; Franklin listened with evident displeasure; and when Dick had done, he said—

"And, pray, what business was it of Claude Duval's if all the Phillip Manning's in the world ran off with all the Grace Mannings? His only duty to himself and to me was to stop them and ease them of their valuables by the way. I never heard of anything more absurd, friend, in all my life, than his conduct."

CHAPTER CLVI.

PHILLIP MANNING GETS UNEASY, AND MAKES A RESOLVE.

Plain Josiah Franklin was so incensed that he rose and paced the room for a few moments quite in a fume.

Dick let this feeling subside before he spoke again; and then he said—

"It's done, Franklin."

"What dost thou say, friend?"

"I say, it's done, now, and it is not the part of a wise man to fret and fume about the past. The future is our own, but the past is gone for ever, and may not be recalled."

The quaker stopped short in front of Dick; and then, after regarding him for a few moments attentively, he said—

"Thou art right, friend."

"I knew you would see the thing in a proper way soon."

"I do see it, and I see that Claude Duval will be hanged at Tyburn."

"He is not yet even discovered," said Jack.

"But he will be, friend."

"I should not like to feel so confident of that," said Dick. "If Jack and I are, as I hope and trust we shall be, successful in tracing the hiding place in which Phillip Manning has placed his fair young cousin Grace, all will be well. Three words from her lips will exculpate Claude, and his instant release, as the falsely accused John Smith, will follow."

"No, it is too much to expect, friend," said Franklin. "I look upon the fate of Claude Duval as settled."

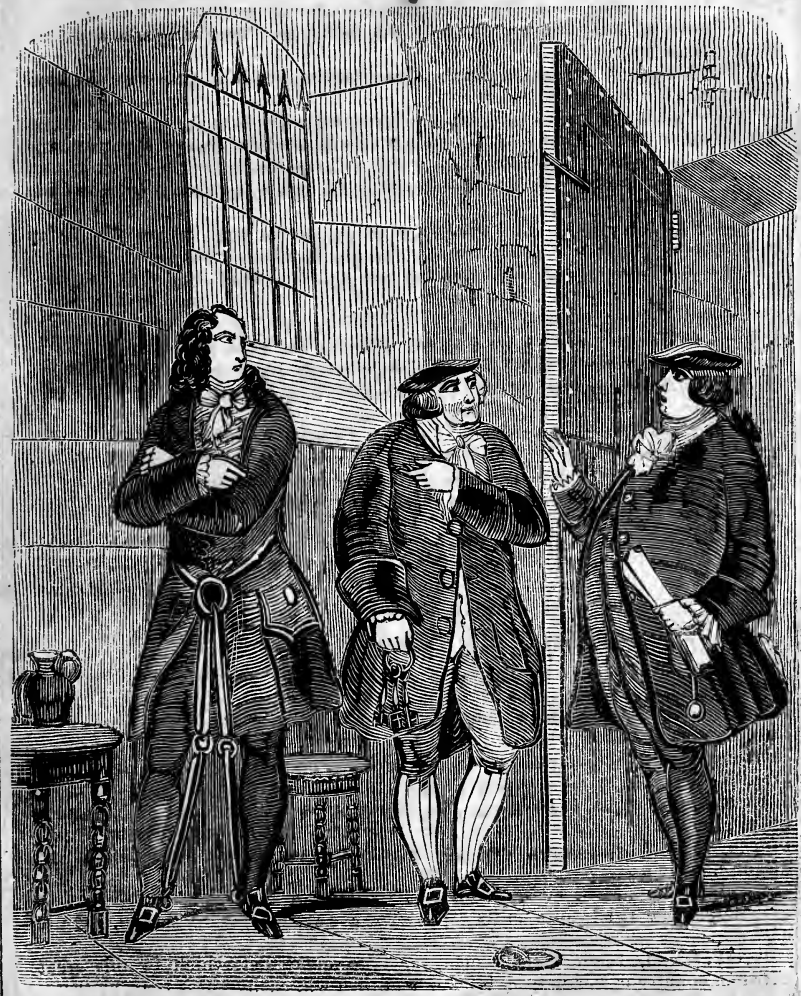
"Then mine is settled likewise," said Jack.

"How dost thou mean, friend?"

"Why, I don't intend to survive Claude. I will find my death in some

desperate attempt to rescue him, even if it should be at the foot of the gallow itself. That is my determination; and I care not who knows it, or hears me avow it."

The quaker looked at Jack for a moment, and then he shrugged his shoulders, as he said—



THE QUAKER VISITS CLAUDE UNDER THE DISGUISE OF HIS SOLICITOR.

"Every one to his taste, friend."

"Come—come," said Dick, "we need not quarrel about what any of us may do in the event of such a contingency. It may not happen, and if it does, it will then be time enough to think of it."

"Exactly, friend," said Franklin; "and now I presume that Claude will want something in the way of help with money while he is in his present situation, and

you have only to ascertain from him how much, and I will immediately produce it."

"You will?" said Dick.

"Ay, friend, I will."

"Th s is kind of you," said Jack.

"Nay, friend," added Franklin, "it is nothing out of the way. I am a man well to do, and I have made that which I now have by gentlemen of thy profession, friend; so it is but fair that I should help thee and such as thee in the hour of need."

"You have done yourself no harm, Mr. Franklin," said Dick, "by the kind offer—for it is kind, let you say what you will of it. Claude will have plenty of money for all his wants in Newgate. All that we require of you is a place of refuge for ourselves and our horses until we have traced this Phillip Manning, and so ferret out where he has bestowed the judge's daughter."

"That you shall have, friend. Think that my house is your own, and all within it at thy disposal."

"Many thanks—many thanks. Jack wants to go at once to see Claude in Newgate, and he wishes to be disguised."

The quaker looked at Jack scrutinisingly for a few moments, and then he said—

"If thou wilt follow me, friend, I will show the sort of disguise that I would recommend thee to put on."

"Go, Jack," said Dick; "I will wait here."

"Thou mayest wait with a perfect conviction of thy safety, friend Turpin, or thou mayest come with us."

"Then I will come with you, since I have the option."

The quaker led the way to the top of his house, and having selected a key from among several that he took from his pocket, he unlocked a back attic, which, all around it, was filled with presses, something like a linen-draper's shop, where every description of apparel was to be found, from the sooty habiliments of a sweep to the showy apparel of a general officer.

"Here, friend," he said, "I can make thee look like a very respectable grazier; and as to-morrow is market-day at Smithfield, it will favour the delusion, although I cannot quite comprehend how Claude has got leave to see whoever pplies to visit him."

"His letter," said Jack, "says that the judge has got him such leave."

"Yes, friend, it says so, but——"

"You doubt it?"

"Indeed I do, friend. But here is the grazier's suit, which, to my mind, will ompare well with thy cast of countenance, to which I can impart a more ruddy nge; and if any one speaks to thee, thou must talk much of south-downs and ort horns, and such like matters, with which thy natural wit will surely furnish ee."

So saying, the quaker took from one of the presses the costume he had menoned; and when Jack saw himself fully dressed and his face tinged with a mixre that Franklin produced, he was indeed surprised at the perfection of the sguise.

"This is capital," he said. "What do you think of it, Dick?"

"Simply that it is capital in its way. You are a genius, Mr. Franklin. Quite genius."

"Nay, friend, I am a plain man, trying to make that which in this great ristian country is worshipped by all, and thou wilt easily guess that by that I ean money."

"It is true," said Dick.

"I will now go at once," said Jack. "Only tell me, Dick, where to meet you er my interview with Claude, and I will come to you."

"Let it be at the judge's house-door. You have the correct address?"

"I have, and will be there."

Jack left the house of the quaker, feeling very easy about the before ticklish

matter of keeping himself concealed as regarded identity from the inhabitants of Newgate, some of whom he well knew had a most marvellous faculty of recollecting any face they had once seen.

Dick took his way, dressed quietly in black, to the judge's house, where he thought that, either coming in or out, there was a chance of seeing Phillip Manning.

We will accompany Jack to Newgate.

If we were to say that he felt no trepidation at all as he ascended the steps leading to the lobby of the prison, we should certainly be going far beyond the truth, for not only did Jack feel emotion, but it was considerable emotion.

The only thing that supported him at that moment, was the thought that it was for one whom he so much valued, as he did Claude Duval, that he was doing what he did.

"Courage," he whispered to himself. "All may be lost by one shrinking action. All may be gained by boldness."

He tapped at the wicket of the old prison.

"Hilloa!" said a turnkey, "what do you want? Have you lost a cow, and do you think it has strayed into Newgate?"

"No," said Jack. "I want to see John Smith."

"John Smith—John Smith. Humph! Do you think he wants to see you, old fellow?"

"I know he does. He sent for me."

"Here, Gutty," cried the turnkey, "you know all about this. It's some one for John Smith."

"All I know," said Gutty, "is that there's an order sticking up there in the governor's hand-writing to let anybody go and come during the regular hours to John Smith, and you know as much as that yourself."

"Come in, then," said the turnkey, admitting Jack, and then muttering to himself—"I wonder what's the use of anybody on the lock at all, if anybody is to come in and go out as they like? There used not to be such doings in old times. We never thought of letting anybody in till they tipped, and that handsomely too."

Now, Jack was resolved to set his own mind at ease regarding his disguise, and to test thoroughly his own means, by doing something after which nothing could come amiss. He knew the turnkey very well by sight, and he said to him—

"Do you remember Sixteen-string Jack?"

"Do I?" cried the man. "Don't I? What do you know about him, master, eh?"

"He stopped me once."

"Did he, and what did he take from thee?"

"A canvas bag with twenty-eight guineas in it; but when I told him the loss of all would distress me on the morrow, he gave me back five again."

"Ah, then, you were the man he did that to? I have heard the story before. Well, he was not one of the worst."

"Ah!" muttered the man they called Gutty, as he lighted a lantern to conduct Jack to Claude's room. "Ah, Sixteen-string Jack suffered at the Gate, and they say his ghost haunts Newgate now, and has been seen in the long passages."

"That's very improbable," said Jack, as he followed Gutty from the vestibule, feeling convinced now that his disguise was perfect. The daring experiment he had tried had had all the effect he looked for from it. It put him quite at his ease, and he walked after Gutty with such an air, that no one for one moment could have supposed that he was in danger within the walls of Newgate.

"A visitor," said Gutty, as he opened Claude's room-door.

Claude looked up, and for the moment did not know Jack, who walked in, saying—

"How are you, John?"

The voice at once assured him of who it was, and stetching out his hand, he said—

"Ah, how are you? it is very kind of you to come to visit me, so busy as you must be."

The door closed, and they heard the retreating footsteps of Gutty as he went growling down the passage, Then, and not till then, did Jack and Claude cordially shake hands like true and staunch old friends as they were, and Claude said to him—

"Jack, you are capitally made up; I did not know you."

"Yes," replied Jack, "I believe my disguise is good. Franklin, the quaker, got it up for me."

"Old Jossiah? Then Dick took you there?"

"He did, Claude."

"Well, I should have done so, some day, when I got leave of him, only I did not know if he was at all aware of your singular story, and how far you would like me to mention it. But tell me, Jack, have you and Dick yet done anything in Grace's affair?"

"Not yet. Consider the time, Claude. My present business with you is to bring you this."

Jack laid a heavy purse upon the table.

"It was not wanted, Jack."

"Nay it is only £100. Give it about you freely to purchase all the indulgences and comforts that are not denied in Newgate any more than anywhere else in this world to one who has money, enough. You will be better pleased with it when you hear who it came from."

"Who, Jack?"

"None other than Tom Brereton."

"Tom Brereton? Impossible. That he should send me money, and that he should know I am here, is——"

"Stop—stop Claude. You are getting hold of the wrong end of the stick with a vengeance. He neither sent the money to you, nor does he at all know you are here. I took it from him on the road."

"That is quite another thing."

"I met him after a determination to pick up something from the first passenger with a heavy purse, to pay your expenses in Newgate, and luckily he had this £100 by him, which he admitted he had himself stolen; therefore I took it with the smallest possible feeling of compunction, I assure you."

"Well, that was strange."

"It was; but he under no sort of apprehension as to his malice. He tried to say that it was you who robbed him, but I took good care to put that idea out of his head to keep the money."

"I will have some of it, Jack. But how are you situated in that particular?"

"Well enough—well enough."

"I will only have half of it. You keep the other half, Jack. Of course it is a bad thing to have more than you want here, as it might provoke the cupidity of the officials, so fifty pounds will be all I will take."

Finding Claude firm upon this point, Jack yielded, and put fifty of the guineas in his pocket again.

After this was settled, he said—

"And now, Claude, Dick and I will not spare time or trouble in getting the better of that rascal Phillip Manning; so keep up your spirits. and hope for the best."

"I will, Jack; and yet——"

"Yet what, Claude?"

"It seems to me as if some great misfortune were impending over me. I am not, as you know, one of the desponding sort, and indeed I am always much more inclined to look upon the sunny, than the cloudy side of things; but I have a decided presenitment of evil."

Jack shook at this rather.

"Do not speak to me in that way, Claude," he said, "or you will upset me

completely, and before I reach the gate I shall betray myself. I begin to feel already how artificial is the courage that has hitherto held me up."

The tone in which Jack spoke rather alarmed Claude, and he said to him in the most cheerful tone he could assume—

"Pho! pho! Jack; you know I am no believer in omens. Think nothing of the few idle words I have spoken. We shall be all right again upon the road, with a star-spangled sky above, many and many a time.

CHAPTER CLVII.

THE DISCOVERY OF CLAUDE'S IDENTITY.

Sixteen-String Jack had now for so long a time been in the habit of thinking that whatever Claude said or did must assuredly be right, that he was easily depressed by a few mournful words; but then he was almost as easily raised up again in spirits, when Claude spoke to him cheerily.

Having thus brought Jack to a different state of feeling than that which, with its gloomy presages, might really have produced very bad consequences to them all, Claude was anxious to close an interview which at the best was dangerous.

"Go now, Jack," he said, "and do your best. Remember that I wait here a prisoner until Grace Manning is in her father's arms again, and that from that moment I am well aware that I shall be an inhabitant of this place only for so long a time as will suffice for an order to be sent for my immediate release."

"Yes, Claude," said Jack. "We know and feel that, and knowing and feeling it, you, and you only, can imagine what an incentive to exertion that is to both Dick and I. Keep yourself in good spirits, Claude, and as you say, we shall soon enough be under the starlit sky of the open country, I hope. I am going now to meet Dick at the house of Judge Manning, upon which he is keeping a watch; and it is likely enough that even to-day we may succeed in doing something."

"Heaven speed you, Jack."

Jack knocked at the door of the room, until the turnkey, who was some distance off in the passage, heard him, and came to let him out. "Ah," said he with a discontented air. "Ah, then, here is fine doings in Newgate for folks to have who they like come and see 'em, and stay as long as they like, and nobody to say 'times up!' I never seed the like."

"Nor I," said Claude, as he placed a guinea in the rough hand of the turnkey; "but if every visitor pays you as well as this, you will be making money like a physician, my friend, and I promise you that every visit to me will be equally productive to you."

The turnkey's mouth widened into a broad grin, as he said—

"Oh, that's quite another affair. You may have all the world, and his wife, come and see him if you like; and arter all, when you come to think, it's a hard thing that a cove as is shut up in a stone pitcher can't have his friends about him."

"Particularly," said Jack, "if he can pay well for the little indulgences."

"In course."

After this, the turnkey was all smiles and sweetness to Jack, and told him, as they traversed the narrow gloomy passages to the gate, "That he never seed sich a real gemman as his friend, Mr. Smith, and he only hoped as he (Jack) would make it a pint to come often and see him, just to keep his spirits up a bit, and tell him the news out o' doors."

And so, without the smallest accident, or any shadow of suspicion as to who he really was, Jack got out of Newgate, and found himself in the open streets of the city, after what may be truly called his perilous visit.

Of course, now, he had the greatest confidence in his disguise, and walked along

with a much more calm and confident air than he had done before; all which was favourable to his situation, and the carrying out the character which he had assumed. He made his way as directly as he could to the square in which the judge resided.

The distance was not great, and Jack was well enough acquainted with London not to increase it by going an inch out of his way, so he soon, from a side street, emerged into the square, very close to Judge Manning's house. The first thing he saw, was Dick standing nearly oppos te by the iron railings of the centre garden, apparently intently reading a bill that was stuck upon the face of a pump that was there.

Jack at once crossed over to him, and Dick, who had by a rapid side-glance seen him coming, said—

"Read this, Jack. I'll keep an eye on the judge's door while you do so."

Jack cast his eye upon the bill, and found that it offered no less than £500 reward for the apprehension of either of three persons; one supposed to be the notorious Claude Duval, the other Richard Turpin, and the third unknown. They were all personally described, and it was stated at the foot of the bill, that the full amount of £1500 would be paid to any one who would lodge the whole three in any jail without waiting for their conviction.

"What do you think of that, Jack?" said Dick; "ain't we a capital prize for some one! Here is £1000 standing by a pump in London, and not a soul to stretch out a hand to take it. That is really extraordinary, is it not?"

"It is no joke," said Jack.

"Joke? No. They who might try to earn the money, should find it no joke. I am well armed, and it is not two, or three, or four men that would find it a very easy task to fasten upon me."

"And I, too," said Jack, "would sell my life dearly."

Of course. £500 sinks in value very much to a man with a bullet or two in his inside. But we are getting on well. How did you find Claude?"

"Quite well."

"And confident of his release, I hope?"

"Yes, he knows us well enough for that, Dick."

"He does, and he shall not be disappointed. The man we seek is in the judge's house now; I watched him in, and when he comes out, I will follow him, and you, Jack, will follow me."

"I will."

"Of course, it is just possible when he does comes out, that he may not be going direct to visit Grace Manning in the place of concealment he has found for her; but visit her at some time or other during twenty-four hours, he surely will; and our duty will be, now that we have once set eyes upon him, not to lose sight of him until he houses himself; and then if we feel that that is not the place of the concealment of the girl, we will wait for him until he comes out again, acd stick to him like his shadow."

"Is that him, Dick?"

"Yes, yes!"

Phillip Manning came out of his uncle's house. There was a gloom upon his brow, and he glanced cautiously around him before he descended the steps. If ever a man was thoroughly wretched, not from regret at his own guilt, but from a conviction that it was, as regarded its promised and expected results, a failure, that man was Phillip Manning.

In the interview he had just had with his uncle, although, the old judge had not said one word to put him upon his guard, yet Phillip, with that acuteness of perception that often belongs to the guilty, had not failed to see that he was more than suspected, and that his uncle's faith was much shaken in the truth of the story that he had told of the abduction of Grace.

How the judge had been so shaken, he, Phillip, had no means of knowing; but the fact, combined with the firm resistance, and the dignified and indignant

rejection of all terms of compromise by Grace herself, made Phillip endure the torments of the damned.

There he stood upon his uncle's door-step, a thorough picture of a foiled villain—of one who, for a great object to himself, had committed a great crime, but utterly failing in the object, was left standing, as it were, with nothing but the crime to console him.

While Phillip Manning there stood looking around him for food for suspicion, Dick was pumping away at the pump, while Jack was holding the iron ladle, and they both seemed only intent upon slaking their thirst.

The eyes of Phillip wandered over them, without exhibiting the slightest trace of suspicion, and then descending the remainder of the steps, he walked on.

"On," said Dick to Jack, "keep as far behind me as you can, so as to keep me in sight at all; and mind, Jack, if you see me go into a shop, or knock at the door of any house, or otherwise appear to give up the chase, it will be from a suspicion that I may be observed, and in that case you may go on and follow Phillip: I will soon come after you."

"I understand," said Jack.

By this time Phillip Manning had reached the corner of the square, and after casting around him one last glance, he seemed to be quite satisfied no one was dogging him, and he disappeared round the corner.

It was only for a moment that he was lost to the sight of Dick, for he was quickly at the corner, and then he saw Phillip walking down the street at a quick pace, without once looking behind him. From this time, the chase of the villain might be said fairly to have begun.

Dick kept about fifty paces behind him, and Jack about twenty paces behind Dick.

Phillip made for the northern part of London, and soon began to get into what was then open country, to the north of the New Road that is now. He then crossed the fields to Islington, which then was really quite a suburban district, and by no means of such close acquaintanceship with the bricks and mortar of London as it is now.

To any one not so well acquainted with the locality as Dick chanced to be, the task of following Phillip would have been one that now would have almost ensured detection, for it would look more than accidental for any one to keep upon the track of another, both in town and country. It was quite clear however to Dick, that Phillip was taking a short cut across the fields, where there was a foot-path, that would bring him out at a particular part of Islington, High-street, and he knew that by making a little detour, and traversing a lane which is now a street, he could reach that point.

He accordingly at once struck off from the direct pursuit of Phillip Manning.

Jack at first took this as a hint to him to follow, but Dick caught his eye for a moment, and gave him a sign to follow him, so that Phillip was to all appearance left quite alone; and if anything could tend to completely assure that doubtful character that he was safe, certainly this manœuvre would.

In a few moments both Dick and Jack were together in the lane, which was a very verdant one, and on the side of it, next to the meadows that Phillip was traversing, there was a row of tall poplars, which completely hid the lane, and cast a sort of twilight into it.

"He suspects nothing," said Jack.

"Nothing at all. We shall meet him again easily; but we must push on, for the route this way is nearly double that he is taking, and he walks fast."

They ran swiftly for some distance, and then Dick said—

"If we get upon the bank here, we can take a peep at the rascal through the hedge without his being able at the distance he is off, to have the least chance of seeing us."

Jack was as anxious as Dick to look at Phillip, and when they had scrambled up the wild flower-decked bank, at the side of the lane, they easily through the trees saw the whole extent of the meadows.

Phillip Manning had reached a stile and had stopped. His hand was up to his eyes to shade them, for the sun had peeped out, and he was looking southward. He seemed to be taking a long and earnest glance at the path he had come, in order thoroughly to assure himself that no one was upon his track. He sat upon the stile then, and took from his pocket a small telescope, and with that placed at his eye he made an acurate, and no doubt, very satisfactory examination of the route he had taken. Just for fear he might turn the telescope in the direction of the lane, and no knowing what its power might be, both Jack and Dick crouched down among the tall grass and flowering shrubbery, so that it would have been next to impossible for them to have been seen, even if Phillip had looked that way, which he did not.

To be sure, he did just take a sweeping kind of glance all round him with the telescope, but he did not fix his regards sufficiently long upon one spot to make our friends be in any danger of discovery in their secure hiding-place.

CHAPTER CLVIII.

PHILLIP MANNING'S CLEVER PROCEEDINGS.

After this, Phillip, with all the air of a man who is thoroughly satisfied, pocketted his telescope and walked on.

"Now we shall have him," said Dick, "and I call all this very satisfactory, inasmuch as it assures us of one thing, which is, that we shall not have our trouble for nothing.

"Are you sure of that, Dick?"

"Pretty sure, Jack, unless we miss him. You may depend he would not take one half the trouble to assure himself that he is not followed, unless he were going upon some important errand; and I doubt if Master Phillip has anything else upon his hands just now half so important as this affair in which we feel so deeply interested."

"Most probably not, Dick. I see now what you mean, and I do begin to think that our work is already half done."

"Without making too sure," said Dick, "I confess now to being sanguine; but we must put the best foot foremost now, Jack, for Phillip has not far to go to get to the opening into the High Street, and, if we lose him at all, it will be there."

They now proceeded at such a rate that they soon got quite clear of the lane, and skirting a piece of waste ground, they then emerged into Islington, a little above what is now called The Green.

There they slackened their speed a little, and Dick went on in advance as before, Jack keeping upon the other side of the way, so as to break the connection between them to the eye as much as possible.

Suddenly from a narrow turning, out came Phillip. Dick took no notice of him, although he was so close to him that he could have touched him; and to avoid any suspicion, he had to walk on past him. He well knew that Jack would see the necessity of such a step, and would keep an eye on Phillip.

So completely, however, was the rascal satisfied that he had come in perfect security, that he took no notice of any one, and had quite lost the air of lurking suspicion which had before been the grand characteristic of his proceedings. He walked in the most direct manner to a house with a little garden in front of it and a small green gate.

This place looked like a better sort of cottage; and they—for Dick had now looked round, after walking quite far enough to lull all suspicion—saw him take a key from his pocket, open the door, and go in.

Dick beckoned Jack to come to him.

"Well," he said, when they were together, "we have housed him at last. What do you think of that place, Jack, into which he has just now gone?"

"That it certainly is not where we shall find Grace Manning."

"That is precisely my own opinion."

"It is too small and too public," added Jack; "she could alarm the whole



TOM BRERETON DENOUNCES CLAUDE AS THE NOTORIOUS HIGHWAYMAN.

neighbourhood from such a place as that by a cry for help. I think you will see Phillip come out again soon from that cottage; but we shall easily know it again."

"Oh, yes; and at another time, Jack, we will know all about it—but just now Phillip claims all our care. We will not lose sight of the green gate for a moment."

Even while they spoke they did not look at each other, but kept their regards upon that cottage; and this state of things lasted for about twenty minutes, when the cottage door opened, and an old woman, with a basket on her arm and pattens on, came out. She crossed the road, and disappeared down a lane opposite.

"Is it worth while asking any questions of that old dame?" said Jack to Dick.

"No, it would be dangerous. The grand thing, I take it, is to avoid exciting in the mind of Phillip the least certainty of his being watched—suspicion he already has; and if we follow and question yon old woman, how are we to prevent her from telling him of such a suspicious occurrence?"

"True enough, Dick—true enough. I only wish the rascal would come out, that's all."

They waited with the most exemplary patience for nearly a whole hour, but still there was not the least appearance of Phillip Manning emerging from the cattage.

"There is something more in this than we can just now divine," said Dick. "We are done for this time somewhow. He cannot have left the cottage by the back, for you see, Jack, it is open to the fields, and we must have seen him."

"Decidedly," said Jack.

"And by the front we know he has not. Confound it, he may be upon quite some other errand to day than that of calling upon poor Grace Manning."

"That is possible," said Jack. "But I begin to have an idea."

"For Heaven's sake then, Jack, let me have the benefit of it at once, for if it be anything that will abridge the monotony of the watch we are keeping here. I fear in vain it will be most welcome."

"You shall have it, Dick. I don't in the least wonder at your getting impatient, for nothing in the world can be so annoying as this sort of thing. You may laugh at me, but my idea is——"

"Hush! There's the old woman again."

"Humph," said Jack. "That *is* my idea."

"Why—why—what do you mean, Jack? Out with it."

"I think the old woman is Phillip Manning."

"The devil!"

They were both silent as they watched the seeming old woman with the basket and the pattens, cross the road-way to the little cottage with the green-gate. Then they saw her take a key from her pocket, after some rummaging, and place it in the lock. For one instance she held up her head, and took a glance around her.—It was Phillip!

"Done!" said Dick.

"For this time completely," said Jack; "but we have made a good two hours' work of it for all that, for now we know Phillip disguises, and that it must be somewhere close at hand to this spot that he keeps Grace a prisoner. You may depend that in that basket he took her provisions until this time to-morrow."

"Oh, yes," said Dick, in a tone of deep chagrin. "I see it all now. It is as plain as your hand before your eyes, Jack; but that you and I should be taken in is rather too bad. I warrant now if Claude had been with us he would have detected Phillip's disguise."

"He might. But the game is over for to-day, Dick."

"Iti s, I fear; and yet if you have no objection we will wait here, as we are well sheltered by this chesnut tree, and see Phillip go home again, and then I should like to go down the turning opposite, and see what one can."

"And so should I, Dick. We shall see what sort of a place it is, and where it leads to, at all events."

Phillip emerged from the cottage in his usual apparel in much less time than it had taken him to put on and perfect the disguise that had been good enough to

deceive Jack and Dick. He did not look about him at all, but banging the door of the cattage to, he made the best of his way to town again, by the same way he had come.

When he was fairly out of sight, Dick and Jack emerged from the sheltered spot they had found among some chesnut-trees, and looked at the cottage.

"I would not disturb that place," said Dick. "If there be any one there, it may have the effect of putting Phillip on his guard; and if no one, all we could find would be his disguise, and that we know already. Let us go up the lane."

"Certainly,"

They had now no trouble in looking after Phillip, so they could pay the most undevided attention to the place they were in. It was a pretty rural lane enough, with, at the top part of it, that is to say that part at which they entered some small cottages that seemed to be in the possession of laundresses. Further on it seemed to straggle right away into the open country.

There was some open country at Islington then.

Feeling quite certain that none of the cottages at the entrance of the lane were worth their examination, Jack and Dick passed on at a quick pace until they got clear of the houses, and reached a stile that seemed to go into the meadows. There they both paused.

"This voyage of discovery," said Jack, "does not seem to promise many results, Dick."

"It does not, indeed. I can see chimney pots among the trees, yonder; but it is rather an awkward thing to go to a house, and say, 'Have you got a young lady a prisoner here? and does a man, disguised as on old woman, come to see her?"

"Rather awkward, indeed," said Jack. "It is tolerably clear to me, Dick, that our best course most decidedly is to wait until to-morrow, and then come here and follow Phillip. We know he comes down this lane."

"Yes, and the plan will be to wait in the lane, Jack. Let us pitch upon some spot now that we are here, that we can come to direct to-morrow, and wait at until the rascal arrives."

They crossed the stile with this intent, and soon found a kind of copse, in the intricacies of which they could be effectually concealed, while it did not prevent them from looking out and keeping a good watch upon the stile, over which they had very little doubt that they should, on the morrow, have the satisfaction of seeing Phillip Manning get.

Having settled all this, then, as far as they could, they felt that their presence there was no longer required, and that their best way was to proceed to London again at once. They made for the quaker's house in Dean Street, Soho.

They fond the "friend" anxious concerning them, as they had been absent for a much longer period of time than he or they had expected; for when Dick had gone to wait for Jack in the square where the judge lived, he had no idea that he should so readily light upon Phillip Manning.

"Friend," said Franklin, "I began to think thee and thy friend Jack had fallen into the hands of the Philistines."

"Oh no," said Dick, "we are making progress of a satisfactory kind, as you will admit when you hear what I have to tell you."

"It is ill talking upon an empty stomach, and with a dry throat, friend," said the quaker—"if thou will permit me, I will provide thee with a resource against both of those evils."

He rang a bell, and ordered a substantial repast for Dick and Jack, together with a couple of bottles of rare old wine, and he would not permit them to fatigue themselves by telling him their news, until they were thoroughly refreshed.

"I am, no doubt," he said, "friends, anxious enough to hear all that thou mayst have to say, but I am much more anxious that thy strength and thy courage should be kept up, for really now there are so few good men upon the road, that I cannot afford to lose either of thee."

Neither Dick nor Jack could help laughing at the business-like views which

the quaker took of the affair, and at the way in which he accounted for his profuse hospitality, which many men would have tried to make a kind of merit of facts own sake. Franklin however was far above any such petty feelings, and he found his account in letting the highwaymen and crackmens who dealt with him know that the assistance he rendered them was merely a matter of business, and had no other support or foundation.

When one of the bottles of wine was gone, and the other dipped into, Dick recounted to him all that had happened, to which he lent the most attentive ear; and when Dick had finished, he said—

"Thou must be cautious, friend."

"How?"

"Why from all I can hear of this Phillip Manning, he is one who will kill."

"Kill!" exclaimed Dick, "kill! And do you fancy for one moment, Mr. Franklin, that I am afraid of his killing propensities? and I am sure I may say as much for Jack here. We don't care one straw about the malice or the resistance of such a fellow as that, I assure you."

"Now, friend,' added the quaker, "that thou hast had thy say, allow me to state that I was not afraid of Phillip Manning killing thee or thy friend Jack of the Sixteen-strings. It was the young maiden called Grace that I spoke of."

"You are right, Mr. Franklin," cried Jack. "The same thought has more than once come across me, giving me a cold shudder as it did so. I think he is just the man to murder the young thing, if he found all his villany upon the point of being discovered."

"I really did not think of that," said Dick. "Pardon me, Mr. Franklin. It is a thing of great importance, and I thank you for the hint. I will take good care it is well seen to. It would be too terrible."

CHAPTER CLIX.

AN ADVENTURE AT THE QUAKER'S.

TINGLE! Tingle! Tingle!

"What's that?" said Dick.

There was just a slight change of colour upon the face of the quaker for a moment, and then he said, in a quiet voice—

"It is a warning, that's all. It is only a warning. You have been traced here by some means: you are either known or suspected, I cannot say which. Truly the Philistines are at hand even now."

"The deuce they are!" said Dick, as he sprung from his seat. "What's to be done?"

"Nothing, friend, just now, by violence," said the quaker. "Everything, probably, by discretion. Please to remain precisely where you both are, until I come to you again. You will consult your safety by so doing, whereas, by removing from this room, thou may'st remove to thy own destruction."

With these words, the quaker rose, and left the room in a moment, Jack and Dick remaining, staring at each other, rather in a state of amazement.

"What shall we do?" said Dick.

"As he says," replied Jack.

"But—but I don't like this state of inaction. Did you see his face change colour when the bell rang? Do you know, Jack, I begin to have my suspicions."

"I have none. You ought to know Franklin much better than I do, Dick, so that of course, so far as that goes, you are the best judge by a great deal; but I do not myself entertain anything in the shape of a doubt of his fidelity to us. I feel that all his interests must be the other way."

"You have convinced me, Jack. We will wait here, although I had rather know what was going on below. Let us listen at the stair-head. There can be

no harm in that you know, Jack. Come on. Are you a good one at overhearing anything some distance off?"

"Pretty well."

They opened the door of the room quite carefully, and crept on to the landing-place of the stairs. Even to do this much was in contradiction to the express recommendation of Franklin; but something must be allowed for men placed in the exceedingly ticklish situation of Dick and Jack. They could hear nothing for some time below but the murmur of two voices; but then they found Franklin and some other person were ascending the staircase together, and talking as they came on. They both turned into a room before they got to the height that Dick and Jack were.

"Did you know the companion of the quaker?" said Dick, in a low, hissing whisper, to Jack.

"No."

"It was Granby, the informer. He is an officer, but he goes by the name of Granby, the informer, because he makes all his captures and transacts all his business by treachery. He is rich, and he will pay two-thirds of what he will get by the job for the apprehension of any one by treachery, rather than attempt it openly and by force."

"Say no more," said Jack. "I have heard of the man. What do you suppose his errand is here?"

"Of course to see if he cannot make terms with the quaker. Stay here, Jack. I have more than once, perhaps very wrongfully, had a slight fancy—suspicion one can hardly call it—that Franklin may, upon some odd occasion, retire from business, and that, preparatory to so doing, he may want to dispose of his stock in trade: do you understand me?"

"Ay; and his stock," said Jack, "you would say, consists of such men as we are."

"Yes; cracksmen and knights of the road, as we are. Once for all, then, I should like to satisfy myself; so I will step down and listen to his conversation with Granby if I can."

Dick took off his boots, and went very softly down the stairs on his stocking soles. He reached the door of the room into which the quaker and the officer had gone, and applying his ear quite close to the keyhole, he found that after a few moments, he could hear pretty nearly every word that was spoken by the parties within.

The officer was speaking, and Dick heard him say, in a clear and very earnest tone of voice—

"Now, Mr. Franklin, it is quite needless to tell you that the police have had an eye upon your house for some time; and strange as you may think it, it is I who have saved you. You may look incredulous. Perhaps, if I were in your position, I should likewise; but there is a why and a wherefore for everything in this world, and I will soon explain it all to you."

"Really, friend," replied Franklin, "I shall be much indebted to thee, indeed, to explain it to me, for, as yet, friend, I am most truly and lamentably in the dark with respect to thy reasoning."

"Are you?"

"Yes, friend; and I beg that thou wilt go on with all convenient expedition with thy promised explanation."

"Ah, you are a deep card," said Granby.

"Eh, friend? A card?"

"Well, well, I don't expect that all at once you are going to drop into my mouth, Mr. Franklin. I tell you that more than one officer has had his eye upon this house, but I have always fobbed them off in some way or another, so that you have really hardly been at all disturbed—eh?"

"Humph!" said Franklin.

"Well, well," continued Granby, "I see you are a man of business, and I like you all the better for it. You will understand what I have got to propose in the

right spirit. I have looked upon you as a nice little piece of property in my way for these last three years, and I think the time has now come, do you know, to realise you. Ha! You understand?"

"No, friend."

"Come, come, Mr. Franklin—you are joking."

"Friend, I can conscientiously aver that I never made a joke in my life, and that, knowingly, I never shall make one. If thou art joking, friend, thou hast come to the wrong party to show thy wit, for I assure thee thou wilt not get from me the ghost of a smile, friend."

"Ha, ha!" said Granby, with a forced laugh; "upon my life you are a strange man—you are, indeed; but come, you and I must understand each other soon. If you don't make terms with me you will have a rough search in your house at all sorts of odd times when you least expect it. All the officers have great faith in what I say. They think I have means of getting information that they know nothing of. And they are right. I have such means. You are all right and snug now, I tell you, for I have fobbed them off just because there being no one to settle with but me, you might afford to be liberal."

"If I were assured of that——" said Franklin.

"Oh, that's the point, is it?" cried Granby. "Well, I hardly know how I am to assure you of it. But you must see by my way that I am no fool, you know, and is it likely that I would let any one else have a share in the affair, when I could keep it all to myself? Now I tell you I know you harbour the great guns here now and then; fellows with £500, and, at odd times, £1000 reward hanging over their heads. The small pay don't come to you, and that's why I want to transact business with you. Now, at a word, I will go your halves."

"Halves in what, friend?"

"Hang it! you understand. How jolly green we are all of a sudden.—Ha! ha!"

"Thy saying 'Ha! ha!' and talking about green affairs, friend, does not enlighten me in the least."

"Don't it? Well, then, when you have a fellow snug here, for whom there is a good reward—anything over £100 will be worth while—you give me the office. I wont take him in your house or near it, but you give me sufficient information, and when I nab him you shall have your half down."

"Down, friend?"

"Yes, down."

"Before you get him tucked up, friend?"

"Yes. I'll give you a cheque for the amount. Everbody knows Jack Granby's cheque is a bank-note."

"Humph!"

"Is it a bargain?"

"Wilt thou stand half the forty-pound blood-money likewise, friend, when the individual whom I may be instrumental in giving up to thee is duly suspended by the neck until he be dead, friend?"

"I will—I will. That will be twenty-pound more always. Come, is it a bargain? I will stand half the blood-money, though it is rather a hard bargain to drive."

"Down, friend?"

"Yes down. Down on the nail."

"Of course, friend, then I consent. How could you doubt for one moment that I would? Good gracious, friend, I think the offer a most liberal one, especially as I am to get my half down; and of course, friend, as my house is to be the great rat-trap, you will be careful not to let the animals suspect it."

"Oh, trust me for that. It's a bargain? Give us your hand upon it!"

"Friend, I do not see the least occasion for giving thee my hand because we have agreed to be two thundering rogues, friend. Let us profit by our internal iniquity, friend, and have, at the same time, if it be all the same to thee, friend, the most hearty contempt and abhorrence for each other, verily."

"Well, you are one of the oddest fellows, if not absolutely the very oddest, that I ever heard of."

"Do you really think so, friend?"

"In faith I do; but that's nothing. We have made our bargain, and I am glad enough of it for one. It will be to the profit of both of us; and if in the next twelve-months we don't make an outrageous good thing of it, I am much mistaken."

"Truly, friend, the speculation looks well," said Franklin; "and I should like a little memorandum of it, for the purpose of making which, friend, I will presently get pen, and ink, and paper. But yet I have many doubts."

"About what? Not about my good faith towards you, I hope? for if you have, the sooner you dismiss them the better. There is nothing so well calculated to keep men faithful to each other as mutual interest."

"No, friend Granby, I have not the least doubt of thy good faith, so far as thy intentions go; but, even now, I fear that thy visit may bring down upon me and my house inquiry; and induce, perhaps, other of your fraternity to visit me.—Nay, the mere fact of thy visit to-day will act as a kind of provocation to induce some one else to come."

"Make yourself easy about that."

"But how?"

"Well, I will tell you. Thinking of course that you, as a man of business, would have the good sense to make a proper arrangement with me, I took the greatest precaution to induce everybody to think I was going somewhere else.—Even my wife thinks I have gone down the river upon some business. I believe you will admit that I am cunning enough, Mr. Franklin?"

"Indeed, friend, thou art as cunning as a badger."

"Ha! ha! Then all your scruples are removed now?"

"Completely, friend, and I am quite decided. I may almost say that I look upon thy visit here as quite providential, and the pains that thou hast taken to conceal it, so that thou shouldst not be traced to this house, are really, friend, quite delightful to think of."

"Well, well," said the highly gratified officer. "All's right. I rather think that when you and I combine for any purpose, it would take the devil himself to get the better of us. Ha! ha! ha! I am so glad I came, you can't think; I never felt so pleased with myself, or so comfortable in all my life, really, upon my word."

Dick thought now that it was high time to get up the stairs agian, for he expected the quaker might come up for pen, ink and paper, with which he wished to make the memorandum he spoke of to the officer. When Dick reached the landing, he whispered to Jack,—

"We are sold."

"Sold?" said Jack. "What do you mean by that?"

"Simply that our friend, Franklin, has even now made a bargain with an officer to give us up for one-half of the reward. You look to your pistols, Jack, and I will look to mine. They shall find that two to two is no odds; and if they don't bid the world good night, it shall be no fault of mine this day.

CHAPTER CLX.

GRACE MANNING'S GREAT DANGER.

While Dick uttered these words, Jack looked at him in perfect astonishment. He found the gratest difficulty in bringing himself to believe in the perfidy of Franklin, and he said with earnestness—

"It's a fact. I heard it with my own ears. It is no opinion, no surmise. It is a fact. We are bought and sold."

"Then, Dick, I think we will make them repent of their bargain. Only say what you think is best to be done, and I will place myself entirely under your direction in the matter."

"Are your pistols fit for active service, Jack?"

"They are. I have only fresh-primed them a little while ago, and my hand is unusually steady. Dick, I feel that I am fit for anything, for if we fall, of course poor Claude falls likewise, for who will find out Phillip Manning, and restore Grace to her father, if we do not?"

"You are right enough there, Jack. What I propose is, then, that we go down stairs, and shoot them both. The quaker has gone to get writing materials to make a memorandum of his infamous bargain with the officer, respecting not only a treacherous giving up of us, but of all who may come here, relying upon him for safety. He has himself said, that this house shall be a sort of rat-trap; but I think he will find that we decline being the rats. Come on. I will shoot the quaker, and you may shoot the other."

"Agreed—agreed. It is for Claude as well as for ourselves."

If it had not been for his feeling towards Claude, there can be very little doubt but that Jack would have shrunk from this deed of retributive justice, which the sterner nature of Dick suggested; but he felt certain that Claude's fate would be sealed if he and Dick were not at liberty to trace out Grace Manning, and so triumphantly vindicate him from the charge brought against him by Phillip Manning. Hence, then, although with a certain degree of reluctance, Jack followed Dick down the stairs with a well-loaded pistol in his hand.

When they reached the landing below, Dick whispered to him—

"It would be a great thing, Jack, would it not, to get the document, which will at any time prove the treachery against which me are now armed. Would it not?"

"I should like by all mean," said Jack, "to have such a written justification of this fearfully necessary deed, Dick."

"You shall have it. We will listen a moment."

They did listen, but rather to their surprise, all was most profoundly still within the room where the secret conference had taken place between the quaker and the officer. After a few moments, both Dick and Jack began to think that their prey had escaped them.

They looked at each other for a moment or two, as though each were anxious to read what the other thought by the expression of his face, and then Dick laid his hand upon the handle of the door, and whispered—

"Come on."

He opened the door, and at once dashed into the room with the pistol in his hand. The quaker alone was there. He was standing by the window, very quietly and composedly washing his hands in a basin that, when the hinged-top of the window-seat was down, was completely concealed. The expression of his countenance, as he glanced round upon Dick and Jack, was appalling. All the mild, quiet, firmness of look, which was his usual characteristic, had fled, and his every feature was indicative of passion. His eyes were flashing, and indeed, as he then stood with his coat off, no one not well acquainted with his features, could for a moment have ventured upon his recognition.

"Well," he said sternly. "Is this obeying my orders."

"You are a villain," said Dick.

"Villain in your teeth, highway robber," he replied. "How dare you apply such a term to me? You are only existing upon sufferance."

"Where is your companion in guilt? Where is he with whom you have made an alliance for our blood?"

"Oh, you are a listener at keyholes, are you?" said Franklin. "Only wait until I have washed my hands, and I will soon answer you."

"I came here," said Dick, "to shoot you, and I don't know what hinders me at this moment."

"You are afraid," said the quaker, drying his hands very deliberately upon a

large towel. "You are afraid—that's the reason, friend, why thou dost not do it."

He was rapidly recovering his usual manner.

"Afraid?" said Dick, as he advanced two steps. "Afraid?"

"Yes, friend. A brave man is always afraid to do a base and cowardly action."



THE RETURN OF GRACE MANNING TO HER DISCONSOLATE FATHER.

Dick slowly lowered his hand, as he said—

"You are a riddler. What am I to think? I heard enough to convince any one of your treachery; even now, for all I know, the officer, Granby, may have left the house, only for the purpose of concocting measures for our apprehension."

"He has not left the house, friend."

"Where is he then?"

"Through that half-open door, friend, thou wilt find him."

"Jack," said Dick, "he is your victim. Shoot him if you see him there, while I keep an eye upon our friend here."

Jack passed through the half-open doorway, and then in a moment he came back with agitation in his looks—

"He is there, indeed," he said, "but he is dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes, Dick. He lies in his blood."

"And this, friend, is some of it," said the quaker, as he pointed to the water in the wash-hand basin, which was of an ensanguined tinge. "This is some of it!"

At that moment the face of Franklin again changed to the awful expression that it had worn at the moment that Dick and Jack had made their way so roughly into the apartment; but it was but transient; gradually subsiding, he looked cold and quiet as usual. Dick hastily made his way to the adjoining room to make sure that Jack had not been mistaken, but there he saw Granby lying in a pool of blood, although he could not well perceive by what means he had come by his death. The face was uninjured, but it had upon it an awful expression of agony, as it was upturned to the ceiling. The eyes were fixed and opaque, and the hair hung in disordered masses, partially dabbled in blood.

Dick made the best of his way back to the other room, and in a voice indicative of emotion, he said—

"Franklin, what is the meaning of this?"

"He," said the quaker, proceeding towards the dead body, "he would tell you if he had a tongue that he could wag now."

"But—but——"

"Tush! The explanation stares thee in the face, friend. That man insulted me by an offer, that it appears you overheard. Well, he has signed and sealed it now with his blood. Are you satisfied?"

"I am, indeed. You have killed him instead of allowing him to betray us. We are safe, and we owe it to you. How can I, for it was all my saying, how can I sufficiently apologise to you for my most unjust suspicions of you?"

"Say no more about it. It was very wrong and very imprudent of you to come out of the room above at all; but as you did come, and it has turned out that no particular mischief has resulted from it, let it drop. Our friend, Granby, still has to be disposed of. He was the most dangerous man to me in all London; and now I can breath a little freely that he is no more. Mark me, friends, I do not consider this to be a murder, although the law would. Come."

Dick and Jack followed the quaker with amazement at his calmness so immediately after such an act. He pointed to the body, saying—"Drag it aside."

Although with reluctance, Dick took hold of the heels of the dead man and dragged him aside, when Franklin, by stamping upon one of the floor-boards where there appeared only to be a simple joining of two pieces, caused it to lift up at the other end, and after displacing that one board, he lifted several others with ease, disclosing an opening right through the floor to an immense depth below.

"This goes to the cellars, friends," he said, "and there Mr. Granby may lie and rot, or be food for rats. I hear them at times screaming and fighting far down below. Be so good as to pitch him down, friend Jack of the sixteen strings."

"Don't ask me," said Jack, "I could not touch him for the world. If he were alive you would not find me backward in grappling with him; but now that he is no more, I should not like to touch him with the top of my boot."

"Nay, friend, I particularly wish you to do it. I killed him. Dick, here, has already dragged him from above the trap, and it is thy duty, friend, to poke him down."

"If it come at all in the shape of a duty," said Jack, "I'll kick him down; so that you shall not say that I had no hand in the business as well as yourself."

With this, Jack urged the dead body to the opening with his foot, and soon overbalancing it, away it went out of sight into the depths below. Franklin carefully replaced the boards, and then remarking that he should have to get out the stains of blood, and that he knew a mode of doing that, he led the way to the other apartment.

"How did you kill him?" said Jack.

"Do not trouble thyself, friend, to ask unnecessary questions," replied the quaker. "Let it content thee that he is dead, friend."

* * J * * * *

While all this was transacting at the quaker's house in Dean Street, Soho, the situation of Grace Manning was getting most critical. If any one had peeped into a small chamber in the house where Phillip Manning had a private lodging in the city, somewhere at the back of where the post office now stands, they would have seen that he was rather singularly occupied.

This lodging of his consisted of but one room, in which was a sofa bedstead; and there it was that, known only by the name of Smith, he used to commit his villanies. At this time, however, he was very differently employed, and he is worth looking at.

At a table by the window he sits, with before him a small glass apparatus for distillation, such as is used for chemical purposes, consisting of a retort and a receiver, well supported by a stand. Under the bulb of the retort was a spirit lamp, flickering and burning with its peculiar faint flame. Phillip was resting with his chin upon his fists, and his elbows upon the table. He was watching the boiling up of some liquid in the bulb of the retort, in which, too, there were some herbs.

"This will do," he muttered. "As soon as a great part of the water has gone over in vapour, what remains will be a tolerably concentrated production from the poisonous herbs I have collected; and they must destroy life. Ha! ha! I am not so foolish as to purchase poison—I make it!"

His face at that moment was perfectly diabolical in its satanic expression.

After a time he removed the spirit lamp from under the retort, and put upon it its glass cap, and extinguished it; then he poured cold water over the bulb of the retort to cool it, and was soon able to handle it. He took from it three drops of a greenish thick fluid, and poured them one by one into a pint bottle of wine. He then held the wine up to the light, and looked at it scrutinizingly.

"No," he said, "it is to the full as clear as it was, and yet what a deadly draught it will be. What an enemy to life would but a small portion of the liquor now become. She shall bid adieu to the world by its means. I will not try to induce her to take it, but I will leave it with her, and at some moment when she feels faint both in body and in spirit she will fancy that a glass of the wine will revive her; and then, Grace, you will be no more, and I shall escape from the perplexity of an affair which, if it go on much longer, will be certain to end in my destruction."

He carefully corked the bottle, and then dashed dust upon it to give it an appearance of age. He dragged it through a cobweb that was in a corner by the roof of his room, and then he said—"This shall be the death draught of my fair cousin, Grace."

CHAPTER CLXI.

PHILLIP'S DISGUISE.

We will take a look at Grace Manning in the prison-house to which the villany of her cousin Phillip had consigned her in that sweet spring-tide of her existence. She almost began to despair of aid.

It was a room in which she was now confined. Phillip had blindfolded her thrice, and changed the apartment in which he kept her prisoner. He was

afraid to let her be long in one place, partly for fear she should concoct some plan of escape from it, and partly lest some one else might find her. Each of these times that he had changed her abode he had taken her into the open air to make her believe that she had gone to another house entirely; but she had smelt the odour of flowers, and she felt quite convinced from the feel of the ground, and the character of the air, that she had only been traversing a garden, no doubt attached to the house in which she had been in the first instance brought.

From all this manœuvring one thing was quite evident, if even other circumstances had not tended to confirm it, and that was, that Phillip Manning was in a state of the greatest fear and tribulation for the consequences of his criminality.

Upon the occasion of his last visit to the house in which he had her in durance—that visit, in the making of which he had successfully foiled both Jack and Dick—he had used the most awful threats towards her.

"Your life," he said, "is in your own hands. You will, if you please, easily force me to become your executioner. If you are so vindictive as still to assert you will ruin me with your father, by telling him all that has really happened, what can you expect but that, in common self defence, I should prefer to kill you in this place?"

"I will tell the truth, and the whole truth," said Grace; "nothing shall induce me to depart from it."

"Wretched girl, do you not tremble?"

"No, Phillip; but I can well perceive that you do so."

"And so, you even dare to taunt me?"

"It is not taunting. I tell you that I will intercede for you with my father, if, even now, you restore me to him. I will say for you, in asking him for mercy, what I can."

"Mercy! What do you mean by mercy? What do you expect as the result of your intercession? tell me that; and let me judge of what I am to expect from you. Speak to me fully—your life hangs upon a thread."

"By my intercession I hope that my father may be induced to spare you from that legal prosecution which your crimes merit. I do not know what the laws of your country would condemn you to for this great iniquity, but I would make an effort to spare you that."

"Yes, and leave me to disgrace and destitution!"

"It is you, Phillip, who will leave yourself to disgrace. No one can lift the disgrace of such acts as yours off the shoulders of him who perpetrates them. As for destitution, I do not think that my father would let you starve, whatever might be his abhorrence of your crimes. Perhaps in some other land you might live a life of repentance."

Phillip laughed loudly and discordantly.

"No, girl," he said; "upon one condition only will I place you in your father's arms: it is, that you will point to me as your preserver, and accuse that man who is now in Newgate upon the charge of your abduction, of really being the person who tore you from home. I will then ask your father for a sufficient sum of money, which no doubt his grateful feelings will prompt him to give me, and with it I will leave England for ever. When I am gone you can tell what tale you like; so that, after all, it will only be costing your father a few thousands, and that is no harm to him."

"No, Phillip, no."

"You will not?"

"I dare not."

"What do you mean by dare not? Who is to hinder you, fool that you are? What do you mean by dare not?"

"I dare not go to my father with an untruth upon my lips, even for one hour."

"Then die in you obstinacy, idiot, for die you shall!"

"Heaven help me!"

"Heaven! Ha! ha! Wait for Heaven to help you until you lie and rot. Ha! ha! I have you now; but it is only to bind more tightly around you the meshes of my power, and to take more effectual steps for the destruction of him who had the audacity to intefere with me in the country lane. To-morrow I will visit you again, and if I do not find you more tractable, that day will be your last in this world."

With these words, and without waiting for an answer, for anything she said was gall and wormwood to him, he left the house, and full of dark and evil thoughts he made his may to London again.

It was after this visit to Grace, that feeling how utterly impossible it was to move her from her fixed integrity of thought and action, he fairly made up his mind to her murder. Then it was that he drugged the wine, which he hoped would be a speedy means of relieving him from her presence in this world.

But notwithstanding all that was happening to them, in the meantime Jack and Dick were not unmindful of the principle business they had in hand, namely, the rescue of Claude from Newgate, by the thorough establishment of his innocence as regarded the abduction of Grace.

By establishing that fact, they not only anticipated an instant order from Judge Manning for his release, but they hoped that in the judge they should make for him (Claude) such a friend, as upon some other important occasion might really stand him in good stead.

They were both at the spot in Islington, from whence they could command a good view of the cottage, where Phillip Manning went to put on his disguise, long before the hour at which they expected him to make his appearance there.

"Do you know, Dick," said Jack, "I scarcely ever felt so nervous in all my life as I do now, about the probable fate of that young girl. It seems as if something whispered to me, that to a certainty that rascal would take her life in spite of us."

"No, no, Jack, if he come here, you may depend she yet lives; and so sure as he does come she shall be saved, for we can then take pretty good care not to lose sight of the villain. I grant you if he were not to come, I should have the most dismal forebodings upon the subject."

"Alas! Dick, if you began to have forebodings, I should feel and have certainties. I hope to God it will not be so. Ah! what a delightful thing. There he is, Dick."

"Sure enough. All's right. Yes, that is the fellow. What has he got in that bag, I wonder?"

"Some provisions, or a fresh disguise for himself."

"Perhaps both, Jack; but as we are pretty sure there is no one in that bit of a crib, which we may call for convenience sake Phillip's cottage, but himself, we will follow whoever comes out of it, let them be in appearance what they may. We have already had evidence that Master Phillip is a skilful actor, and we positively must not let him do us again, Jack."

"We will not."

Phillip advanced with the utmost possible caution. He seemed quite to have some sort of notion that he was being followed, for he looked many times behind him, and passed the cottage twice before he ventured upon going up to the door of it, and opening it with the key he took from his pocket.

When he did open the door though, he disappeared within the cottage, and closed it again with truly marvellous celerity.

"Good," said Dick. "We have him now, Jack, as safely as though he were in our hands. I will now go up the lane opposite and hide for him, while you come after him, but at such a distance as shall take off all idea that you are after him. Don't you look for me, as I will keep an eye upon you as you come up the lane, and join you in good time."

"That will do, Dick. Good luck go with you."

"That it certainly ought to do now, Jack, for this is, to tel lthe honest truth, rather a difficult sort of adventure to those that generally engage our attention.

For the love of everything now, mind whatever you do, that you don't follow Phillip too closely."

"Trust me."

Dick at once started over the way, and in a careless manner, for fear Phillip should be looking from the window of the cottage, he stalked up the lane. It is highly probable, however, that he might have gone in any way he liked, for Phillip was by far too busy with his own disguise, to pay the remotest attention just then to anything else.

We will in the forthcoming adventure watch the conduct and proceedings of Phillip, leaving our friends to act as their good feeling and judgment may direct them in the defence of the beautiful young girl who was in such danger.

Phillip then quite satisfied himself, before he went into the cottage, that nobody saw him, so that when he did get in, he thought he had nothing in the world to do but to put on the disguise with which he was in the habit of going up the lane; but upon this occasion, having a horrible guilty knowledge of what he meant to do, he shook to that degree, that it was with the greatest possible difficulty he could put on the apparel, which was to make such a transformation in his appearance.

In about double the time, however, that he usually took to make the change, he did at length effect it, and then placing the drugged bottle of wine in a small hand-basket, he, with that upon his arm, left the cottage.

Now he did not look to the right or to the left, for he felt confident in his disguise, and he really believed that the only person he had to deal with was Grace herself. He went across the road quickly and up the lane as fast as it was at all prudent to go, considering that he personated an old woman, and perhaps a little faster.

The inhabitants of a few of the cottages at the commencement of the lane, had got to know him through seeing him several times, and one said, as he went along—

"Well, old Goody, how are you to-day?"

"Poorly, poorly," replied Phillip, in a very well acted voice indeed, as he went on.

He then pursued his way until he came to the pailings of the garden of the large house that was to let, and then he slackened his pace and only crept along. He pretended to be gathering something in the hedge, but in reality he was carefully looking about him to see if any one were at hand. After getting in this way a handful of chickweed, he quickened his pace a little, still skirting the pailings.

It was well that Dick was capitally hidden, and it was well that Jack was not too hasty in following Phillip, so as to come into sight before the rascal got housed; for if he had, without the smallest doubt, Phillip would have turned back, and posponed his visit to Grace for that day.

Everything, however, happened as it was wished to happen, and after a few minutes more skulking along the pailings, he suddenly whipped a little key out of his pocket, and opening a small door in it, disappeared in an instant.

"I am safe here," he said, as he closed the little door, and locked it on the inside.

It was rather curious that at that moment Dick popped from behind a hay-stack in a meadow on the other side of the lane, and said—

"Now he's nabbed."

The place where Phillip now found himself, was in truth a neglected garden. The trees had grown tall and strong, the shrubs had got wild and straggling, and the flowers had run in all directions, disdaining cultivated art, and rapidly lapsing into their original wild habits.

To him the place had no charms either of retrospection or anticipation. All he knew and felt was, that he had come there to commit a murder, and that each moment, although he felt his nerves fearfully shaken, he likewise felt more and more inclined to do the deed.

There was nothing whatever to interrupt him, and he made his way, regardless of the remains of the old pathway, towards the house, which, with its weather-stained walls and its closed windows, looked grim and desolate.

"There was a murder, they say, committed in this house once," mutterred Phillip Manning, as he reached its threshold; "and so no one will live in it. Now there will be two. Yes, now there will be two; for nothing can, and nothing shall, save Grace Manning from death to-day. She shall never be a witness against me."

CHAPTER CLXII.

STARTLING INCIDENTS.

So said Phillip.

"She shall never be a witness against me; and nothing can, and nothing shall save Grace Manning from death!" Impious man! did he think that Heaven slumbered while he was about to destroy one of its masterpieces of creation?

Before he crossed the threshold of the house, he placed his hand up to his eyes, and took a long look around the garden. He felt quite satisfied that he had it all to himself. Like Alexander Selkirk, the original Robinson Crusoe, he might have said—

"I am monarch of all I survey."

"'Tis well," he muttered. "I always thought that even the highest crimes could be committed with perfect ease if people were but commonly careful. I shall do this deed and no one will be a bit the wiser. Indeed it is as good as done, and beneath that mulberry-tree I will bury the only mute witness of my crime. Yes, there shall the body of Grace lie and rot while I comfort her father's and my uncle's declining years, bidding him look upon me as a son, although he has lost his only daughter. Then of course grief will soon kill him after he has made a will in my favour, leaving me all his property, which is truly immense, and I shall have my heart's desire—unbounded means of enjoyment. Oh, how I will play the tyrant and trample on all who come within my power."

While he indulged in this day-dream, he was fumbling in his pockets for a key to open the door of the house with. He found it at last, and then he disappeared whin the ill-omened structure that had earned so bad a name and which he fully intended should from that day be entitled to a worse one.

He did not fasten the door behind him. What was the use? He was so very safe.

The hall in which he now was consisted of a large space, paved with alternate black and white marble squares, and from the centre of this hall sprang the principal staircase of the house. There was, however, numerous rooms opening from the hall itself, and into one of those he went. Phillip never appeared in his disguise before Grace. He always felt that that would be useless, as a tone—a look—a gesture might discover him, and probably would do so to one who knew him so well as she did. Into one of these rooms, then, leading off from the hall, he went, to get rid of his disguise. Wrapped up in the bottom of the basket he had brought with him from the cottage was his coat, and that was the only article he found necessary to alter his present appearance with.

In that side room, which had been a pretty enough looking breakfast-room, he quickly effected the change in his apparel which he thought necessary, and then, with the drugged bottle of wine and some biscuits he crept up the staircase. Concealed in his breast was a double-barrelled pistol loaded carefully.

"Should she refuse the wine," he muttered, "she shall die by a more violent means; but in all cases die she shall."

The whole of the upper part of the house was in darkness, for Phillip had taken great care to close all the shutters so that no ray of light should by any sort of

accident reach the room in which poor Grace was kept a prisoner. That room was an inner one, with but a small window to it.

"Now," he said, as he began to make his way towards her by unlocking the door that led to the little room in which she was, "now I have a part to play and we shall see whether the complaints that have been paid to me on the score of my acting be genuine or not."

By the aid of a phosphorous match he got a light in the outer room. A half-burnt candle stood in a piece of wood, by way of a candlestick, on the floor. He ignited it; and then waiting a moment until it had burnt sufficiently to be beyond the danger of sudden extinction from being moved, he crept towards the actual door of the room in which Grace was a captive.

He unlocked it and flung it open. Then shading the light from his eyes with his hand, he called—

"Grace! Grace!"

There was no reply for the moment, and the idea that she had fled from the house came across him like a death-pang. He rushed into the room.

"Grace! Grace! Speak! Speak, I charge you. I pray you do not drive me mad by this silence! Oh, you are there!"

She stood at some few paces from him, calm and still.

"Well, Phillip Manning," she said, "what would you with me? I am here, as you see."

"Yes," he said, and he trembled violently. "I now see that you are here. But—but why did you not speak to me at once? It is no matter though. It is no matter. Oh, Grace! Grace! Pity me!"

"I do pity you."

"You do pity me?"

"Yes. Guilty creatures surely may well be pitied. May they not, Phillip Manning?"

"Well, well, Grace—perhaps you are right. I have come to-day to you with very different feelings from what I had when last I saw you. Then all the evil passions of my soul were up in arms; but better thoughts have since come over me, Grace; and if a true and a sincere repentance for what I have done, and such atonement as I can make will—will——"

He affected that his feelings would not permit him to finish his speech; but placing the candle upon the chimney-piece he audibly sobbed.

"Is this change indeed sincere?" said Grace.

"You may well, indeed, doubt it," added Phillip, pretending to speak with great difficulty, and to gulp down his sobs as he did so. "You may well doubt it, Grace; but it is sincere; and you cannot see a more wretched man than I. Some demon surely must have possessed me to make me behave to you as I have behaved. I cannot myself understand it."

"If, indeed, Phillip," said Grace, "I could think that you had awakened to a proper sense of your wickedness, it would not cost me an effort to forgive you."

"Ah, can you be so good—so angelic?"

"You may prove to me your repentance by the commencement of your atonement. When you restore me to the arms of my father, I shall then, indeed, believe that you are sincere."

"I will do so. I have come now to do so. Without condition other than a claim upon your pity, and your mercy, I have come now to take you from this place, and to restore you to your father. In some other land, as you yourself suggested to me when last we met, I shall hope to find that peace of mind which will now for ever be denied to me in my own. You, Grace, will be my intercessor with your father; and while I feel that it will be impossible to say one word in extenuation actually of my offence, still my bitter and heart-felt repentance may be pleaded."

"And it will not be pleaded in vain."

"Ah, think you so? What happy words!"

"I am certain of it. But do not delay, Phillip. Take me home at once, and

for yourself fear nothing. I will make it the first of my requests to my father to forgive you, and to make some sort of provision for you out of England. Let us go now at once, I implore you. Every moment that I remain here is another moment of misery to me, and of deep anxiety to my father."

"Ah!" said Phillip, wiping his eyes, "how well I can understand this anxi



CLAUDE, WHILE ESCAPING FROM NEWGATE, FINDS PHILLIP MANNING A PRISONER.

Come, you shall take a biscuit and one glass of wine to strengthen you, my much injured cousin, and then we will be off."

"No, no; I want nothing."

"Yes, you do; I feel certain that after even the few days only that you have passed here you must be weak and ill. You will find that when you get out into

the fresh open air you will be ready to faint away. But one biscuit, soaked in a drop of wine, will restore you, and keep up your strength and courage."

"I have no need of courage now, Phillip, that you have repented; and strength I feel I have enough."

"Nay, but ——"

"Excuse me, Phillip; I will not drink; I have a great objection to wine—I do not like it. Do not ask me."

"To oblige me, Grace. Only one sip—just a sip will be sufficient. You will not, surely, make a quarrel between us at such a moment as this, and for such a trifle as the taking or the refusing a glass of wine? Surely you would not run the risk of throwing me back again into my former frame of mind regarding you for such a trifle?"

"Your repentance, Phillip, must be but skin-deep, indeed, if it can vanish because I refuse a glass of wine."

"Well, well, that is an uncommonly true remark. But yet you will take the wine?"

"No, Phillip."

"Curses on you! You shall take it!"

"Ah, Philip, now I know you again!"

"Know me again? What do you mean?"

"I mean that from the first I knew that your pretended grief and repentance only served as a cloak to hide some object. Why, you cannot even deceive a poor simple girl like myself. Your grand object to-day is to get me to drink that wine, and I will not take one drop of it. No, Phillip, I tell you, no; I will not taste it."

"Wretched girl! Have you twenty lives, that you feel you can afford to trifle with them in this way? If I be not a repentant man, you shall, in good truth, find that I am a desperate one. The question between us is your life or mine; and I tell you now, Grace, that, with all your youth and all your beauty, your last hour has now come!"

"If it be the will of Heaven, it has."

"It is my will—that is now sufficient."

She burst into tears.

"Oh, Phillip," she said, "you cannot be so very wicked as to take away life. If even now there are times when you feel as though you would give anything for innocence of mind and purpose, what will be your feelings when you have done murder? Ordinary crimes may, in some measure, be atoned for; but who shall restore the dead? Who shall bid the grave give up its tenant, because the murderer is repentant? Pause, Phillip, for your own sake, pause, before you commit an act that is, in its awful consequences, irrevocable. Spare my life—oh, spare me, Phillip!"

"No; curses on you! You have yourself goaded me to this act, and you shall die."

"No, no—oh, God!—no."

"I say yes. There is no help for you. You are shut out from all the world. If you and I were upon some desolate island in the midst of the great sea we could not possibly be more isolated than we are from all human nature. You may cry, pray, rave, and shriek, but there is no help for you. You are my victim—it is a settled thing. You have rejected the terms upon which I offered you your life and freedom, and I will kill you. You have your choice—poison or a bullet?"

He took the pistol from his breast-pocket as he spoke. The young girl clasped her hands before her face, and sank upon her knees in a paroxysm of terror.

"Spare me!—spare me!"

"Will you drink the wine?"

"I cannot. I dare not."

"Then there is but one other alternative—you will die a more violent death; but die you must, and shall. I say, that there is but one other alternative—"

"Liar!" cried a voice of thunder; and in a moment Dick Turpin, as though he had been shot out of a cannon, sprang upon Phillip, and knocked him to the floor.

"Hush!" cried Jack. "Have you got him?"

"All's right," said Dick. "Twist the pistol out of his hand. That will do, Jack. Why I do believe I have knocked all the breath out of him. Cheer up, my lass—cheer up."

"Grace has fainted," said Jack.

Dick got hold of Phillip by the throat, and there he held him, while Jack tied his hands securely, so that he was quite incapable of further mischief. He did not speak a word, but looked from one to the other of them, like a man only half awakened from some dreadful dream.

"Murder!—murder!—mercy!" he cried. "Oh, murder! Help!—help!"

"Why, you vagabond!" said Dick, "it is we who ought to cry murder. But your career is over now, and you may as well take your fate easy, for hung you will be to all intents and purposes."

CHAPTER CLXIII.

A MOST UNEXPECTED CATASTROPHE.

Phillip Manning was not the sort of man to attend to Dick's advice, of taking his fate easily. So long as he was at all successful in the prosecution of his villany, he got on amazingly, and was upon the most capital terms with himself; but the instant any reverse happened he was lost to all firmness, and gave himself up to despair.

"Kill me—kill me, at once!" he cried. "It will now be nothing but slow death to me for the time to come."

"Very well," said Dick. "I will blow out your brains in a moment, since you are so good as to request such a thing, which is very liberal upon your part; for it certainly will save a deal of trouble to society at large, and cheat the hangman."

"Oh, no—no—no!" shouted Phillip Manning, when he saw Dick draw a pistol from his pocket. "Oh, no—no, I did not mean it—indeed I did not mean it. I cannot die. Let me cling to life while I may. Oh, spare me!"

"Miserable wretch!" said Dick. "Do you fancy for one moment that I would have your death upon my shoulders? No, I know well enough that you would not have the courage to allow me to do more than to show you the weapon of death. The law will wind up the miserable thread of your existence."

Phillip licked his lips, and with a groan he spoke to Grace, saying to her, whose life by that time he would no doubt have taken, if he had not been hindered from so doing by Dick and Jack—

"Oh, cousin Grace, say something for me. Tell them to let me go. I—I did not intend to harm you. It was only a joke, after all."

"The best joke will be when you are hung," said Dick. "Don't speak to him, Miss Manning. You should not condescend now to say one word to such a man. His murderous intentions as regarded you were only too apparent."

Grace shuddered as she replied to Dick—

"Yes," she said, "but for you and your friend he would have no doubt have killed me; I feel now like one rescued from the grave, and can hardly believe in the reality of this scene."

"I don't wonder at that, Miss Manning," said Jack; "but you will soon be in the arms of your father, and then you will, indeed, feel that, in reality, you are rescued from this bad man, who would have murdered you, merely to cover his lesser crime of imprisoning you in this dismal place."

"Yes," said Dick, "in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, murder is done to

cover the consequences of some other crime, which, compared to it, is a piece of the most unblemished and spotless innocence. But come, Jack, let us be going; I will take care of Master Phillip, and do you escort Miss Grace."

This was, no doubt, a politic arrangement, as far as it went, for he, Dick, was much better qualified to hold a tight grip of Phillip Manning than Jack was, while Jack could very well escort Grace.

At first Phillip could not be got to move. He flung himself upon his knees, and, in the most abject manner possible, begged for that mercy and consideration which he never yet showed to any one.

"Spare me," he cried, "and you will not—you shall not repent of doing so. Only let me go, and I promise you all most solemnly that I will leave England at once, and no one shall ever hear of me again. In some other country I will bitterly repent of my past errors. Oh, what will be the good, now that Grace is rescued, of bringing me to justice?"

Grace would willingly enough have listened to the appeal of the abject wretch, and she looked at Dick, as much as to say, "Shall it be as he says?" Dick understood her, and, shaking his head, he said,—

"No, no, Miss Manning, you leave this fellow to your father; he will do what is right and proper; but at present I consider that, until he decides what is to be done with Philip, we ought, none of us, to interfere in his fate. It is our duty to give him up to your father, whom he has so bitterly offended, and he alone should decide upon his fate."

This reasoning was so clear and conclusive, that it quite convinced Grace, who no longer looked imploringly at Dick, in favour of Phillip. She carefully avoided the looks of Phillip at all; and Jack offering her his arm, they all left the room together. To be sure, Dick had some difficulty in making Phillip walk, but finding such to be the case, he whispered to him,—

"If you positively will not come along, I can only tell you that my friends tell me I am a very short-tempered man; and when you or I least expect it, I may lose patience, and blow your brains out; so be warned. I won't answer for myself; and after this, whatever happens in that sort of way, you have only your own obstinacy to thank for it, and you lose your chance of the judge acting with any degree of clemency towards you, on account of your relationship to him and his daughter."

"Oh! yes, yes," said Phillip, catching, or pretending to catch at the idea; "how very good and kind you all are to me!"

"Hold your row," said Dick.

"Yes, but I was only saying how very grateful I am to you. It is such a good idea, that of yours, about the relationship. Of course, it would not be pleasant to the judge to have his nephew hung—would it?"

"It would be to me, if I were he. There's nothing would give me so much real gratification."

"You don't mean that—you really don't mean that?"

"Indeed, but I do, though."

"But I thought you thought the judge might be merciful to me, on account of my being his nephew?"

"Yes, he may do such a foolish thing as take that into his account, but I would not; and all I said to you was that if I had to blow your brains out previously, you lost the chance—that is all."

"Oh, yes, my dear sir, I quite understand you; and how very facetiously you put it too."

"I put it facetiously! Now, I consider that to be an insult, Mr. Phillip. I never was facetious in all my life."

"No, no, certainly not. I did not mean facetious, my dear sir—not at all. God bless me, no. I meant that—that you put it quite—quite ——"

"Seriously?"

"Yes; ah! seriously, to be sure. That was it—that was what I meant, of

course. I'm so much obliged to you, you can't think, for being so good as to suggest to me what I really did think."

Dick made a gesture of impatience. The fulsome and disgusting adulation of Phillip was too much for his patience.

"I wish I had given him to you, Jack," he said, "to take care of; you would, perhaps, have had more patience with him than I am blessed with."

"No," said Jack, "I really don't think I should. I have a tolerable stock of patience under ordinary circumstances, I fully admit; but I think it would fail in the company of such a man as Phillip Manning. So do you keep him, Dick, to yourself, for, in good truth, I don't at all want him."

They now made the best of their way out of the house, and Grace could not refrain from shedding tears of joy, as she once again found herself in safety and in the garden. The sight of the trees and the flowers—always agreeable and affecting objects as they are to the sensitive and educated mind—was to her one of the richest of treats; and notwithstanding that garden had gone to such decay as it had, she saw a thousand beauties in every struggling plant that spent its luxuriance in that deserted place.

"They say a murder was committed in the house long ago," said Jack; "and that that is the reaason why it is deserted."

"Alas!" sighed Grace. "The poor murdered one had not such friends as Heaven sent to me."

"Yes," said Jack; "no doubt Phillip would have added to the evil repute of the place by your death likewise, had not our anxiety, both for you and for our friend, brought us early upon his track."

"Anxiety for your friend? Can it be true, as Phillip told me, that the gentleman who rescued me from Phillip in the country lane is prison on my account?"

"It is too true."

"That gives me truly a heart-pang. Oh, let us hasten that we may rescue him. My father will not lose one moment in procuring his release; and such rich compensation as he can make to him for the great injustice that has been done him, he will make, you may be assured."

"Of that," replied Jack, "we are quite certain."

By this time they had got into the little lane, and they soon emerged from that into the high street of the then suburban Islington, where Dick's object was to procure, as quickly as possible, some conveyance to London. They stopped at an old inn—then it was an old inn, but now, to the regret of all lovers of the past, it is gone —and inquired for a post-chaise.

The Angel, for that was the name of the inn—it was no where near the site of the modern Angel Inn at Islington—could only produce one vehicle of the sort; and as Jack did not choose that Phillip should ride in the same vehicle with Grace, they had to get another chaise from another inn, and so, the two vehicles keeping tolerably close together, they set off for the house of Judge Manning: Grace and Jack being in one, and Dick with his prisoner in the another.

The greatest depression seemed to seize hold of Phillip as they neared London. He began to reflect upon the rigidly just character of the old Judge, and to fear that, notwithstanding the relationship, he would let the law take its course as regarded him, Phillip. His principal hope rested in the expectation that, despite the character of his conduct to her, the gentle disposition of Grace might induce her to plead for him to her father. Of course, anything like a re-instalment in his former condition he now felt was impossible; and, like some ruined and disappointed gambler who has played a stake with fortune and lost, he let his head rest upon his hands, and groaned aloud.

"Those who commit such acts as yours," said Dick, "should make up their minds to the consequences of detection. Whining will do you no good."

"I am lost—lost!"

"Probably enough;—but here we are at the house of your uncle, and to him I will deliver you. If he like to let you go, well and good. I shall consider it no affair of mine, although I shall think it a scandalous shame."

CHAPTER CLXIV.

CLAUDE IS FULLY LIBERATED, AND YET CHANGES HIS CONDITION FOR THE WORSE IN ONE HOUR.

The two post-chaises stopped simultaneously at the judge's door, and one of the drivers knocked loudly. The agitation of Grace was extreme, and she at once sprang from the vehicle, crying, in a voice shaken by her feelings—

"Father! father!—Where is my father?"

The servants in the hall were delighted to see her; and for some few moments they were so astonished at her sudden arrival, that they could do nothing but crowd around her, without answering one of her anxious question as to whether her father was within or not. She could bear the suspense no longer, but breaking away from them she rapidily ascended the staircase. She knew that if her father were within he would be in his study, which was a small room at the back of the house, for quiet sake, where he spent a great portion of the time that he had to spare from his official duties.

It was thither, then, that on the 'wings of affection' she sped.

The door of the little study was shut; and, overcome for a moment or two by her feelings, Grace was compelled to pause at it before she could summons strength enough to open it. It must be recollected too, that she had been greatly weakened by the few days imprisonment she had endured in the deserted house. Indeed, nothing but the natural elasticity of youthful strength and spirits had kept her up so well as she had maintained herself. After a few moments she recovered herself sufficiently to open the door gently.

Her father was there!

The old judge was leaning upon the study table with his head resting upon his hands. He did not hear the study-door open. His thoughts at that moment were with his child; and he was asking himsef if he should ever in this world again have the joy of looking into her eyes, and of blessing her.

Grace gently touched his arm.

"Father!" she said.

If a spark of elictricity had produced the effect the judge could not have started from his seat with greater precipitancy than he did.

"Do not mock me!" he cried. "Oh, do not mock me. Who called me father? I have, alas! no child now."

"Yes, yes!" cried Grace, as she flung herself into his arms. "Yes, father, yes. I have come back to you. I am your own child. Your Grace. Look at me."

There are scenes and situations which it would be profanity for the pen of the novelist to linger to depict. Such scenes should be sacred. In the deep recesses of every human heart there are affections and passions which no language can paint. Over the interview between the father and child so happily restored to him, we draw for a time a veil.

* * * * * *

While this was going on within the judge's house, Dick and Jack had dismissed one of the coaches, and both of them sat in the other along with Phillip Manning, who, now that he found himself fairly at his uncle's door, appeared ready to go mad with shame and vexation.

Had he not been well secured there is no knowing what act of desperation he might not have been guilty of.

"I envy the feelings of Judge Manning, now," said Jack to Dick. "It is almost worth while to have suffered what he must have suffered, to feel the joy that he must now feel, in the restoration of his child."

"You are right, Jack; it is really worth while. We never know real joy but by its contrast with some previously experienced misery, so you see, Jack, these folks who tellus that pleasure in this world, is of itself merely a negative, imply-

ing the absence of pain, as night implies merely the absence of day, are about right."

"I think they are quite right," said Jack.

"Listen to me," said Phillip.

"Well, say on," replied Dick.

"You have now restored Grace to her father. By her testimony, of course, your friend who is in Newgate, will be free, and so you will have accomplished all your wishes. I will give you £100 if you will let me go."

"No," said Dick.

"No," said Jack.

"I will give you £200.—Yes, I will make it £200. I have some little savings and I will make it into £200.

"I would not let you go," said Dick, "if you were to make it two hundred hundred, so you may spare yourself the trouble of increasing your offer."

"Lost! lost! lost!" cried Phillip.

"You may be lost. But if you are hanged, society will be considerably the gainer in the long run by your loss, I only wish your uncle would come out and say what is to be done with you, now at once."

"He comes," cried Jack. "He and Grace. Look Dick, look at the old man's face. Did you ever see such an expression of satisfaction? I'll warrant now that Grace has told him all."

"Not a doubt of it."

Jack was right; Grace had in a few words told her father all, and he was coming to the chaise to thank and to welcome those who had brought back the joy of his heart to him, by bringing back his child.

They both, that is Dick and Jack, alighted to meet him, and he embraced them, while with tears standing in his eyes, like sentinels over his feelings, he thanked them over and over again.

"I do not know," he said, "I cannot know how I shall be able to repay to you the obligation I owe you, but be assured that you will not be able to draw too largely upon my gratitude. Come in both of you; come into this house, which at all times, I beg you to consider your own."

"Phillip, is in the carriage, sir," said Dick.

"Yes, I have given orders concerning the prisoner."

"Uncle, uncle!" cried Phillip, from the carriage, when he saw that the judge was fairly going away without so much as exchanging a word with him. "Uncle! uncle! I want to speak to you!"

"Yes," added the judge, continuing his conversation with Jack and Dick, as though there was no such person as Phillip in the world. "Yes, I beg that you will both henceforward reckon me as a friend who may always be relied upon."

"Uncle—uncle! Good God, uncle!—will you not speak to me?"

"And likewise your friend, who is now so unjustly confined in Newgate. It will be my study to make him the most ample compensation."

"Grace—Grace! Oh, speak for me. Uncle—uncle! you will drive me mad if you say nothing to me."

"And believe me," added the judge, as they all four reached the door of the house together. "And believe me, the unjust detention of your friend shall terminate within the succeeding hour to this."

Phillip raised his voice to a shriek, but the judge would take no more notice of him than he did of one of the post-horses. A couple of stout lackeys came out of the house, and one got on the box of the coach with the driver, to whom he gave some directions. The other sprang into the vehicle and seated himself opposite to Phillip, and then away they all went, Phillip's cries and shrieks to his uncle, to take some sort of notice of him, dying away in the distance.

Both Jack and Dick were inexpressibly amused at this mode of treatment to Phillip upon the part of his uncle, for it was certainly the very best that could have been devised, inasmuch as any conversation or altercation with him would really have been a humiliation to any one. They would neither of them say one word

to the judge about him, and if Grace had in any way interceded for him they were quite delighted to find that such intercession had had no effect upon the just resolves of the father, for that Phillip had gone off to prison they did not for one moment doubt.

Refreshments were immediately ordered for Dick and Jack, but the former spoke to the judge, saying—

"In truth, sir, the most refreshing thing to us in all the world now would be to see our friend free from prison."

"That you will see shortly," said the judge; "but you know that, in all these affairs, there are certain forms to go through, which even I cannot dispense with. I have, however, sent my secretary to see into the matter, with instructions that there should be no delay."

"That is sufficient, sir."

"Make yourselves quite easy. You will soon be introduced to your friend."

Both Jack and Dick fully expected to see Claude come into the house soon, but presently the sound of carriage-wheels without sounded upon their ears, and the judge rising, said—

"Will you now accompany me upon the business of taking your friend from durance?"

They were both willing enough to go upon such an errand, and would have bidden adieu to Grace, but the judge interposed, saying—

"No—no. You and your friend, who will soon be a free man, shall come back here and pass a few hours with me. I want to learn, so far as you will tell me, who and what you all are, in order that I may best know in what way I can be of service to you."

Dick and Jack exchanged significant glances at this. It would be no easy matter to say to a man in Judge Manning's official position, "Why, sir, we are highwaymen; and the only good you can do us is not to give us into the hands of the police."

They both felt that this explanatory and confidential interview that the judge promised himself with them was to be courted, at any risk; but at that time they said nothing, hoping that Claude, when they were once more united to him, would think of some mode of getting handsomely away.

With this feeling, then, they got into the judge's carriage, which they found was waiting at the door for them. They fully expected to find themselves trundling along towards Newgate, so they did not take any particular notice of the route they were taking, until suddenly Jack looked out of the window, and said,—

"Why, this is Bow Street!"

"Bow Street!" said Jack. "What do we want in Bow Street?"

"I have yet to do an act of justice," said the judge. "As your friend was by me publicly accused of the crime of carrying off my daughter, I think his exculpation from the charge ought to be public likewise. He will be brought from Newgate to the police-office here, and I will publicly proclaim his innocence."

Dick and Jack looked at each other, but they did not say anything, although if the truth were told they felt very uneasy at the idea of this public exculpation, and would have rather met Claude at the door of Newgate, and been off with him at once to the country.

"Our friend," said Dick, "is very much obliged, and I am sure he will be just the man to appreciate such a very delicate attention from you, sir; but as I know he has friends in the country, who are so anxious concerning him, I feel assured he will esteem it a great favour to get away from the police-office as quickly as may be consistent with your feelings on the subject."

CHAPTER CLXV.

THE POLICE OFFICE.—AN AWKWARD RE-ENCOUNTER.

THE judge replied to Dick in the most courteous manner in the world, and made a gratuitous offer of his own carriage to convey any or the whole of them where they pleased, as soon as they had been at his house for some time and



SEIZURE OF CICELY AT THE FARM-HOUSE.

refreshed themselves, and he had fully arranged with them what he could do for them, out of gratitude for the immense service that they had rendered to him.

There was, under the very peculiar circumstances of the case, no such thing as gainsaying what the judge thought proper to do. Had Claude been actually

there and then with his friends, the police-office business might easily have been avoided; but as he was not, but, on the contrary, had to be fetched from Newgate, both Dick and Jack felt how utterly helpless they were just then. At one moment entertaining the desperate expedient of making the judge a confidant, at that the eleventh hour, as it were, and letting him know exactly who and what Claude was, came over Dick; but he did not like to do that while there was a chance of the affair settling itself comfortably and safely another way; so he let things take their course, comforting himself with the idea that the explanation in the police-office would not last many minutes, and that then it would be much better the judge should know nothing more than he did know, and that was little enough.

A glance at the countenance of Jack was sufficient to tell Dick how full of apprehension he was for Claude; and indeed he, Jack, was so much affected at this abominable idea, as he thought it, of going to Bow Street, that the judge could not help observing it, and said kindly to him,—

"You seem indisposed, my friend?"

"No," said Jack, making a desperate attempt to rally his spirits, and smiling in a very strange and grave kind of way; "no, thank you, sir, I never felt better in my life, I assure you—never better."

Dick gave him an admonishing kick to say as little as possible, on the good old principle that the least said is the soonest mended; and then the judge's coach drew up at the door of the Bow Street police-office. Poor Jack could not suppress a groan as the vehicle stopped.

"I am certain you are not well," said the judge, "but the great natural courage of your character will not permit you to admit as much. Is it not so?"

"Oh! dear, no," said Jack; "I—I am quite well and delighted; only I am so much attached to my friend, who is about to be liberated to-day from his unjust imprisonment, that I own I feel a little nervous and excited."

"The feeling does you honour," said the judge, as they alighted.

The officers and other official persons about the police court soon found out that it was one of the judges that had come; and they were painfully profuse in their attentions both to Dick and Jack, as well as to him; for they could not but see the very friendly and familiar terms upon which the old judge treated his two companions, different as they looked from him.

"If there be no immediate recognition," thought Dick, "all will be well, and we shall pass through this rather troublesome affair with flying colours; but from my heart I do wish it were all well over."

The judge was accommodated with a seat on the bench, and both Dick and Jack would, if they had chosen, likewise enjoyed that honour; but their natural modesty must have stood wonderfully in the way, for they both positively declined; and far from wishing to make themselves at all conspicuous, they took up a very retired position near the door of the court.

"I don't like this at all," whispered Jack to Dick.

"Nor I, Jack. But what are we to do, old fellow? We are in for it now, and we must just go through with it."

"Yes; but really it's very uncomfortable."

"Rather so. Hush! There's Claude coming. I hear a coach stopping. I hope, now, that five minutes more will see us all out of this confounded place, the very air of which appears to me difficult to breathe."

"It's the same to me," said Jack. "I feel as if I were half choaked."

"Hush! don't say any more. There's a fellow with as long ears as a donkey, trying might and main to listen to what we are saying."

"The d—l he is! Can't you——"

"Throttle him?"

"No—no. Can't you say something a little louder to allay any suspicion?"

"It ain't worth while, Jack. Here is our friend. Hush—hush! It will soon be all right now, I hope."

Claude was brought into the court by two of the official personages from Newgate, and placed at the bar; but the judge immediately rose, and said—

"No, no. That is not the place for an innocent man. Let me beg that he may not be made to stand there for one moment."

Claude was removed to where the witnesses stand usually, and then the magistrate said to him—

"It is with peculiar satisfaction that I see you here to-day, John Smith, as an important, a very important communication will be made to you by this gentleman on my right hand."

"My entire innocence," said Claude, in a calm, clear voice, "of the charge brought against me is fully established?"

"It is," said Judge Manning, rising. "It is more than estab'ished; for not only, your worship, am I now in possession of ample proof that this gentleman had no hand whatever in the abduction of my daughter, who is now most happily restored to me, but I am satisfied that in the most gallant manner he rescued her once from the real criminal, and protected her well up to the moment when low cunning and most unheard-of villany got the better for a time of truth and justice."

Claude bowed.

"I have come down here purposely," added the judge, "to make my retraction of the false charge against Mr. Smith as public as I can, and I feel, at the same time that I declare his entire innocence, that I owe him every reparation and apology, as well as a heavy debt of gratitude, for the gallant manner in which, while it was in his power, he protected my daughter, who is now safe and well at my house."

"You have found the real criminal, sir?" said the magistrate.

"I have; and to-morrow, when my child is sufficiently recovered from her alarm and her fatigue, she will be able to appear before your worship to depose to such facts as will bring him within the grasp of justice."

"So much for Phillip," said Dick to Jack.

"Well," said the magistrate, "this is one of those gratifying occasions which very seldom occur in the course of magistrate experience. When we are forced to discharge a prisoner, I am sorry to say that, in the vast majority of cases, it is not from any doubt of his moral delinquency, but because the circumstances attendant upon his crime are not such as to bring him fairly within the operation of the law; but in this case it is to me a sincere pleasure to say that you, John Jones——"

"Smith," whispered the clerk.

"Yes. John Smith leave this court without a blemish upon your character, and you are discharged forthwith. Mr.—a—a—Smith, I have very great pleasure indeed in discharging you."

"Sir, I thank you," said Claude, "for the kind expression with which you accompany this act of justice. The consciousness of my innocence, and the firm conviction that it would very shortly become apparent, have supported me during my most unjust incarceration in Newgate; and I beg to assure you, sir," turning to Judge Manning, "that the pleasure I feel at hearing that your amiable daughter is restored to you, is much greater than my satisfaction at my own release from imprisonment."

The judge stretched out his hand and shook hands cordially with Claude, while the magistrate nodded his head, and smirked and smiled in the most amicable way he could command at a short notice. Everything seemed to be going merry as a marriage bell upon that really pleasant and auspicious occasion.

"Fully discharged," said the magistrate.

"And nothing to pay," said the clerk.

"Now then," said Judge Manning, "allow me the pleasure of calling you my friend, and of conducting you to my house, where my daughter will herself thank you for your chivalrous conduct towards her."

The last few words which the judge uttered were nearly drowned in the sound of some riot that was taking place at the door of the court. It seemed as if

the officers were trying to keep some one out who would not be kept out on any account, and a loud voice cried—

"I have been robbed—robbed on the highway. Robbed of all I had in the world, and now I am a miserable wretch again. I want to see the magistrate.—I want money.—I wan't justice.—I wan't somebody to be hung for robbing me.—Let me in, I say.—I will have justice.—I'm a miserable wretch now, for I have lost all my money, and I will come in."

"What is all that, officers?" cried the magistrate. "What is all that?"

"A man who wants to lodge a complaint, your worship; but we thought he would be intruding just now, your worship."

"No—no. This case is over. Let him come in, and put a stop to all that clamour at the door, will you?"

His hair in disorder—unshaven, and his clothes in a state of the greatest neglect, who should rush into the court but Tom Brereton, who had been so successfully stopped on the highway by Jack and Dick, so short a time before. He made his way up to the magistrate, gesticulating furiously as he came, and exclaiming—

"My money—my money. It was all I had, and nobody knows what I had to go through to get it. I want justice. I want my money, or to see somebody hanged for taking it!"

"Well, well, sir," said the magistrate, "I will take your complaint in a moment. Don't make such a noise in the court. I have the honour, my lord judge, to bid you good-day—silence there—and you too, Mr. Smith. Good-day.—Silence! This is a most delightful occasion, I assure you, Mr. Smith—

"Smith!" cried Tom Brereton, as he pointed with both his forefingers at once in the face of Claude. "Smith!"

"Yes," said Judge Manning; "Mr. John Smith, my friend."

"And an innocent man," said the magistrate.

"Who has nothing to pay," said the clerk

"Smith?" raved Tom Brereton. "Smith, your friend, sir?—An innocent man, your worship?—Who has nothing to pay, you idiot? Why—why this is the notorious highwayman, Claude Duval!"

Judge Manning staggered back to the seat on the bench that he had occupied, and sunk into it with a groan. The magistrate turned as white as a sheet, and propped himself up against the wall; and the clerk put his head under the table, and pretended to be looking for something in the waste basket, while in reality he thought he was keeping out of danger.

"Yes," roared Tom again, "that's Claude Duval, and I shall get the reward, and make up all my losses. Ha! ha! I shall get the reward. That is the notorious Claude Duval. Seize him, or he will murder all of us rather than be taken. Lay hold of him. Ha! ha! I shall get the reward, I must have the reward! Oh, what a lucky dog I am!"

Half a dozen officers made a rush upon Claude and laid hold of him, but he raised his voice, speaking quite calmly as he said—

"Hold off! I am indeed Claude Duval, and I am notorious. I did not think to be ever taken with a breath of life in me. I did not mean that it should ever be so, but then I did not calculate being in the toils like this. It would be suicide now to resist to death, and that is the cowards resource. I yield, and proclaim myself, as yon shrinking coward names me, Claude Duval!"

"Alas! alas!" cried Judge Manning.

"Hold him tight," cried the magistrate—"hold him tight. Ah, something kept running in my head that his name was not Smith. For the love of goodness hold him tight."

"You need not be afraid," said Claude; "I shall make no foolish attempt to escape. I congratulate you, Tom Brereton, upon your cleverness; and remember, you don't get all the reward until I am hanged."

"And you will be," answered Tom, "so it's as good as in my pocket, Duval. I'm as pleased as possible that after the way you have served me out at different

times, I am able to be down upon you at last, that I am, and especially as I shall make a good thing by it, too."

"Well," said Claude, "of what am I charged with? Is it of robbing this man while I was a close prisoner in Newgate?"

"No," said Tom Brereton, "but it was some of your sort."

"This may be all wrong after all," said Judge Manning; "where are the two friends of the prisoner whom I brought with me in my carriage?"

"Officers," cried the magistrate, "take them both into custody, and bring them before me at once."

The most active search was made for Dick and Jack, but neither of them were to be found. Upon the first appearance of a recognition of Claude, on the part of Tom Brereton, they had made their escape. They felt that they could possibly do something for him while they were at liberty, but shut up with him in separate cells in Newgate, they knew that they could do nothing.

"They have escaped," said Claude. "Misfortunes have all some bright side, if we will but look for it."

"We will soon have them, your worship," said one of the officers. "We wil be off after them at once, and soon have them both in custody."

Claude smiled faintly, and then turning to Judge Manning, who was evidently very much affected by what had taken place, he said—

"Do not fancy, my Lord Judge, that because this cross accident has happened I am, or shall be indifferent to the kind and honourable motives which prompted you to bring me here this day. You could not know that this was an atmosphere dangerous to my liberty and life, and in the public capacity which you stand, I had no right to perplex you, and place in opposition your duty and your feelings by any such confidence. What is done is done; and, at all events, come what may, I am delighted to think that your daughter is restored to you."

Judge Manning wrung his hand as he said—

"Oh, if you had been anything but what you are—if you had been ever so lowly or ever so poor, I could have done much for you; but now my hands are tied, though my heart continues open, and I can do nothing—nothing."

"I know it, my lord, and feel it keenly," said Claude. "There is a gulf now between you and I, which you dare not and I cannot cross; but from my heart I still thank you, sir. That is all I can say; and I will not, let the issue of this adventure be what it may, I will not regret the cause of it, since it has restored Grace to your arms."

The old judge seemed upon the point of saying something, but he suddenly checked himself, and merely bowing to the magistrate, he at once left the court.

"A-hem!" said the magistrate, clearing his throat, "it is my pleasing duty, John Smith—that is to say, Claude Duval—to commit you to Newgate, until I can have an interview with the Secretary of State, and ascertain from that distinguished personage in what manner you are to be disposed of. I say it is my pleasing duty. Clerk, make our a warrrant of committal to Newgate. A-hem! It is my peculiar and pleasing duty."

CHAPTER CLXVI.

CLAUDE'S DANGEROUS POSITION.—JUDGE MANNING'S GRATITUDE.

Claude stood in the place assigned to witnesses still, and of all the persons in that now crowded court, he really looked the least concerned or interested.

No one would have fancied his life at stake, and that he was the person around whose fate the whole of the agitation of those who were so fully betraying such agitation revolved. And yet there was not one present who would not have wagered £100 to £1 that he would be a dead man within fourteen days from thence.

And there he stood in the very prime of life, looking so calm, so thoughtful, and so full of real courage, that he enforced the unwilling admiration of many a one who would not have expressed the feeling. The coarse and vulgar exultation of Tom Brereton became loathsome.

"Ha—ha!" he cried. "He's nabbed now, and I shall see him hung with all the pleasure in life, though he is now a sort of relation of mine by marriage. You would hardly think it now, would you, to look at him and to look at me, that we were relations at all?"

"No," growled an old officer. "I should as soon think of a relationship between a monkey and a fine old English mastiff. Can't you hold your stupid tongue? We ain't all such curs as you are. If a knight of the road is taken at last, he meets his fate and there's an end of it. I never heard much very bad of Claude Duval yet, and between you and me and the post, I think he was hunted on that last affair when he went to Southampton."

"And so do I," said another. "I wouldn't a-gone on that job for I don't how much, and I'm glad it turned out a failure."

"So am I."

"Silence in the court," cried the magistrate. "Now, officers, get a coach, and take your prisoner to Newgate as quick as you can. Keep an eye upon him, for they say he is as slippery as an eel, and has as many tricks as an old fox."

"Now, Duval," said the old officer, as he touched Claude on the arm. "If you are ready for a start, we are."

"Quite," said Claude. "They will stare to see me again at the old jug, I think. Good-day, Tom Brereton; you and I will settle the reckoning of to-day some other time."

"Pish!" said Tom Brereton, snapping his fingers, "I don't value you that, now you are taken care of. I could find it in my heart to give you a good kick, if they would let me."

"Well," said one of the officers, "I have heard o' a *hass* kicking of a dead lion. Haven't you, Morgan?"

"Often—often," said Morgan, as he trod heavily on Tom Brereton's toes; "often. Lor, my little man, I hope as I haven't smashed you, really!"

"You are a set of rascals," growled Tom, "and you are all out of your minds almost with rage, because none of you will get the reward, and I shall. That's it."

Tom Brereton was so delighted with this discovery of the selfish motives of the officers in sneering at him, that if they had said ten times more to him than they had, it would have produced no effect upon him; and it was truly ludicrous, now that he had an expectation of filling his pockets by the reward he would be entitled to on account of Claude's apprehension, to see him arranging his hair and rubbing his chin with an idea of getting shaved.

"It's all right," he said. "It's all right. I shall make a capital thing of it now; and what is as good, I shall get rid of that abominable fellow, Duval, who has really been quite, as one may say, a kind of ogre to me, for I don't know how long. Wherever I went, I was perpetually frightened of him, and at every corner I ever turned, I used to shake at the idea of coming face to face with him; but now he's in Newgate, and done as brown as a cinder.

Hurrah! hurrah! for the old stone jug,
And its massive walls so strong.
Who picks his way to the outer day,
His nails must be rather long.

Upon my life, I am becoming quite a poet, and I didn't know it. I shall be rich as a Jew, with guineas not a few; and to be sure I'd no call, to let off Claude Duval."

In this happy frame of mind, Tom Brereton left the police-office, after registering his address in the clerk's books. Whether he found any very continuous cause for so much self-felicitation, will be quickly shown as we proceed with a narrative

of the events of this most eventful and extraordinary portion of the life of Claude Duval.

In the course of the next half hour he was an inmate of one of the strongest cells of Newgate, and the whole prison was full of gossip upon the extraordinary way in which he had been discovered and denounced to justice.

Some of the turnkeys were almost ready to tear the hair out of their heads, at the thought that Claude Duval, for whose blood, as it were, there was such a handsome reward offered, had actually been for days within the walls of the prison, and they not to know it. It was really almost enough to make a turnkey weep, and after that, it might very well draw tears from a stone.

"The idea," said one fat man, wiping his bald head. "The idea of me letting of him out at this very lock, and thinking as he was John Smith only, when he was as good as £1500 to anybody as could only have laid hold on him and said, 'I have got you, Claude Duval!'"

All the others groaned in unison, so that upon the whole, there was anything but a feeling of exultation in Newgate at the capture of Claude, for, as one officer said—

"He'd a thousand times better have got away, because then he would still have been to be nabbed by somebody in the 'purfession;' whereas, now the game was up, and that prize was drawn out of the wheel of Fortune."

The number of extra pots of beer brought into Newgate that day, was something prodigious, and previous to the vanishing of each of them, some very elaborate maledictions were heaped upon the head of Tom Brereton.

The fat turnkey whispered to the officer who had made the speech we have recorded—

"Sup with me in the larder to-night, off of some tripe, and we will talk it over. I'll have Bill Flukes, and Soloman Bones, and Morgan, to meet you. We will talk it over then. It's a robbery."

"So I think, Mungo. But can anything be done?"

"Mum is the word! We will talk it over. Why should the 'purfession' be done brown in this sort of way? If anybody had shot him, we must have grinned and borne it; but he aint dead yet. He's alive, and kicking, Mr. Wilks."

He's alive, certainly; but about the kicking, I don't think he'll find kicking of much use against the stone walls of Newgate. However, I'll come, and as you say, we can talk it over. Mum's the word!"

"It is—it is. I feel a little better now."

They separated with mutual winks and nods, and what all this winking and nodding meant, we shall find out when we introduce the readers to the supper in the larder of Newgate. This was a kind of indulgence that the turnkeys did not often treat themselves to, as it was rather against the rules; but, then, the governor was ill, and confined to his house, so that a great many little liberties were taken by the lower officials of the prison.

Dick and Jack no sooner found that the game was up for the present, as regarded Claude, than they left the court at the Old Bailey, and in that noiseless manner, without being missed until they were actually asked for, they made the best of their way to the quaker's, in Dean Street, Soho. To him they related all that had happened, and he listened with a face of grave apprehension. When they had come to an end, he said,—

"Truly, friend Dick and friend Jack, I consider the situation of our friend Claude, as rather critical."

"Rather critical?" said Dick; "is it not fatal?"

"No, friend."

"I only wish you could give me anything like a substantial reason for that," replied Jack. "You would be conferring upon both me and Jack no insignificant favour, if you could convince us that there was anything like a rational hope of Claude's getting over this affair. If you have anything cheering to say to us, pray say it at once, Mr. Franklin, if you please,"

"I will, friend Dick. In the first place the greatest exertions will be used to

get Duval hung, for he has many enemies on account of his gallantry to the ladies. Every husband—every father, and every lover who has suffered a pang upon that account, will prosecute him to the death. Moreover, he has robbed a bishop; and churchmen never forgive anything or anybody."

"Why," said Jack, "you are giving us all the reason you can for despairing of Claude's life,"

"Yes, friend Jack, I am; but I shall come to the other part of the question directly. I think I have said all that need be said about the great jeopardy in which Claude stands; and now, on the other side, he has a great friend in Judge Manning, who will do all that he legitimately can do, to save him; and he has a great friend in Grace Manning, who will do all that she can do, legitimately or otherwise, to save him. Then, the whole of the officers will be as mad as fury at his being caught by any one out of their profession; and then he has you two, and then he has me to befriend him; and he has a couple or three thousand pounds to pay his way to liberty, if that amount should be wanted, and should be likewise sufficient for the purpose."

"What," cried Dick, "two or three thousand pounds? What do you mean by that? He has not a tithe of the money, although I and Jack may be likely enough to get him a good round sum by our exertions on the road."

"There is no occasion, friend Dick, for any exertions on the road just now. They would be dangerous; and neither you, friend Dick, nor you, friend Jack, are in a fit frame of mind to follow the business just now. I will produce all the money that can possibly be wanted; and I will trust to the honour of all of you to repay me when it may be convenient."

"We are indeed immensely beholden to you," said Jack; "you shall not lose a farthing by the transaction if I live. And so you really think that there is a hope of rescuing Claude even yet?"

"I do. At present I make it a particular request that neither you nor Jack will attempt anything or stir out of this house. I will now go forth and get all the information I can about Claude's position. I will even find out to a square foot in what part of Newgate he is placed, I will know who attends upon him, and what he says, and how he looks, before I see thee again."

Both Dick and Jack could not but stare at the quaker to hear him talk in such a strain; but they well knew that in his case it was no boasting or vain assumption. The extent of his resources they had had reason to believe were extraordinary; and if he had said "I will bring you back Claude Duval to supper," they would have been tempted to have believed him; although they knew that the massive locks and walls of Newgate were between them and the realisation of such an event. But the quaker never promised more than he could perform, and when he said what we have worded, he had certain means of getting the information he desired.

Truly, gold will do wonders in this world. It melts the hearts of gaolers—it opens prison doors with its master key—and it throws down stone walls without so much as touching them.

Mr. Franklin did not delay a moment longer, but very calmly taking his broad-brimmed hat from a peg in the hall of his house, away he went, leaving Dick and Jack in a state of puzzled expectation.

There was now but one other person upon whom the discovery and identity of Claude and his consequent committal to Newgate produced a powerful effect; and that person was Judge Manning. We have recorded how abruptly he left the court, and when he did so, he hastily entered his carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive him home.

On his route all he said was—

"I must save this man! I must save this man!"

The moment he reached his own house, he repaired to the library, and then summoning Grace to his presence, he said to her—

"My dear, now sit down by me, and from first to last, give me as clear and detailed an account as you possibly can, of the whole of your recent adventure.

I want particularly to know every word that this Mr. Smith said to you, and I want a very minute detail of his actions towards you.

Upon this, Grace related all to her father, and the whole narrative said so much for the courage, and the chivalrous honour and delicacy of Claude, that the old judge was compelled to rise and pace the room to and fro to recover his equanimity and at last pausing before Grace, he said—



CLAUDE RETALIATES UPON TOM BRERETON.

"And this man—and this man, Grace, who rescued you from Phillip in the green lane—this man, who with the utmost delicacy brought you to town—this man, who protected you all the way, and who only left you at the door for a moment because he would spare my feelings too sudden a shock from the joy of your recovery—this man, my dear, did all this at the risk of dying on a scaf-

fold, for he is no other than Claude Duval the celebrated highwayman; and now stands committed to Newgate, from whence he will only step forth to death, and a terrible death, at the hands of the hangman!"

Grace uttered a cry of despair, and sank fainting on the floor.

"No! no!" cried the judge, "rise my child. Comfort yourself. It must not be, it shall not be! He who has done so much for you, shall not suffer death in such a shape. It is our duty to save him."

"Ah, father, and you will?"

"I will."

"I breathe again. Oh, would it not imbitter the remainder of our lives to think that because he was so self-denying, so kind, so generous to me, he met with death. No, no, it must not, shall not be. You will save him father?"

"I will, my child."

CHAPTER CLXVII.

THE OFFICIALS OF NEWGATE SUP IN THE LARDER, WHICH IS IMPORTANT TO CLAUDE.

THAT night at ten o'clock, when all the cells were closed and the most active business of the day was over, the old larder in Newgate was worth looking at.

This larder was a place of some extent. The unhappy wretches who are to expiate their crimes upon the scaffold, are brought through it on that, to them, fearful morning, when they find no sympathy within Newgate, and when they know that there is a glaring crowd without waiting to see them die. But upon these occasions they do not absolutely see the larder.

No, a portable partition, for the reception of which there are grooves in the ceiling and on the floor, converts their progress, instead of being through a room, into one through a narrow passage, and then they step out to die, without having taken a last look, in their immediate progress, of pots and kettles, and coffee stew-pans, and all the etceteras of a large kitchen. But upon this present occasion the larder is in all its integrity and beauty. A rousing fire is in the ample grate, and some most appetizing steams fill the ambient air. You would not suppose yourself in Newgate at all were you there, which proves satisfactorily, that one kitchen is very like to another.

We have before stated that this supper in the larder was contrary to rule, and that it would not by any means have been ventured upon, if the governor had not been known to be confined to his bed, or all but that; so that he could not pounce upon them at unawares; and as regarded each other, and the minor officials, they had too good an understanding among them to fear any treachery at all.

By a quarter past ten, then, they were assembled—only five of them; but then that five consisted of men who, if they pleased, could do something in Newgate, and from their looks it was pretty clear that something they meant to do. The cook was acustomed to these little gatherings in his domain; and as they always resulted in providing him with an unlimited amount of strong drink, he never made any kind of objection to them, but bustled about, and took good care that the solid portion of the entertainment should be none of the meanest the prison stores could afford.

Now, this cook had a failing, which was decidedly to take what folks call the other glass, which is generally considered to be the glass which is over and above that one at which a man may still preserve the equilibrium of both mind and body. Upon this occasion it was the special object of the officers and turnkeys to give him that other glass as speedily as possible, for they had matters of deep moment to consider of which it would not be wise to trust to cooks.

"Come, Bill," said Morgan, as he pushed a dish of exquisitely stewed oysters towards his friend, "you don't eat, man."

"Don't I?" replied Bill. "It's Jukes who takes nothing; and as for our good friend here, the cook, he is the most abstemious man in the world, and won't drink."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the cook, as he pushed his white night-cap up upon his brow, "don't I drink. Come, Mr. Morgan, pass the bottle, and I'll drink to your very good healths, all of you. Here's lots o luck, and may business never fail. Ropes will be cheap when all the world grows honest, I think."

"When all the world grows honest, they won't want cooks," said Bill. "But you don't eat anything."

"Why, as to eating," said the cook, "I can't say I do in a regular way eat much. I now and then take a taste of one thing, and a taste of another; but what with the fire, and the smother, and one thing and another, I don't give way to eating."

"And the bottle?" said Jukes.

"No—no, Mr. Jukes. There you do me an injustice. I take a little, only a little, to keep me up agoing, that's all, gentlemen; so here's good luck again; and all I can say is, that you are as welcome to a quiet little feed in the larder as can be. You have only to tell me before-hand that you are coming, and it will be all right. So here's to all again, and—and I only wish you all luck—l—luck, I—do. This is not bad brandy, wherever it came from. Hurrah for the Road. That's a Highwayman's chaunt ain't it, Mr.—Mr.—Ju—Ju—Jukes?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"I—I thought so, and as I was saying, here's better luck still. God bless you all—all the lot of you. I'm a poor fellow in my way, but I know—I—I—know—yes, that's it, I know. It's enough to make anybody cry it is. I—I—God bless you all."

"That will do," said Morgan, as the cook suddenly, losing his equilibrium, fell into a corner. "That will do. And now friends and mates, lets to business."

"Ay, ay—to business," said the other.

"What do we live by?"

"Why, by grabbing the gentry and the cracksmen, to be sure. By the family, take 'em all in all, we live," said Bill, "and that's a fact. Now the idea of a parcel of rascals, out o' the profession, grabbing of a cove is 'promiscous'—it is. They might as well grab us. I tell you what it is, mates—Claude Duval must get on the road again."

The others nodded.

"He's the chap for us. He belongs to us," said Morgan. "It's a robbery for anybody to meddle with him but us, and they shan't. The profuse rewards belong to the profession. I'm not a chap to say, let me have everything, but I don't like to see things go out of the profession. Are we agreed, comrades—are we agreed?"

"We are—we are."

"That's all right. Suppose Claude Duval escapes from Newgate? It will be no more than other folks have done before him; and if we choose to wink at things, why off he is. He's just the sort of chap to make the try at it."

"He is."

"And if he can be given ever so slight a hint that on some particular night we shall all be remarkably blind and deaf, don't you think he'd be likely to take advantage of it?"

"To be sure he would. Why not? If ever there was a man in Newgate likely to get out his own way, it's Claude Duval; and if we choose to say yes to it, it's as good as done. How is it to be managed? that's all we have got to consider now. Who is to let him know? for, after all, it must be only a broad hint."

"That's all. But Duval is no fool. I will see him when I am on duty to-morrow, and I'll be bound he will quite well enough understand then which way the cat jumps. Only, of course, he mustn't get out by the regular way."

"Confound it all!" said Bill, "we are making a trouble about nothing at all. Trust him, I say, and take him clear out, and give him a fair start. It can easily

be done through the chapel, and over the wall, by the corner of Newgate Street, if he has anybody to help him. I know it can't be done otherwise; but I will see him off the first regularly dark night, if you like."

"But what can you say to him?"

"Say to him? Why, the exact truth. If we don't, Claude Duval is the man to guess at it; and it is always better to tell a fellow what you really mean, than leave him to find out, and know it when you have said something else to him."

The others seemed to think this rather a bold proceeding on the part of Bill; but the more they considered of it, the more they felt induced to come into it; and at last it was fully and completely agreed that upon the first occasion when it could be done, Duval was to be offered his freedom from Newgate upon the express ground that he had been taken by one who was not in the profession; an argument which, knowing the amount of rewards offered for him, he would be able fully to appreciate.

How far this might have the effect of interfering with Tom Brereton and his claims to the reward they did not stop to inquire. It was for them sufficient that Claude should once again be in "the market."

By the light of the lantern that swung above their heads they saw that their friend, the cook, was still in the land of dreams; and then having made a very tolerable clearance of the supper, they left the larder to the cook and to repose.

If the reader will now please to reflect for a moment or two, he will not fail to perceive in how singular a situation Claude is placed, and how strangely that situation contrasts with his position but a short time previously.

Here was the man who had been hunted almost to death—who had not been permitted to leave for ever the scene of his crimes, and lead a different life in another land—who had been interrupted in every way—whose life had been a darling object to extinguish—a man who had been pursued by fire, and secured at last in the very grasp of the authorities—enclosed within stone walls, and yet how many now were plotting and planning his rescue!

Truly may we say

"All the world's a stage,
And men and women merely players;"

for who could have supposed or expected for a moment to find the very turnkeys of Newgate and the officers of the police to come out in so very different a character?

But it all only goes to prove what Claude had himself, upon more than one occasion, asserted, namely—that he was simply and only pursued for the price that was set upon his life. It became a matter of business to hunt him down. It was now equally a matter of business to let him go.

Of course Judge Manning, who was as truly anxious as any one could possibly be for the release of Claude, felt and acted from pure motives of deep, heartfelt gratitude towards him. He had, perhaps, promised his child more than his cooler judgment could tell him there was a possibility of performing, when he said that Claude should be freed; but if that promise be qualified by saying that he would do all that he possibly could to bring about such a result, there is no doubt but he will keep it, both in the spirit and to the letter.

But the struggle in the mind of the judge between his sense of public duty was long and severe. The feelings of the man and the father, however, triumphed over those of the judge, and he said to himself—

"I will, if it be in my power so to do, rescue him who was the champion of my child, and then it will be fit that I retire from the performance of those public duties which my private feelings have stepped in to nullify."

After once coming to such a conclusion as this, it may be very well guessed that the judge would not allow any circumstance to prevent him from doing his very utmost in the case; and accordingly, within one hour after the conversation with his daughter, which we have recorded, we find him closetted with a small, prim-looking man, dressed in most plain black, and with such a quiet manner about him, that one would have supposed him quite incapable of anything in the shape of either mental or bodily resistance to anything.

This individual was the private solicitor of Judge Manning, and one upon whom he knew he could thoroughly depend. The subject upon which he had summoned him will be quickly apparent, although to judge from the faint look of surprise upon the attorney's face, one would fancy it was something much more out of the common way than it really was.

"And, my lord," said the attorney, "you really mean that you will do anything to rescue this man?"

"I do mean it, Mr. Sago. I do mean it; and I sent for you to entrust you with the affair. Mind, I do not mean to be so absurd as to say that I will force this business on you. Far from it. If you have any disinclination to it, say so candidly and at once, and I will seek some other less scrupulous practitioner."

"My lord—my lord," said Mr. Sago, placing his hand upon that part of his waistcoat, beneath which he presumed his heart was situated, "it is quite impossible you could find a less scrupulous attorney than myself. I am strictly and entirely professional."

Just the faint ghost of a smile crossed the face of the judge as he heard these words from the lips of the attorney—words which he so well knew how to interpret; and then, after the pause of a few moments, he said to him—

"We perfectly understand each other, then, Mr. Sago, upon this case. You will do your very best in it, and you will charge me with the expenses, together with £500, for your own professional services."

The attorney bowed, made some important remark about the weather; and then, without once again recurring to the subject, he took his leave of Judge Manning.

When he was alone, the judge leant his head upon his hands for a few moments, and then said, in a desponding tone of voice—

"I have done all that I can do, and more than I ought to have dared to do I may be successful, and yet much do I doubt it. Time—time alone will show. I will now tell Gace that I have set this matter in motion."

It was strange that at the very same time that the judge was in consultation with his solicitor, concerning the saving Claude Duval in any way, both Dick and Jack were in deep and solemn converse with Franklin the quaker upon the same subject, and the turnkeys and officers of Newgate had as good as agreed that the highwayman was to be free in a short time.

Franklin had, with amazing tact, found out all that there was to know about Claude's present position. He could tell the two friends that he in whom they were so deeply interested, was committed to the prison of Newgate for safe keeping, until the authorities had fully decided upon what was the course they should think proper to pursue towards him. He could further tell them that Claude was in a strong cell, but that he was not ironed, although, no doubt, he would be, and that he would be carefully watched. He could not, however, with all his cleverness, and all his means of information, tell them that there was actually a conspiracy within the very walls of Newgate to set him (Claude) free.

"We then," said Jack, "are utterly hopeless; for, alas! what can we do in the matter?"

"Little enough," said Dick. "All we can hope to do is to convey to Duval some tools which may help him to make an escape from Newgate, or to attempt to do so."

"We will easily enough let him have tolls," said Franklin. "I will hand them to him when I see him in his cell."

"When you see him?"

"Yes. There is no difficulty in that. I will show you how I can procure an interview with him, if you will be guided by me."

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

CLAUDE, BY GENERAL CONSENT, COMMENCES HIS ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE.

"You rather astonish me," said Dick.

"And me likewise," said Jack.

"Oh, pho!" said the quaker; "nothing can be easier than that. You know that the only person from without who is allowed to visit a prisoner in Newgate, without hinderance, or being well searched at the lobby, is the solicitor whom he may pitch upon to conduct his case, and who must produce a written retainer from him."

"Yes—yes."

"Well, then, you, Jack, or you, Dick—it don't matter which—must write to Duval in Newgate, urging him to send a written retainer to a Mr. Alfred Jones, addressed to this house. With that in my hand, and properly made up, I will present myself at the gate of Newgate, and I have no sort of doubt but that I shall at once get an interview with Claude, and of course I can then carry him in anything I please."

"But will they if I write," said Jack, "deliver to him my letter?"

"They must, as it will contain nothing but what is perfectly unexceptionable in every way."

"Then let it be done at once," said Dick, "and you, Jack, can write it more perfectly than I, as you are by far the oldest friend of Claude; and when you go to him, Mr. Franklin, you can tell him all the news, and how gladly we would do anything in the world that he can think of to procure his freedom."

"Truly, friend, I will," said Franklin.

The letter was speedily written by Jack, and although it contained not one word that could be construed by the prison authorities into anything that it would be improper or imprudent to communicate to the prisoner, yet, from the style of it, Claude would have no difficulty in seeing that Jack wished him to send the written authority to Mr. Alfred Jones, for a very special reason.

The address, too, to the quaker's house, which would be sure to strike him, would of itself be sufficient to assure him that the missive came direct from his friends, and meant more than met the eye.

In two hours the answer came back. It merely contained a few lines to Jack, and kind remembrances to all friends, and the order of retainer to Mr. Alfred Jones, solicitor.

"Now my friends," said Franklin, "you may wait here while I pay a visit to Newgate, and tell me before I get ready what out of all this box of tools and implements you think will be most useful to Claude Duval."

As the quaker spoke, he dragged from under a table a small chest, which, upon being opened, disclosed a beautiful collection of house-breakers tools of all kinds and descriptions, most of them being of the most exquisite workmanship and the most ingenious design.

Dick and Jack made some selections, and handed them to the quaker, Dick saying—"There, if you can manage to give him only these five tools he will not be kept in Newgate by the power of locks, or hinges, or fetters, I'll be bound."

"He shall have them, friend. He shall have them. I do not in the smallest degree anticipate any difficulty, for the name of Alfred Jones, as a solicitor, appeareth in the law list, and it is most unlikely that they should know that individual at the gate of Newgate; but as in all human enterprises, friend Jack, there is some little chance of failure, I will risk that much."

With this the quaker went off to Newgate capitally dressed in black, and looking so cool, and so collected, that no one for a moment could possibly have suspected him of any ulterior designs, or of being anything but what he represented himself. With that easy confident air, which a man has who goes upon an errand that he knows and feels he is all right regarding, Franklin ascended the steps of Newgate and rapped smartly at the half-door.

"Well, what now?" said the man who was on the lock, as it is technically termed.

"Open the wicket," said Franklin, with an air of authority. "I am a solicitor. Open the wicket."

The turnkey mechanically obeyed, and when he was in the lobby, Franklin took out a large pocket-book, and after a pretended search among its multiferious papers that nearly exhausted the patience of the turnkey, he affected, at last, to find the written authority from Claude, constituting Mr. Alfred Jones his solicitor.

"Oh, here it is, at last," he said. "Be so good as to get some one to show me to Duval quickly, for my time is of importance."

"Oh. This here ought to go to the governor," said the turnkey.

"Well, be quick about it."

"Yet, I daresay it's all right. Joe, look at this. You are more of a schollard than I is. Is this a proper *torney's thority?*"

Joe looked at the paper as wisely as possible, and then in a very oracular kind of manner, declared his opinion that it was as right as ninepence, and that he'd better show the gemman the way.

"That's the thing, my good fellow," said Franklin, "and if ever I am in here for anything, I'll he as liberal among you all as a prince."

"Ah," said Joe, "catch you lawyers a-coming here, 'xcept on a visit only, that's all. You knows how to manage things, you does. This way, sir, this way. We hasn't no objection to drink your health, though, for all that."

"I always do things regular," said Franklin. "Wait till my client has paid me something, and without it I don't come again, I can tell you, and then I'll stand a crown."

"Ah," said Joe, with a look of admiration, "I never seed you here afore, sir, but you is one of the deep ones; I can can see that any way. This here's the way, sir. Hilloa, Foxey. Here's a lawyer come to see Duval. Just show him in."

Foxey, who was enjoying a quiet snooze in a little watch-box sort of place, jammed up into a corner of a narrow passage leading to the range of cells in one of which Claude was confined, awakened, and growled out—

"What is you arter now? Can't a man shut his eyes for a matter of a minute, but you are forced to come with your larks and botherations? Be off."

"Not till I have seen my client, Mr. Foxey," said Franklin. "Then I shall be off as quickly as I can, but not before."

"Eh? oh, eh? I begs your parding sir. I thought as it was only a bit of Joe's gammon, that's all; 'cos, you see, sir, they often pokes fun at me, pretending as I'm give to going to sleep, when all the while there ain't a wider awake follow than me in the whole stone pitcher."

Foxey led the way to Claude's cell, and opening the door, he said—

"A wisiter," and then he banged it to again upon the quaker, who stood a few paces within its threshold. His first act was to place his ear against the massive door at which the officer had departed, to be sure that he was gone, and then being quite clear upon that head, he turned to Claude, saying—

"You know me, friend?"

"Ah," said Claude, springing up, "Mr. Franklin?"

"The same. Dick and Jack are at my house. I find I have been misinformed regarding your condition."

"Misinformed? As how?"

"You are in fetters, and I was told that such was not the case."

"They only put them on a quarter of an hour ago, because they found me examining the stanchions of the window, and they have a perfect horror of my escaping."

"And yet it may be done."

"Of course it may. What has been done may be always done again, and many things that never were done at all will be done in the fulness of time. But tell me—how is Jack, and how is Dick, and what has become of Phillip Manning? Grace is, of course, in perfect safety with her father?"

"Jack is well," said the quaker, answering all the questions of Claude in the most methodical manner; "and Dick is well. Phillip Manning is in this building and Grace is happy with her father."

"Thank God."

"Your own situation is now of the greatest importance. Do you despair, or do you hope, Claude Duval?"

"Despair? Who that knows anything of me ever found food for the opinion that I should despair? Who that ever heard of Claude Duval, accused him of abandoning hope even under the most cheerless circumstances? Do not, Mr. Franklin, ask me such a question. Something seems to whisper to me that my time has not yet come."

"I do not think it has."

"I thank you for that thought. No, I shall, I think, sniff the night air again, and breathe the soft odour of fruits and flowers; I do not think that I shall only pass from this cell to death."

"Nor do I. I have promised Jack and Dick that all that man can do to save you, I will do, and I will keep my word. Here is a plan of Newgate, accurately laid down, for your information; and here are such tools and implements as no doubt you know well how to use."

"Let me see them."

Claude ran over with an eager eye the five exquisitely made tools that the quaker had brought him, and then with a deep sigh, he said—

"Yes, these will do much, but there is yet something wanting."

"What is that?"

"Rope. I can do nothing without a good coil of rope. If I had that I do think that, favoured a little by fortune and a dark night, I could really now bid adieu to Newgate."

"You really think so?"

"From my heart I do."

"'Tis well, friend," said Franklin, suddenly, as at times only it was his humour to do, adopting the quaker phraseology. "'Tis well, friend; and truly it giveth unto me some gratification to be able to say to thee, friend Claude, here is the rope that thou seekest."

As he spoke, he unbuttoned his top-coat and exhibited, nicely wound round his waist, a complete coil of rope, of evidently many yards in length.

"Thee will find, friend Claude," he said, "that this is a bit of good stuff, and will not fail thee. Double, ay, treble thy weight and mine together, might hang to it without fear, slender as it looks; and now what dost thou think of thy chances?"

"Think? Why I think I can almost say, that I know I shall get out of Newgate. Have you any small grapples or hooks to give me to fasten to the end of the rope?"

"Yes, friend Claude, I have not forgotten those; and it striketh me that thou art as well provided as any man can well be, friend Claude. What thinkest thou?"

"I think, Franklin, that I shall owe my life to you, and that the time will come when you will not look back with any regret upon having done me this favour."

"Then, friend Claude, I will bid thee good day, and remember I am Mr. Jones thy solicitor; and if thou shouldst want to see me again, pray send to me in that name at the address in Dean-street, which thou knowest. And now, dost thou want money? for if thou dost, thou hast only to name the sum, and it is now at thy disposal."

"No," said Claude. "I think I will try this escape quite unaided by any one in the prison. If a trial to bribe a man fails, one's situation is only much worse, for he gains information, and that begets increased caution, and perhaps they might find somewhere to place me which would preclude the possibility of getting away at all."

"Thou art right. I wish thee all manner of luck, friend, and wish thee good day."

The quaker tapped at the door, which had been locked upon him; and as the sound reverberated through the passage that communicated with the cells, the turnkey heard it, and came up with his huge bunch of keys.



CLAUDE PAYS HIS DEBTS AT NEWGATE, AND MEETS TOM BRERETON.

"Your client, Mr. Lawyer," he said, as he preceded Franklin along the passages to the lobby; "your client is booked, I take it."

"Very probably," said Franklin.

"Ha! ha! He will dance upon nothing."

"Yes, friend, I do not think that either you or he need fear drowning, even

"Me? What do you mean? Why should I be hanged?"

"That, friend, is best known to yourself; but I have had such immense professional experience, that I am enabled to say at a glance whether a man is bound for the gallows or not."

"But—but you don't mean to say that I look like it?"

"No, friend, not like it, but it itself. I don't entertain the smallest doubt upon the subject."

"The devil!"

"Yes, the devil is the ultimate distinction, but comfort yourself, it may be a year or two yet."

"A year or two? What a comfortable idea, to be sure! Confound you, I wish you would keep your mighty cleverness to yourself. Who asked you to be so wonderfully prophetic?"

By this time they had reached the lobby, and Franklin then saw a small thin man who was conversing with one of the officials, to whom the quaker heard him say—

"You will perceive that this is an order from Judge Manning to permit me to see the prisoner Claude Duval. Pray satisfy yourself that it is all regular."

"Oh, I dare say it's all right enough," said the turnkey. "Here, Foxey, you have been once to the cell; just show this gentleman Claude Duval's lodgings, if you please."

"Humph!" said Franklin, as he passed out of Newgate, "That, then, is a messenger from the judge. What does he want, I wonder?"

CHAPTER CLXIX.

MR. SAGO HOLDS OUT PROMISES TO CLAUDE, AND DOES A LITTLE BUSINESS FOR HIMSELF.

Claude was rather surprised at Mr. Sago's appearance, and he looked all the surprise he felt. The manner of the cautious attorney was certainly not in any way calculated to decrease that surprise. The first thing he did upon getting into the cell was to place himself in a crouching attitude, and to listen attentively to the retreating footsteps of the turnkey. He even went the length of counting them upon his fingers as the man slowly tramped down the narrow stone corridor into which the cells opened. Then he went all round the walls, examining them up and down with the greatest attention.

"Pray, sir," said Claude, for the attorney had not spoken one word to him, "pray, sir, is it usual to send lunatics into the cells of Newgate, to annoy prisoners?"

"Hush!" cried Mr. Sago. "I really do think that it is all right and safe, I do, indeed."

"What is all right and safe? What do you mean?"

"Why, sir, I mean that I think there are no ear-trumpets, or peep-holes, from this cell."

"Ear-trumpets and peep-holes! Are there are such things in Newgate!"

"Bless your innocence, yes. Lots of 'em; but, I say, I don't think that there are any such here, so we may speak freely, although in a low voice—mind you, in quite a low voice. We cannot be too cautious in these sort of communications, and when I have anything very particular to make you acquainted with, I will use this."

As he spoke, the attorney took a little slate from his pocket, and a pencil, and then he sat himself down opposite to Claude, and rubbed his hands together like a man thoroughly satisfied with himself, and with what he was about.

"If," said Claude, "it is all the same to you, sir, I should be glad of some little hint as to what you mean by all this."

"My dear sir, you shall have not only a hint, but the fullest and most complete information. Do you know ——— ?" Here he wrote the name of Judge Manning upon the slate, which Claude replied to with a nod. "I come from him, my dear sir, so far as an order to see you goes, and he wishes me to tell you that situated as he is, he don't see how he can do you any good."

"Nor I neither," said Claude. "Pray give my best respects to him, and say that I feel I ought not, and cannot, expect anything from him in the way of aid, situated as he is with regard to his public office."

"Good, my dear friend; but I—I—." Here Mr. Sago put his finger by the side of his nose. "I have an idea."

"You don't say so?" said Claude. "Pray, what is it, sir? I shall be much obliged by your letting me know it as quickly as possible, so that I may have the pleasure of bidding you good day, as I prefer being alone."

"Good. Of the two I am a man who generally prefers being alone; but my idea is, that for a consideration I could put you in a way of bidding good-by to Newgate, and you will recollect that in so doing, you include the gallows in the tender adieu."

"True," said Claude.

"Well, sir, about the consideration. Can you manage the insignificant sum of five hundred?"

"It gives me great pleasure," said Claude, "to hear that five hundred is to you an insignificant sum; and if you will tell me in what way you prefer assisting me to escape, I will give you an answer."

"I shall open the front door for you, my dear sir, and let you walk out at your ease."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. That is the way I will manage it. I will find some one, for a consideration, who will come here and let you go out in his clothes. For a consideration I will so blind the eyes of the turnkeys with gold dust, that they will suspect nothing until you are off and away upon the road again; but it will, to pay everybody, take about five hundred."

"I will think of it," said Claude.

"Very good. My name is Sago. I will call upon you to-morrow at this hour, and then you can give me a definitive answer upon the subject. Remember, if you cannot find the money at once, I will advance it, until, from the profits of your business, you can conveniently repay me; for I really do think that to hang a man for doing a little business on the highway, is nothing better than murder. You will easily comprehend that my feelings alone have prompted me in this affair. I do not, of course, expect to get for myself one penny piece of the money. But no matter: while I have the approval of what is here—" Mr. Sago gave his chest a thump —"I shall be satisfied."

"You are quite a remarkable man," said Claude. "Be assured that I shall be in a situation to give you an answer to-morrow at this hour, if you can get at me."

"Humph! I will try that. My dear sir, I wish you a very good-day, indeed. Keep up your spirits, and hope for the best, my dear sir. I have been keeping an eye upon the walls of this cell, and I really do believe it is a genuine one, and that there are no ear-trumpets or peep-holes about it."

With this Mr. Sago left the cell, rather congratulating himself upon the idea that with what he would get from Judge Manning, and what he would get from Claude, he should be able to make a pretty good job of the escape from Newgate, always provided the officers were not such miracles of virtue as to resist bribery. When he reached the lobby again, he took from his pocket rather an elegant snuff-box, and handed it to the man on duty at the wicket gate, for him to take a pinch from, at the same time saying—

"I think there are seven of you altogether, on and off duty, about the lobby here, and the stone passage leading to Duval's cell?"

"Exactly seven," said the man, "and werry good snuff this is, sir."

"Seven," added Sago. "Humph! seven times twenty makes one hundred and forty, which, in guineas, has a nice bright look. I am now going to the Ram's Horn and Cartridge Box, opposite, to take a quiet glass. I shall be there for half an hour; and if you and the others have a fancy that twenty guineas apiece will be pretty for merely dozing a little, and running any risks, why one of you can come over, and say as much to me there. Ask for Mr. Sago."

The turnkey, with a grin, as he opened the wicket to let the attorney go, said—"It's about Duval?"

Mr. Sago nodded.

The turnkey nodded; and then they both winked; and Mr. Sago, as he walked over the way, said to himself—

"It's a done job, and very cheap, too; very cheap, indeed. Well, I rather think I shall make a good thing of this; and everybody will be so much interested in keeping the affair snug, that the judge will never be a bit the wiser. Sago—Sago, you are a genius, that you are; and you always were, from the first day that you began life by sweeping out the office of Shark & Co., in Gray's Inn; and studied law by listening at the key holes to their private consultations."

We need not follow the officers—two of whom went within the ensuing half hour to the public house—in their bargaining with Mr. Sago. Nothing pleased them better than to find that some one was willing to pay them for what they had made up their minds to do for nothing, namely—to set Claude Duval at liberty.

With their motives for so doing gratuitously, the reader is already fully acquainted; so that, what with one thing and another, Claude found himself thoroughly surrounded by persons not at all anxious to keep him in Newgate; but plotting and planning in every shape and way for the best means of getting him comfortably and quickly out of it. The only thing the officers made as a special bargain with Mr. Sago was, that they were to have the twenty pounds apiece, provided Duval got clear away, let it be done how it might. They had their own reasons for preferring a different mode to that which Mr. Sago proposed. They much preferred a regular prison-breaking to the substitution of another person for Claude in his cell, in whose power they might all be to an inconvenient extent.

It was the gentleman named Bill, who, about two hours after the visit of Mr. Sago, made his way into Claude's cell, and gave him a hint of what he might, if he chose, set about; and as Mr. Bill's mind and perceptions were not of the most delicate or highly cultivated order, the hint was a pretty broad one.

"I tells you what it is, Duval," he said; "you haven't been nabbed in the riglar way, and fair play is a jewel whether in or out of Newgate; so, you see, if so be as you thinks as there is a chance of giving the old stone jug the go-by, don't say that me or any of my mates stood in your way, nor don't say that any of us stood out of it either, that's all I have got to say to you."

"I understand," said Duval.

"Very good. A nod is as good as a vink to a blind oss. In course, you'll want tools. Well, perhaps this here bag will be left here by me quite promiscuous. Perhaps you will want to know the way; well, it's through the chapel, which is at the end of this here passage, then into the yard, and over the wall by the corner of Newgate-street. But, perhaps you will say, how are you to get on the wall and down on t'other side? Well, perhaps you'll find a rope a-hanging, and when you climbs up by it, you can pull it up and let it down on the other side. But don't be fancying that I am telling you how to get out of Newgate."

"Oh dear, no," said Claude. "That would be very absurd. You may depend upon it I shall not take anything so ridiculous into my head as a consequence of your visit."

"And you never will, so help you, let out a word about it?"

"Upon my life I will not. There's not a man living who can say Claude Duval ever broke word or paltered with it in any shape or way."

"I believes it," said Bill, giving the table a thump in the enthusiasm of the moment; "I believes it. Look you here, Duval. You are took—nabbed—

grabbed—flummaxed—and nailed; but it was not in the fair and regular way of business. I hate that sneaking rascal as peached upon you at Bow Street. It's a wrong thing, and we of the purfession is biled at it, and can't stand it, and won't stand it, as you see, Duval; we have made up our minds that you shall go to the road again, for you haven't been took off of it in the proper way, not by no manner o' means."

"I quite understand you," said Claude, "and know your sentiments. Only tell me one thing. Will Tom Brereton get the reward?"

"He will."

"I am sorry for that."

"So am I; and so are all of us; but we can't help it. It's only a clear five hundred pounds for lodging you in jail. He'd get a thousand pounds more if you were turned off some fine morning, but that he'll lose. The five hundred pounds though he'll have, and nobody can help it."

"Then listen to me," said Claude. "When I am free, as I suppose now I may conclude I shall be, I will haunt Tom Brereton like his shadow. He can't get rid of five hundred pounds all at once, and I'll have it from him again as sure as my name is Claude Duval; and when I get it, I'll come to the lobby of Newgate and share it among you, if you will pass me your word that I may do so with secrecy."

"Done!" cried Bill. "If anybody lays a hand upon you, or says a dangerous word about you when you come, they shall walk through me to do it."

"I am satisfied," said Claude.

"Werry good," added Bill. "Perhaps you'd set to work as soon as it's eleven o'clock to-night? You have got a ticker in your fob, and will know the time."

"I have. All's right."

"Good again," said Bill; and having thoroughly concluded his mission in what he called a highly satisfactory manner, he abruptly left the cell.

"Truly," said Claude, when he was alone, "for strangeness, this beats all my adventures put together. Here, I may say in a manner of speaking, I am almost jostled out of Newgate and forced upon the road again, whether I will or no. Alas! alas! what a world is this! Here am I made the puppet of circumstances, all because a price is put upon my head. The very thing which was intended to crush me, and destroy me, conspires now with other circumstances to save me. Yes, Cicely, I shall see you once again. Fate has not entirely separated us in this world. My own Cicely, if now, after this escape, I could but find a means of quitting England for ever we might be happy; but no—no. Fate, after all, is but a dream. Fate has in too unequivocal a manner pronounced a negative upon my adopting such a course. I must remain in England and fulfil my destiny, let it be what it may."

From this time until eleven o'clock at night, the minutes seemed to lag very slowly with Claude. He did not think proper to make any attempt to move from his cell previous to the arrival of that hour; for he knew that the officer must have had some sufficient and ample reason for naming it; but he employed the time in freeing himself from his fetters, which, with the admirable tools brought to him by the quaker, he found no difficulty in doing.

The only thing he took from the basket of tools left him by Bill, was a small wrought-iron crow-bar of about fifteen inches in length; and then, for fear of accidents, coiling the rope the quaker had brought him round his waist, he waited for the hour of eleven to come.

CHAPTER CLXX.

CLAUDE MEETS AN ACQUAINTANCE IN NEWGATE, AND THEN ESCAPES.

St. Sepulchre's clock struck eleven. Even in his cell, so still was the prison, Claude could hear the faint drowsy echo of the chimes, and then the more full sound of the hour striking.

"It is time," he said.

For fear of an accidental visit from any one, Claude had kept his fetters in such a position that they did not look to have been disturbed at all; but now that the hour for action had come, he at once shook them off, and they fell with a clatter to the ground.

He then took up one of the tools that had a sharp point, and, upon the wall of his cell, he wrote the following lines:—

"Claude Duval was in Newgate thrown,
But he laughed his fill at iron and stone;
He broke many locks, and he cleared the wall:
Heigho for the saddle! says Claude Duval."

"There," he added, "that will be something of a memorial of me in time to come; and may it put heart to attempt his liberty into any poor devil who may occupy this cell after me."

Among the things brought to him by the quaker, were matches of phosphorus, then pretty well understood by what was called "the family," *i. e.* cracksmen and knights of the road; and those matches, together with a small lantern which he could darken at a moment's notice, were likely to be eminently useful to him in his progress through the dark passages of the old prison.

"I almost regret," he said, as he lighted his lantern, "that these rascals of turnkeys and officers have made up their minds to wink at my escape; for I should have liked to get away in spite of them all, which I do think I could have done; but, perhaps, it's as well as it is, for I am now, in a manner of speaking, sure of my success."

His first task now was to unlock his cell door, and this he did not find to be a very difficult task, for he had the very finest tools for such a purpose that London could furnish him. The door soon yielded, for as Bill had been his last visitor, he had forgotten (?) to put up an iron bar that was behind it.

With his lantern in his hand, Claude traversed the corridor in which he now found himself, and he was upon the point of commencing an attack upon one of the double-doors leading into the chapel, when he was arrested by hearing some one weeping. The sound appeared to have come from one of the cells opening from the corridor.

"What shall I do?" said Claude. "Ought I to trouble myself about any one else at such a time as this? or ought I to reflect that I have it, perhaps, in my power to restore some one to life and liberty, who may either be wholly and completely innocent, or not very guilty?"

Such a discussion was not likely to last very long in the mind of such a person as Claude. His feelings soon carried the day against his judgment. He made his way to the door of the cell from whence the sobs issued, and placing his mouth to the key-hole, he said, in a low but distinct voice—

"Who are you?"

The sobs suddenly ceased, and all was perfectly still, until Claude repeated his question, and then a voice replied—

"I am a most unfortunate person indeed. Who is it that speaks to me in such a place as this?"

"One who can give you your freedom," replied Claude, "only he is not quite sure that you deserve it."

"Oh, do not say so," replied the voice; "I am merely placed here out of spite on account of some family differences. There is not in all the world, I assure you, be you whom you may, a more innocent person than I am; and if you can only restore me to freedom, you will earn my everlasting gratitude."

"I have no means," thought Claude, "of testing the truth of this man's assertions, but I will run the risk, and let him go with me as far as the street, poor devil."

With this determination, Claude took down the bar of the cell door, and speedily unlocked it. When he flung it open, he said—

"Make as little noise as you can, and follow me; I am, like yourself an escaping prisoner, and we shall require all our skill and caution yet to succeed."

The inhabitant of the cell now came crawling out upon his knees in the most abject manner. The light of the lantern fell upon his face, and Claude recognised Phillip Manning! At the same moment the wretched man caught a sight of, and recognised Claude Duval.

"Mercy! mercy!" he cried.

"Villain!" said Claude, "had it been any other man in Newgate I would not turn my back upon him, but you——"

"Oh no—no—no!—Spare me. Take me with you! Only free me from this dreadful prison, and I will be your servant—your slave. Oh, have mercy upon me!"

Claude turned away in disgust.

"Duval, Duval, do not leave me here. My uncle is cold, and stern, and harsh; he has made up his mind, notwithstanding all the exposure and all the relationship, to leave me to my fate and to the law. Oh, take me with you. You are bold and vigorous, and the stone walls of Newgate cannot hold you. Have pity upon me."

"No," Phillip Manning, "fight your own battles. Remain where you are, for me."

"But I cannot fight my own battles. I have already written a letter to my uncle threatening him that if I am put upon my trial, I will insinuate so much against the purity of Grace, that it shall stick to her while she lives, and he took no notice of the letter at all. Oh, save me! save me!"

"You consummate scoundrel! To your cell again!"

"No—no. I have once left it, and I will not return to it. If you will not save me by letting me go with you, I will raise the whole prison by my cries, and swear—for I am am ready at any time to swear anything—that I caught you in the act of escaping, and that you were trying to persuade me to go with you and rob on the highway."

Duval had only just patience enough to hear the end of this speech, and it was truly wonderful that he had so much, considering his temperament, but the last words were no sooner out of Phillips lips, then clapping the lantern to the floor, Claude sprung upon him, and lifting him bodily up with both hands, he flung him into the cell again as though he had been some piece of old lumber, and then banging the door to, he put up the bar again in a moment. All was still. Master Phillip had in all probability been too much stunned by the vengeance with which he was sent back again into his old quarters, to give any immediate alarm of what Claude was about.

Claude was really much more annoyed at this little incident than he chose to confess to himself, and he muttered as he set to work upon the door at the end of the corridor—

"Confound it, who would have thought of lighting upon that one rascal out of all the folks, good, bad, and indifferent, in Newgate? But it serves one right for at such a time meddling with the affairs of anybody one did not know."

The door he was engaged upon soon yielded, but that immediately behind it, which opened into the chapel, was secured by two strong bolts, one at the top, and one at the bottom of the door, so that he had his work before him to get that one undone.

It was only by boring a hole right through the door, and with the powerful tools he had, sawing a piece out of it both at top and bottom, that he succeeded in overcoming this obstacle of the bolts, and then having previously shot back the lock, he found himself within the chapel of Newgate, which, by the uncertain light of his lantern, looked of treble its usual size.

He knew that he could much easier leave the chapel, by a door immediately opposite to the one at which he had entered, than he had entered it, for now the bolts were upon his side, and he could withdraw then in a moment. The

locks readily yielded, and he then found himself in a corridor, very similar to the one from which his cell had opened. It was at the far end of this corridor that he expected to find a door that would lead him immediately into the court-yard that he sought, and which was bounded by the wall, close to the corner of Newgate Street.

He found the door without any difficulty, but to get it open was rather a serious task. The lock was one of a peculiar character, and none of the implements that he, Claude, had, would in any way touch it as regarded opening it. He felt that there was no resource but to set to work getting the lock off bodily; and without a moment's delay he commenced operations. By dint of great labour, he succeeded, in the course of a quarter of an hour, in getting the wedge-end of the wrought-iron lever he had with him about an inch beneath the plate of the lock.

Slowly and cautiously he applied his strength to the other end of the crow-b and it was pleasant to him to hear the creaking and springing of the yielding lock. Then with a sudden bang, like the muffled report of fire-arms, the lock-plate came off, and there was no longer any difficulty to contend with, as regarded opening that door, so far as the lock was concerned. Duval did not expect that that door had any other fastening, and he was most disagreeably surprised to find that it did not yield. By a little shaking at it, he found out that there was a bar across it.

This was a serious obstacle, not as regarded the difficulty of removing the bar, but as regarded the time it would take to do so. There was no earthly resource but to absolutely saw through it, and that he immediately set about. Fortunately there was just sufficient space between the door and the wall for him to introduce one of the fine and exquisitely-tempered saws with which he was provided, so that he could begin the work at once.

Rapidly the sharp teeth of steel cut into the soft iron of which the bar was very injudiciously composed, and at length the last obstacle was removed, and the door creaked open upon its massive hinges. Then came a rush of cold air, which was sufficiently convincing to Claude as regarded the immediate proximity of the court-yard.

"Now," he said, "I have but the wall of Newgate to surmount, but that is not the easiest thing in all the world. I must trust to good fortune, however, and a stout rope. I wonder if the officer has been as good as his word, and left a rope hanging from the spokes conveniently?"

Claude thought it was expedient to put out his lantern; for although the night was dark it was not so dark but that with a little practice he could see objects generally in the prison-yard, and there might possibly be some official who, not being in the plot, would consider it a wonderfully meritorious thing to discover him. Besides, if a rope were there at all, it must be hanging close to the wall, so he could not miss it.

The court-yard was small, and Duval soon reached the wall, but scarcely had he done so, when he was somewhat startled by the ringing of a loud bell in the prison. He paused a moment to listen to it, and then suddenly from the deep shadow of an angle of the wall there came a man, who in a low voice, said—

"Quick, Duval, quick. Why, isn't you off?"

"Is it you, Bill?"

"Yes, to be sure; I've been awaiting for you this half-hour. Don't you hear the alarm-bell a-going? Somebody has found out that you are missing. Five or six minutes ago, they said there was a shouting from one of the cells, but that can't have anything to do with you, surely?"

"It's Phillip Manning," thought Claude, "who has given the alarm."

He did not think proper to say as much to Bill, but in the same cautious tone in which he spoke, he said—

"Show me where the rope is, and I'll be off, if I break my neck in the venture."

"This way—this way."

Bill led Claude to the rope, and then holding the end of it, he said—

"You get up it as fast as you can. I'll steady it here below, which will be half the battle. Confound that bell."

The alarm-bell was pulled by one who was not at all niggardly of his labour; and from various closely-barred casements that looked into the court-yard, lights began to flash, while the murmur of loud voices came plainly upon Claude's ears.



THE ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE CLAUDE IN SMITHFIELD.

He sprang several feet up the rope at a bound, and then with great agility commenced climbing hand over hand to the top of the wall.

It was a capital rope for climbing, thick enough, so that Duval was at the top of the wall in an incredibly short space of time. There he found that two strong hooks at the end of the rope had taken a capital hold of the *chevaux de frise* that was upon the top of the wall. It was a dizzy thing to look down upon the lights

in the Old Bailey, and to see from that height and that frail, very frail, standing-place, the long perspective of lamps down Skinner Street and up Holborn Hill. He had to hold on to the complicated iron-work as best he could. To cross it was a matter of great danger and difficulty.

CHAPTER CLXXI.

CLAUDE ASTONISHES TOM BRERETON AND PLEASES HIS FRIENDS.

THAT was not exactly the time for reflection; and Claude, after shading his eyes with his hand, and taking one long look upon the streets below, from which rose up to him the roar and the clash of life in the countless crowds of London, proceeded to let the rope down on the outer side of the wall.

He tore his clothing and gave himself some slight scratches from the spiked iron-work at the top of the wall, and then he succeeded in fairly launching himself on to the rope. All he required now to do, was to keep himself from any too rude concussion against the wall, and that he managed tolerably well, by pointing his toes against it. In the course of two minutes he was in the Old Bailey.

A man having the dress and appearance of a porter, was the only person passing at the moment, and he, after pausing for a moment with a look of astonishment as Claude descended and reached the pavement, suddenly rushed forward and seized him by the collar, saying—

"Hilloa, my jail bird, you are taking to your wings, are you?"

"Yes," said Claude, "and my claws likewise."

Drawing in a full breath as he spoke, he struck the man such a tremendous blow in the face that he fell to the ground as though a cannon shot had felled him. Duval started off then at a brisk trot, and making his way down Skinner Street he soon gained Holborn-bridge. As he ran he heard the sound of the great bell of Newgate, as though it were pursuing him, but he was resolved to go the nearest way he could to the quaker's in Dean Street, and without deviating from his path in the least, he ran up Holborn Hill.

"Stop him!" cried a voice. "Stop thief!"

Claude glanced behind him and saw some men running. He had his doubts whether they were after him or not, but he did not think it worth his while to throw a chance away, and being close to Southampton Buildings he darted down that turning, and then taking the first turn he came to, to the right again he emerged into Chancery Lane. Not wishing then to make his way into Holborn or down the lane to Fleet Street, he thought his best plan would be to get through Lincoln's Inn, and so on by a back route to Soho.

Claude knew that the Inn was closed to all but its inhabitants after nine o'clock, but he crossed over the road and boldly knocked at the old gate.

In the course of about a minute the wicket was unbolted, and a surly-looking man with a nightcap on his head and a lantern in his hand, made his appearance. A sharp scrutiny into Claude's face satisfied the porter that he, Claude, did not belong to the Inn, and he said in a tone of passion—

"What the devil do you want here? You can't come in, I tell you."

"But you can come out," said Claude.

As he spoke he darted in his right hand, and seizing the porter by the throat, he dragged him through the wicket and hurled him into the middle of Chancery Lane. To step into the Inn and to bolt the wicket on the inner side was Claude's next step.

"Daniel!" cried a woman's voice from the lodge. "Daniel, what's the matter? What's the matter, Daniel?"

"Nothing," said Claude. "You be quiet, or I'll soon make you."

Without waiting for any reply, he darted across the old square and so on to the new, and then making his way up Cook's Court, he was duly let out by the porter there, for it is a rule after hours at the Inn to let everybody out but nobody in.

The cries of the men in Holborn, whether they had been directed at Claude or not, had long since died away, and he walked with a deliberate step through the silent purlieus of Clare Market. Drowsy watchmen calling the wrong hour, and asserting the weather to be anything that came uppermost to their minds, were the only persons he met, with the exception of some nymph of the pave who occasionally applied to him an endearing epithet or an abusive one, as her humour at the moment dictated; and so, in less than half an hour after leaving Newgate, he stood upon the quaker's doorstep in Dean Street.

Instant admission was granted him, and he found his hand grasped in that of Jack, who cried—

"Claude, Claude, this is indeed a happy meeting. Both Dick and I said we would meet you, but our friend Franklin declared you would be safer by yourself!"

"Thank you all," said Claude, "I am safe enough, and glad to see you all.—I don't think either—indeed, I may say, I am sure that there is no one upon my track, so all is right so far,"

"Then, friend, Claude," said the quaker, who had been fastening up the street-door, "let us to supper, for we have waited for you. I said you would be here, friend, at half-past twelve, and it is now not above twenty minutes to one. Didst thou meet with any cross accident?"

"Nothing to signify," said Claude; "but you shall have all the particulars while we are at supper. I feel as though I could do justice to it; let it be as good a one as it may, Mr. Franklin."

"Friend, there are four roast ducks, and a Westphalia ham, together with all sorts of varieties in the way of drink."

"Good; and now can anybody tell me what has become of my horse?"

"I can," said Dick "He is all right, and as fresh as a daisy on a Spring morning, Claude. You have certainly got the better of the Philistines this time, and no one can rejoice at it more than I do."

"I thank you all," said Claude; "and does Cicely know nothing?"

"She knows nothing," replied Jack; "but suspects much."

"Then, that shall be seen to after supper; I will ride to the farm, and set her heart at rest. Oh, how I long to be in the saddle again, and among the trees and meadows. God, I think I should die soon in the city. Short as has been my stay in Newgate, there have been times when I felt as though I should have gone mad; but that is past now, and in good truth I don't think they will take me again with the breath in my body. This time it was an extraordinary accident, or they would not have had me within the walls of Newgate."

They were now seated at the supper-table, and they all did ample justice to the good cheer of the quaker, after which Claude related to them what had taken place in the prison, regarding the interview he had had with Sago, the attorney, and the singular determination that the officers and turnkeys had themselves come to, to let him escape.

"Friend," said Franklin, "thou wert in luck's way. I know that Sago very well, and thou needest not trouble thyself about any arguments or promises with him. I will give him a call."

"Thank you; but can any of you now tell me anything of Tom Brereton, for I am resolved to keep my word with the officials of the prison, and whatever I can wrest from him of the reward I will take to them. It may serve me in good stead at another time, or a friend, if not myself, may profit by having well-disposed people to me within the four walls."

"That is true, friend," said Franklin; "and I very much applaud thy resolution; I can tell thee where thy old acquaintance, Tom Brereton, is; and I can likewise tell thee that he has only received £750 for thy capture. The Secretary of State raised a quibble wth him that thou wert already in custody, and kindly added, 'that if he did not like to take the £750 in full, they (the government) were quite willing to meet him in any Court of law upon the subject, for the term of his natural life;' so, with a rare wisdom, Tom Brereton took the money."

Claude laughed, and then he said—"And where may I have the pleasure of finding the rascal?"

"He has taken a lodging, friend Claude, at the next house to the corner one of the Edgeware road, and there, most undoubtedly, thou will find the rascal; for he makes no secret of his name or his whereabouts, as he looks upon thee as most comfortably bestowed in Newgate, and that thy first appearance in the open air therefrom will only be to be hanged."

"I am very much obliged to him," said Claude, rising. "It will be quite a charity to undeceive him. Mr. Franklin, I am extremely obliged to you; and for myself and my friends, I feel myself very much your debtor, indeed. I will take good care that you lose nothing by your share in these transactions,"

"Friend, I am quite satisfied," said Franklin, rubbing his hands together. "Business is business, and I am quite sure that I shall see thee all again very often. I wish thee all manner of luck, friend."

The servant of the quaker made his appearance, and casting up his eyes in a sanctimonious manner, he said—"Truly, the three animals are at the door."

"What the duce does he mean?" said Dick.

"He means," said Franklin, "that your horses are ready."

"And, am I, Dick," said Claude, "to have the pleasure of your company? Jack, of course, I counted upon."

"Even so," said Dick. "I am something like you, Claude. I am half dead for want of a sniff of the country air. I am for the road, again, and will ride with you some miles; I then think of going a good many miles off, and trying some of the first-class roads, some hundred miles at least from London. I think there is some fair business to be done."

"Probably enongh," said Claude; "but don't let me keep you off Hounslow Heath, if you have any fancy to it."

"No, thank you. I shall try the great north road, for a few weeks, and then who knows but we may meet again. However, I will now ride with you as far as the Edgeware Road, for I presume that is the direction in which you purpose going now?"

"It is; and I will drop in upon my friend, Tom Brereton, as I go along. I am very anxious to get that little piece of business comfortably settled; and I don't think it will take me very long to do it."

"Truly, friend," said Franklin, "you will find him in the first floor of that house that I have named to you; and as he certainly does not expect thee, the surprise will be all the greater, and, of course, quite an agreeable one."

"Very agreeable," said Jack.

They all mounted, and the only person who watched them do so was the drowsy looking guardian of the night, who threw the glare of his lantern upon them, and then as they were just moving off, cried—

"This is an odd time of night to ride. Who is you?"

"Just run on a few miles, and we will tell you," said Claude. "You can hold on to my horse's tail."

The watchman was waxing very wroth, as they trotted down Dean Street, and then emerging into Oxford Street, they went on at a brisk canter to the west.

"Ah," said Claude, "this is life, again. Now, indeed, I feel that the blood circulates in my veins. What a different creature to be sure I feel upon my gallant steed in the pure open air. That infernal cell of Newgate would have killed me in another week. Why, I can smell the fresh and beautiful vegetation of the country, already."

"Yes," said Jack, "so can I. I love the trees, and the fields, and every sight and sound of the open country. When death comes to me, let it come far away from the smoke and the din of London. But here we are, Claude, at the Edgeware Road, Do you still hold to your intention of dropping in on Tom Brereton, to night?"

"Certainly I do. The sooner the better. By to-morrow at noon the news of my escape from Newgate will be all over London, and upon the very first intima-

tion of such a thing, he will assuredly be off, and I don't want a tedious dance after him. It must be to-night or never that he and I come to a reckoning."

"Here's the house, then," said Dick, as they all three paused opposite to the house that had been mentioned by the quaker as that in which Tom Brereton had taken a lodging, upon the strength of his seven hundred and fifty pounds. It was a respectable enough looking building, and the first floor was adorned by a pretty balcony, that ran all along the front of the house, and around the wooden rails of which some creeping plants were rather tastefully trailed and trained. The most profound stillness reigned in and about the place.

"I have an idea," said Claude, "that by standing on the saddle of my horse I can reach the balcony."

"Of course you can," said Dick, "and it will be, by all means, the best way of getting into the house. We will take care of the horse, and see that all is right below here."

"Thank you. I don't anticipate the smallest trouble in the affair. I know my customer pretty well."

Claude walked his steed to a spot exactly under the edge of the balcony, and then admonishing it by his voice to be still, he got upon the saddle and found he could reach the balcony easily enough. After, then, trying some of the bars, to see if they would stand his weight, and finding that, so far, all was right, he drew himself up in a moment, and was fairly in the balcony, somewhat to the detriment of some plants in pots that were placed there.

"All right?" whispered Jack, from below.

"Yes—yes; you need not keep the horse there, or stay there yourselves exactly by the house; it may attract attention, and when I have done all the affair I can jump down."

Jack took Claude's horse by the bridle; the creature knew Jack very well, and would go with him; and then he and Dick walked off some twenty or thirty yards, and waited the issue of Duval's adventure in the lodging of the man who had placed him in such peril.

There were two windows to the room which opened from the balcony, but as they both belonged to one room, it was of no sort of consequence which one he, Claude, opened; so he began operations upon the one that happened to be the nearest to him, and soon found that the fastenings were singularly insufficient.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

TOM BRERETON FINDS THAT LIGHTLY COME, LIGHTLY GO, IS A TRUE PROVERB.

It was a French casement, and in the course of three minutes Claude had open one of the halves of it, and stepped into Tom Brereton's drawing-room noiselessly.

It showed what an amount of confidence both Claude and his friends had in the accuracy of any information that might come from Franklin, the quaker, that he should make his way thus into a house, and not feel the least doubt upon the subject of his being upon the right track to find the man whom he sought. And he was quite right in this great confidence that he bestowed upon the word of the quaker, for he was sure enough then and there in the lodging of Tom Brereton, who would as soon have expected a visit from the Pope of Rome upon that night as from Claude Duval. The room was very dark, for it was the most obscure portion of the night; but Claude had with him some of the matches which he had used in Newgate upon the occasion of making his escape from that prison, so a small blue flame quickly made itself visible in the drawing-room of Tom Brereton, and illumined by its faint radiance every object.

The first thing that met Claude's gaze, upon the table in the centre of the room, was a decanter half full of wine, with an overturned glass by the side of it.

Two candles, very roughly put out, were likewise upon the table, so that there were pretty evident tokens that Tom Brereton had been enjoying himself a little freely during the evening.

Claude lit one of the candles, and then seeing a door a few inches open, which he judged rightly enough led into the bed-room, he cautiously and very noiselessly advanced, and pushing the door wide open, entered the sleeping-chamber of the man whom he had come to seek.

Claude need not to have been at all careful in his approach to Tom Brereton's bed-side, for that individual had taken sufficient wine to steep his senses in forgetfulness; and he was snoring at a furious rate, as he lay upon his back with a flush of unusual colour upon his vulgar and most menacing face.

Claude placed the candle upon the dressing-table, and then sat down very composedly by the bed-side. Tom Brereton had a nose in the full acceptation of the term, and it looked so convenient and handy a means of awakening him, that Claude reached his hand towards it, and taking hold of it with his finger and thumb, he gradually tightened his grasp of it.

Tom Brereton moved uneasily, he coughed, shook his head, tossed his arms about, and finally opening his eyes, he beheld, seated by his bed-side, his arch enemy. It is doubtful if he would not rather, at that time, have seen sitting by him the arch enemy of mankind, than Claude Duval, with his stern composed-looking face glaring at him.

Claude let go his nose, which was squeezed perfectly flat, and seemed as though it would never recover its former rotundity, and then in quite a casual sort of tone, he said—

"Well, Tom Brereton. Here I am, you see."

Tom Brereton rubbed his nose, and rubbed his eyes. He got half up upon his elbow, and then he rubbed his nose and his eyes again.

"A dream?" he said.

"Look again," said Claude. "Do I look very visionary? Were those fingers that compressed your nose those of a vison? I repeat, Tom Brereton, that I am here to pay you a visit and to square accounts with you."

The agonised coward fell back upon his pillow, and uttered a cry of horror and alarm. Claude drew a pistol from his pocket, and placed the cold muzzle of it right within the cavity of Tom Brereton's ear, as he said—

"Another such cry, and it is your last in this world. You know me, and that I keep my word. Answer we what I shall demand of you, and speak in a low tone, but clearly and distinctly; and as you value your wretched existence let me have no prevarication."

"The Lord help me!" groaned Tom. "I'm a dead man now—Our father which art in Heaven—For what we are about to receive the Lord make us truly thankful—Amen!"

"Peace, idot!"

"Yes—yes. I—I—am—peace. Oh, dear! Oh—oh!"

"How much did you get for denouncing me at the police office?"

"How—how much? Oh, my dear sir, you can't believe how very unhappy I have been ever since I had the misfortune to say it was you. Oh, dear, I regretted it so very much, for you know how very fond I am of you. I could quite cry, I could to think of it."

"My patience," said Claude, "is fast leaving me. I ask you how much you got by way of reward for denouncing me at the police office? I worn you now. My finger is upon the trigger of the pistol, and if you tempt me too far by any lies, you are a dead man, and the wall there will be plastered with your brains, if you have any."

"Oh, gracious, I got seven hundred and fifty pounds. Here's a horrid fix."

"It is a fix. Where is the money?"

"Where is the money? Oh, don't I wish it was here, I'd give it all to you in a moment. It's in banker's hands."

"What banker? Quick—quick."

"What banker? Oh—why, it's in the hands of—of Smith and Company I assure you, in Lombard Street, No. 22 and a half, next door to a cake-shop. Oh, dear."

"Tom Brereton!"

"Yes, my dear, sir. Yes, I am paying all the attention in the world."

"You have told me a lie about the money."

"Oh, no—no—upon my honour—upon my soul. I have told truth."

"Well, I am sorry for it. I have come here with a determination to have that money or your life—do you hear that?—or your life, Tom Brereton, and I will keep my word. Do you understand that, Tom Brereton?"

"Oh, don't—oh, don't. Look in the carpet-bag. Look in the carpet-bag. It's hanging up behind that cupboard door. Only spare my life. I have not had time to repent yet. I know I'm a sinner. We are all sinners, my dear Mr. Duval; so spare my life do—Amen!"

"If I find the money I will," said Claude. "But first let me secure this pistol, the muzzle of which is in your ear, in such a way with a piece of whip-cord to the side of the bedstead, that if you make any movement it will go off, and blow your brains out. I shall so myself escape being your executioner."

"Oh, don't—don't. Oh, dear. You will find the money, all but about twelve pounds, in the bag, indeed you will. I'm a miserable sinner."

Claude saw upon the dressing table a large pair of steel snuffers, and an extinguisher of the same metal. The latter he pushed into Tom's ear, the largest part forwards, so that it felt like the barrel of the pistol, and he wedged it with the snuffers pretty tight.

"Now," he said, "your life is in your own keeping not in mine, and we will see what is in the bag behind the door."

Tom Brereton lay flat upon his back with his mouth wide open, and almost afraid to breathe, from the idea that the pistol was ready to go off, and blow his head to pieces upon the smallest amount of provocation so to do, while Claude hastily examined the carpet-bag, in which he found a pocket-book containing notes to the amount of seven hundred and twenty pounds. The defiency was not of much consequence.

"Hark you, Tom Brereton," said Claude. "Your life is spared because I have been successful in finding the money. If I had not, you must have died. I shall now leave you to your own reflections."

"But you don't mean to take it all?" groaned Tom.

"No. I shall leave you the remainder of the thirty pounds. You will then have had much more then I intended to give you."

With this Claude blew out the light, and was proceeding into the other room in order to leave by the balcony in the same way that he had made his way into the house, but Tom Brereton called out to him in the most piteous manner, saying—

"Oh, gracious! You are not going to leave me here with this horrid pistol sticking in my ear, that may go off when I least expect it? Only take that away with you, and you may rely on my not making the smallest alarm: indeed you may, my dear sir. Oh, take it away!"

"Ah," said Claude, as he shut the bed-room door; "very likely,"

He was not a moment now in reaching the balcony; and then swinging himself over it, he dropped easily to the pavement below. Both Jack and Dick made their way up to him, leading his horse.

"Is it all right?" said Jack.

"Quite," replied Claude. "I have got £720 of the money, and left Tom Brereton in such a fright as he will not get over for some time now, I think, and it has all been done without giving the least alarm. I shall be off now to the farm where Cicely is."

"And I," said Dick, "will bid you good night, or rather good morning, for I see a faint light in theeast at this corner. Claude, I dare say fortune, good or bad, as the case may be, will throw us together again some day."

"I hope so," said Claude, as he wrung his hand.

"At all events," added Dick, "if I ever hear that anything has gone amiss with you short of your getting a bullet in your brains, I will come to you, and do you all the help I can."

"And I promise the same," said Claude, "if there should be a thousand miles between us. There is no doubt now but that Jack and I will keep company upon the road together, and you may count upon us both at any time, Dick. We shall be only too happy to do you a service."

"I know it," said Dick, as he waived his hand. "Farewell!"

They parted, Dick pursuing his route alone up the Edgware-road, and Claude and Jack trotting together through Tyburn-gate, and making their way towards Notting-hill, then a very rural district indeed.

There is something indescribably painful in parting for an indefinite period of time with any one with whom we may have been upon a footing of social intercourse; but when danger such as had hovered about the career of Dick Turpin and Claude Duval had been shared together, and when, under circumstances affecting their lives and mutual fidelity, and a mutual friendship had been relied upon, to say "Farewell!" became, indeed, a saddening and a painful thing.

Claude and Jack rode a good mile before they exchanged one word with each other. It was Jack who broke the silence.

"It's very like death," he said, "to part from a friend in this way."

"It is," said Claude. "And yet something seems to tell me that I shall see Dick Turpin again, and that he and I will have yet together some strange and moving adventures. I am seldom wrong in these kind of presentiments."

"Success and good fortune attend him," said Jack; "and who knows, after all, but that he, and I, and you, and Cicely, and Mr. Mark Brereton, may not all get off comfortably from England, and be quite happy somewhere."

Claude shook his head.

"You doubt it, Claude?"

"No, Jack, I do not doubt it. I feel certain now about it. Fate—destiny—the will of Heaven—give the necessity whatever name you will—compels me to run out my allotted course in England. I have tried to get away, as well you know, Jack. I have tried as no man ever yet tried, and I have been foiled. You know I have been cast back as if by the hand of fate. You know that I have been held to England as though by some chain, the firm though invisible links of which are around every limb."

"Yes, it was so," said Jack, mournfully. "I admit that it was so."

"I will not try it again, Jack."

"Well then, we will run our race here, Claude. For myself I care little, so that we run it together; but yet I will confess, it has been often a pleasant day-dream to me, to think that some day, with Cicely, you could sit down and be serene and happy, and free from the constant alarms of this kind of life; but if it cannot be, why there is no help for it."

"None whatever, Jack. So don't let us make ourselves gloomy about what cannot be helped. I am free, and we are once more upon the road together, so let us be as light-hearted as possible. It is the parting with Dick that put us both into this serious strain of thinking, but we will yet hope that this parting will not be for long. We are sure to hear of him, and a dash across the country now and then, to shake hands with him and ask him how he is, although it may cost a hundred mile canter, will not be a very great object."

"I should never grudge such a ride, Claude."

"Nor I; but here we are at the old farm. It's an unlikely sort of hour to rouse people up at, but I know that here I am welcome at any time I like to show myself."

We need not particularise Claude's reception at the farm. We need not say that Cicely was delighted to see him, although his cheek was a little pale. How little did she guess that he owed that transitory loss of colour to a residence in

Newgate! We need not say how very welcome Jack was made for Claude's sake.

During the remainder of the night, Claude gave to Cicely a complete history of all that had happened to him since he had seen her, to which she listened with a breathless and soul-absorbing interest. At the mere mention of the dreaded word, Newgate, her colour fled.



CLAUDE COMES ACROSS AN OLD MISER IN THE PINE-APPLE INN.

"Ah, Claude," she said, "how truly wretched I should have been had I only guessed one half of this. I should have gone distracted."

"There you see, Cicely, how much you have been spared by not knowing it; but the result ought to teach you never to give way to despair, let you hear what you may of me; for you will be able to say to yourself, 'Was he not in a cell

of Newgate one night and was he not the next night restored uninjured to my arms?"

"Yes, yes," said Cicely, as she sank sobbing upon his breast; "and how can I be sufficiently thankful to Heaven that you are here, Claude?"

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

THE ROAD AGAIN.—A REMARKABLE ADVENTURE.

THE morning was misty, but yet fresh and beautiful, and Claude, as he sat at breakfast in the ample kitchen of the farm-house, could not help contrasting with a sigh, his mode of life with that of one who, apart from the din and turmoil of huge cities, lived a life of primitive simplicity, and was content to be a waiter upon Heaven's bounty, in the produce of the earth, for his chief good.

"I have often thought, my Cicely," he said, "since fate, or fortune, call it what you will, forbade us to leave England, that we might yet find some quiet rarely-visited spot, where we might almost fancy ourselves amid the wilds of nature, and there live a life of rural peace."

"Ah, Claude," said Cicely, "if such a dream as that could only once be realised!"

"Do you like the picture?"

"Yes, Claude; with you, it would, indeed, be happiness; but, alas! how is such joy to be ours? Should we not live a life of continual apprehension? Would not any chance passenger, who should look at our abode, humble though it were, with more than usual interest, be to us an object of dread?"

"Yes. Yes."

"That life of uncertain peace I almost think would be worse than the present one with all its terrors. And yet, it might endure until we both sunk into the grave, where at least we should know peace."

"I will think of it," said Claude. 'I will think of it. But now I have yet something to do, which must be done at once."

"What is that, Claude?"

"Nothing of danger, dear one, but something of honour; and there is Jack, I see, coming from looking at our horses. Pardon me a moment, Cicely."

Claude left the room, and met Jack upon the lawn in front of the house. "Jack," he said, "I must go to Newgate with the money that I took from Tom Brereton, and which is justly enough due to the officers, because I promised it to them; notwithstanding, I will admit that their assistance in my escape was little or nothing."

"I approve of the payment," said Jack, "and yet——"

"I know what you would say, Jack. You don't like the idea of my going to Newgate with it?"

"In truth, I do not."

"You think that that there is danger, but I differ from you," said Claude. "While, of course, I shall take what precautions I can as regards putting on an efficient disguise, in case anyone should see me who is not in the plot, I do not think if I went as I am that one of those to whom I really shall take the money would denounce me."

"I don't know," said Jack. "My faith in the fine feelings of police-officers, Claude, is not great."

"And I, Jack, have no faith in their fine feelings at all, but I have some faith in their cupidity and in their judgment. If they were to play any tricks with me, the affair would altogether come out in some way; but I will be well upon my guard. Get the horses ready, and let us be off to London."

"So soon, Claude?"

"Why, I don't quite expect to get to London very quickly, for to tell the truth,

I shall loiter on the road with the hope of an adventure; but be that as it may, I somehow feel that I wish to be on horseback. I will be with you in a few moments."

"Very good," said Jack, "I will bring the horses round, and if we must be off—why we must, that's all. But, Claude—"

"Yes, Jack."

"Would it not be the wisest plan to adopt some disguise at once, so that you would get into London without any news of your being in its neighbourhood getting ahead of you."

"I hope to be able to pick up some disguise on the road, Jack. The only person I have much to fear is Tom Brereton. He, I have no doubt, by his clamours will raise a pretty hue-and-cry at my heels; but I hope to outwit him yet. He is too contemptible to fight and kill, or that would long since have been his fate, Jack. I cannot bring my mind to do it."

"You are generous to your enemies, Claude, and ever were; but it will stand you in better stead in the long run to be so, than to kill all who stand in your way, I feel assured."

"I think so too, Jack."

Claude took a brief farewell of Cicely, assuring her, that now he was not going upon any undertaking of danger, but merely to pay a little debt that he owed, which would be thankfully received; and then, after a hearty shake hands with all at the farm, he mounted, and with Jack by his side, took the London road again.

Suddenly Jack laid his hand upon Claude's bridle, saying—

"Just look down the road, Claude. What crowd of horsemen is that that I see yonder?"

"Crowd of horsemen—where?"

"Don't advance. We are under the shelter of the trees here now. Do not advance another step, or they will see you. There are some ten or twelve of them, and they are apparently in deep consultation about something."

"It is necessary, Jack, that I should see who and what those men are. Hold the horse a moment, while I scramble up upon this bank and have a good look at them."

Jack held the horse, and Claude having dismounted, got up upon the bank that was close at hand, and being so elevated, he was able to take a good look at the party of horsemen, who certainly, as Jack had said, appeared to be in deep consultation about something. From the glances they repeatedly cast towards the farm-house, and from several of them actually pointing in that direction, Claude had very little difficulty in convincing himself that it was their destination, and such being the case, whom could they seek but himself?

It gave him a pang to think that that place of refuge for Cicely should have been discovered; and it was an additional pang to him to fancy that some evil consequences might possibly fall upon those kind friends who had from time to time, in some sort, jeopardised themselves by giving him shelter.

"Jack," he said, "we have been dogged. Some active enemy has been upon our track. We are not abroad a bit too soon this morning. Those men are after us, or, I should rather say, they are after me, Jack."

"No. Say us, if you say anything, Claude; for your fortune shall be my fortune—your prison shall be my prison; so, if they bode harm to you, it is to me likewise. Thank the fates we are out of range of their vision here."

"I think we are. But it will be prudent to keep a little back among the trees. Ah, they have determined to go by the meadows to the homestead, and they are leading their horses through a gap they have made in the hedge-row yonder.—Now, I'll be bound but those fellows think they have the reward for Claude Duval in their pockets already virtually."

"Not a doubt of it, Claude, and you may owe this speedy pursuit, you may depend, to Tom Brereton."

"Of that I feel assured. Dismount, Jack; They are looking well and sharply

about them, and they may chance to see your head among the trees if you continue mounted."

Jack was off his horse in a moment; and Claude, although he still wanted to watch the movements of his foes from the top of the bank, crouched so low among the blackberry bushes that grew in great luxuriance upon the top of it, that it was next to an impossibility that they should see him.

"They near the house, Jack," he said. "They near the house now. They place sentinels around it. I can see the flash of arms. They have cutlasses and pistols. Ah, how sure they now make of their prey."

"Come down. Come down, Claude."

"Nay—no—no—not yet. Yet a little, Jack."

"Oh, come down. Mount and fly. When they find you are not there, they may be upon your track, and a mile between you and them may be worth your life. Come away, Claude, oh, come away; I implore you now at once."

"Jack! Jack! Cicely is there."

"I am answered, Claude—I confess it, I am answered. We will stay. I had forgotten. Yes, Claude, Cicely is there, and we will stay until you see them leave. Then you will feel that all is right. You will fly then Claude—will you not? Say that you will?"

"I will, Jack, Hush! They have surrounded the farm-house on all sides. They place their sentinels two together; and now four of them climb the gate, and get into the yard. Ah, the dog flies at them! They have killed the creature! Oh, that I were there! It fondled upon me but a brief hour ago!"

"It is a cowardly act, Claude. What are they doing now? Tell me, or I shall go mad down here with the horses. What are they doing now, Claude?"

"Hush—hush—don't be at all anxious; I will tell you all, Jack. They proceed through the farm-yard. There—there—now they turn the corner of the large wheat stack you recollect, and I can see them no more. They are gone."

"And those who keep watch?"

"They are are still in their places, but evidently full of fear. They seem to expect that at a moment we may pounce out upon them, Jack; and then I'll wager my head to a groat, but they would run one and all of them as hard as their legs would carry them."

"They would, Claude, they would; no doubt of that. But do not keep your eyes off them for a moment, Claude, I beg of you."

"Trust me, Jack. Ah! what is that? By Heaven, Cicely is out with them; one of them threatens her. Bravo! bravo!"

'What is it? What is it, Claude?

'Only one of my friends at the farm has knocked the fellow down with a pitchfork, that is all—that is all. It was well and nobly done. How can they think of taking Cicely prisoner? they can have no power to do that. Jack, my duty now is to rescue her. They are evidently bent upon taking her in charge; they cannot have any sort of authority for so doing, and I——"

"Hilloa! hilloa!" cried an angry voice close at hand. "Do you know, fellows, that you are trespassing?"

Claude looked down from the top of the bank on which he was, and saw a stout man with a florid bloated-looking face, and a scrupulously cut coat of parson's black, a bob wig, and in fact the whole accredited costume of a churchman of the period.

"Hilloa!" he cried again. "Are you aware that you are trespassing upon my land? Why the devil don't you keep the high road?"

"We shall be off directly sir," said Jack.

"Ay, ay, I daresay you will be off directly, you vagabonds; but that won't suit me. I believe that you are no better than you should be, either of you, if indeed you are not highwaymen. Of course you will be off directly if you can, but we will see about that. I don't exactly let fellows off directly that I find some twenty paces within one of my preserves, I can tell you. I am in the com-

missio n of the peace, and I order you both to follow me to my house. We will soon see who you are."

Claude jumped down from the top of the hedge, and looked curiously at the parson. He walked quite round him once, and then suddenly sliding up to him, he placed himself back to back with him, and gave him a sharp rap on the back of his head with his (Claude's) head.

"The very thing," said Claude. "This is providential."

"You infernal rascal!" cried the parson, stamping with fury; "what do you mean by all this mummery!" If you think that impudence will serve your turn, you are very much mistaken. "I'll pretty soon have you both laid by the heels."

"Stop him, Jack."

Jack placed himself in the parson's way, so that when he turned off to go in quest of assistance, he fell right into Jack's arms.

"Gently, Jack," said Claude, "respect the church. I look upon this as a most providential occurrence, reverend sir."

"A providential fiddlestick, you rascal. How dare you detain me one moment? Do you know the consequences?"

"Yes," said Claude, "the consequences are of course all the mischief you can possibly do; and as for the right—I confess it is just now, as is too often the case, the right only of might. But you would be wise to submit, seeing that you are in a decided minority here."

"I will call for help—I will make myself heard. Help! help! hel—murder! murder! don't."

Claude had clutched him by the throat, and held him with a grasp that rather interfered with the reverend gentleman's breathing functions.

"Will you be quiet?"

"Yes, yes; but don't choke me—don't choke me. I will be quiet. Take your hand off my throat."

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

CICELY IS RELEASED, AND CLAUDE PROCEEDS TO LONDON.

"CERTAINLY I will," said Claude, as he released the parson from the hold he had taken of him. "There is no occasion for more choking than is just sufficient, my dear sir."

"What—what do you want? Be off with you, both at once. I don't want to have anything further to say to either of you. Be off."

"Not quite yet," said Claude. "Bring him along, Jack, further among the trees. This place is rather too open,"

"If you intend to murder me, I may as well resist here as further on in the preserve. I may as well chance my life here, and cry again for what help I can hope to get."

"Hark you, sir," said Claude. "I am no murderer. I am not a man to do any deed of violence, unless much pushed to it by those who are imprudent enough to force me to it. You will not have a hair of your head injured, but peculiar circumstances make it a matter of necessity that I should borrow your wig, and your hat, and your coat, and possibly your breeches."

The parson's mouth opened to a ludicrous extent.

"What!" he cried. "Rob me of my clothes?"

"Oh, dear no, my good sir. I'd as soon rob a church, and walk off with the pulpit on my back. I will only borrow them for the occasion, and you may depend upon having them again. Bring him along, Jack, gently. Mark me, sir, you are in no personal danger unless you wilfully create it for yourself."

The parson seemed to think that submission was now decidedly his best policy. He was in the hands of two strong well armed men, and from the language used

by one of them it was quite clear, whatever might be his companions mode of operation, that he was not to be trifled with.

"My good fellow," he said, "if this is a joke it has been carried far enough. I promise you upon the word of a gentleman that I will take no notice of what has passed, but you must permit me to go at once."

"Sir," said Claude, "I would take your word in a moment, but I really have an use for the things I mention. All I can promise is that I will take them in as little offensive a manner as I can."

By this time Jack had led the parson some paces further into the preserve, which was uncommonly well wooded. The two horses followed of their own accord. The example of Claude's horse was having a great effect upon the civilization of Jack's steed. Claude then hastily divested himself of all his upper clothing, saying as he did so—

"Now, sir, pray make your choice: shall my friend here help you off with your things, or will you oblige us by taking them off yourself? Time is precious. Jack, open the vallise, and get yourself into your groom's clothing."

"That's soon done," said Jack.

"The deuce take it," cried the parson. "How many of my things do you want, sir?"

"Only your coat, waistcoat, cravat, wig and hat; I have a dark silk pair of breeches on that will answer the purpose. Be quick."

Rather sullenly the parson took off the required articles, and flung them to the ground. In a few moments he was divested of them, and Claude, who was just about his size, looked amazingly well in them. The wig and hat completely altered the whole character of his physiognomy; and Jack having procured his groom's coat and hat from the vallise, crammed Claude's other clothes into it, and was quite ready to personate a respectable domestic.

"Now, sir," said Claude, "when you tell this story, as of course you will have the impudence to do, do not say that we used the smallest violence of an unnecessary character to you. From the moment of your submission not a hand has been laid upon you except in courtesy."

"Confound your courtesy!"

"As you please; but it is now necessary that for one hour I should not be interfered with in my movements. How am I to know that you will not, the moment my back is turned, emerge from this wood, and raise a hue-and-cry after me?"

"Don't you expect me to do so?"

"Certainly I do, but if you will give me your word of honour, as a gentleman, that you will not, I will take it."

"Oh, Claude," said Jack, in a low tone, close to him, "are you going to trust a parson?"

"I think me may, Jack."

"Let me go at once," said the parson, "and I give you my word of honour, that I will say nothing of what has happened here."

"I hope I shall not be deceived in you," said Claude. "It will be the worse for some unlucky man upon some other occasion, if you break your word."

"I will keep it. But will you tell me who you are?"

"Yes, if you wish it. I am Claude Duval."

"By Heaven, I thought as much. Your secret shall be safe with me, Duval. You stopped a coach once in which was a lady of my family, in delicate health. She told you as much, and you behaved with great forbearance. A fright would have killed her, but you did not alarm her. You may depend I will not say a word about you, and if I had but known it was you, I should not have interfered with you at first."

"Very well, sir," said Claude. "I am rejoiced that we part upon such good terms. Take your road home, sir."

"And with a price upon your head, you will really run the frightful risk of my

raising my servants, and the whole country about you, in the course of a quarter of an hour?"

"Yes," said Claude, with true dignity. "I feel and I know that I owe my safety to running such risks. I am in the habit of trusting all sorts and conditions of people, and to that trustfulness I owe that I am now alive."

"It may be so. Good-day. Ah, what throng of persons is this coming this way. I can see them in the road, through the trees, yonder."

"Go home, sir," said Claude, "and keep faith with me. I have some business with those people."

The parson made a slight bow, and in his shirt-sleeves, went a roundabout way to his house, where he knew he could pass through a private garden to his study without being seen by any one of his household.

"Come, Jack," said Claude. "Those with whom we must exchange a few words, are upon the road, I think, now. Do you not hear them?"

"I do, Claude, I do."

Claude and Jack led their horses to the margin of the road, and then they mounted. Jack, as he was bound to do, to be in keeping with his character of groom, fell back about fifty paces in the rear, and at a sober trot, Claude advanced to face the horsemen, who were the same that had by this time searched the farm-house for him, in vain.

What a pang it was to his heart to see that two of them were dismounted, and that they had Cicely between them, who had hastily thrown a shawl over her shoulders, upon being told that she must accompany the party.

Close by her, came the young man who had struck one of the officers with a pitchfork. He was guarded by two of the party; and following the whole came some members of the family, who were resolved to see the issue of the affair, and justice done to Cicely and their own reation.

One and all appeared thoughtful, though they rejoiced that Claude had got clear of the premises before the arrival of such a force to capture him.

When Claude appeared upon the road, the party came to a halt. Cicely and her friends knew him by his horse; but as they saw that he was disguised, they had the prudence to forbear from making any exclamation, or giving their captors the least idea that he was known to them.

Claude, when he saw that he was fairly seen, put his horse to a canter, and came directly up to the party.

"What is all this?" he said.

One of the men, a London officer, and as it appeared, the only real officer among the whole, for he had merely got those who were with him to assist for the occasion, rode up to Claude, and touching his hat respectfully, said—

"I presume, sir, I am speaking to the Reverend Peter Rickman?"

"Well, sir?" said Claude.

"Oh, very good, sir. I was coming to your house, sir, which they told me was near at hand. We have had a hunt for the famous Claude Duval, sir."

"And have you found him?"

"I am sorry to say, sir, that we have not. We had certain information that he was concealed in a farm-house, sir, close at hand to here, and we made sure of him, but, somehow; he eluded us."

"Who gave you the information?"

"Why, you will hardly believe it, sir, but it was Dick Turpin."

"Dick—Turpin!"

Claude at the moment nearly fell from his horse, so great to him was the shock of this information.

"Yes, sir. Here is the note. It came to me in London last night, and I, of course, acted upon it, as you see, sir, but missed the rascal. Of course, sir, I should not show the note to anybody but you, but it is quite at your service, sir. Here it is."

"Oh, certainly, certainly. Let me see."

Claude took the note, and read the following words:—

"Duval is at a farm on the Uxbridge road called Shaw Hill Farm. You will find him there for a surety. "DICK TURPIN."

"Ah," said Claude, as he put the note in his pocket, "so I see! exactly! Well, what do you want me to do now? You have not caught him, you say, so I can do nothing at all in the matter."

"No, sir, we have not got him, but we have got his wife, sir."

"Is she a highwayman likewise?"

"Oh dear, no, sir; certainly not."

"Then why have you taken her into custody?"

"Why, your worship, you see, I thought it would be just as well to commit her to prison for a week or two, and see if we could not get out of her, by frightening her, where Claude Duval was likely to be nabbed. That was my idea, sir; and besides, they say he is precious fond of her, and having her in the jail at Guildford would be sure to keep him in the neighbourhood."

"A very good plan, my friend, only illegal."

"Oh, sir, the London magistrates, with such sort of gentry, don't much mind whether they are on the right or the wrong side of the law. You know they are not the sort of people to bring their actions for false imprisonment and all that sort of thing."

"And do you fancy, sir," said Claude, in a tone of indignation, "that I am going to make Guildford gaol an Inquisition? Do you fancy I am going to expose myself to the censure of the Secretary of State by so glaring an act as sending a woman to prison because she was the wife of a man against whom I suppose you have a warrant?"

"Oh, yes, your worship; I have a warrant."

"For the apprehension of Claude Duval, but not for the apprehension of his wife, I presume."

"No, sir. I—I—certainly. A-hem! And your worship, then, thinks it's a mistake to take the—the female?"

"A mistake, sir? It's a villany. Release her directly. I order it. It's something new in this country, that the wives of felons are to be apprehended, merely on account of that connexion."

"Yes; but, your worship, you know it is felony to aid, and abet, and comfort, and so on, any one who has committed a felony."

"Why, who in the name of all that's wonderful, should comfort a man if his wife don't? Have you got a wife, sir?"

"Yes. I—I——"

"Release that woman directly, and let her go where she likes. Of course she will go back to where you took her from. What has this man been doing, that you have him a prisoner likewise?"

"Why, sir, one of my party—that one with the handkerchief round his head—only just laid hold of the arm of the wife of Duval, and said in quite a quiet way, 'Come along with us, and we will soon see how the air of Guildford gaol agrees with you,' when this young man ups with a pitchfork and knocks him down; so of course we took him, your worship."

"Then, my friend, of course you must let him go again, for your man who got the crack on the head with the pitchford was in the commission of an illegal act, so it served him right. I order that man's release."

"But, your worship—Really, your worship!"

"No words, sir. If you dispute my authority, you are perfectly at liberty to do so. Carry your prisoners where you like, and take the consequences of doing so. I am quite willing."

"Oh dear, no, sir. Your worship's authority is, of course, sufficient. I am only very sorry I have done anything that your worship disapproves of; but I will be more cautious another time."

CHAPTER CLXXV.

CLAUDE ASTONISHES THE VESTIBULE AT NEWGATE.

THE whole of this discourse was listened to by Cicely in a perfect fever of apprehension lest Claude should be discovered. It seemed to her as though it would be impossible that Claude could, in so very hazardous a conjecture, possess



THE SCUFFLE WITH THE TWO OFFICERS.

nerve enough to outface a dozen men with such a deceit. But even Cicely, well as she thought she knew him, yet knew not the amazing courage and coolness which he could exercise.

Most emphatically we may truly say, that Claude was never below the occasion.

"Very well," said Duval. "You will say that you met me, and that will be sufficient. There can be very little doubt but that Claude Duval is upon the

Guildford road somewhere, and as I really feel strongly regarding his capture—indeed, I may conscientiously say that no one can possibly feel a stronger interest in his apprehension than I do, except it may be his wife here—I will give fifty-pounds among you if you catch him within twelve hours."

"Fifty pounds, your worship?"

"Yes, I have said it; and there are quite witnesses enough to hear me, should they be required. But, mind—you must have him within twelve hours from now."

"Come on!" cried the officer. "We are very much obliged to your worship, indeed. He can't be very far off, and if we don't have him it won't be my fault; I am considered one of the most wide awake officers in London, your worship, though I say it myself, who, perhaps, should not. But it's well known that it's quite impossible to take me in."

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, your worship. I have cut my eye teeth; I wish your worship a good morning. Come on, my good fellows. We shall make a good morning's work of this yet. Let the prisoners go. We don't want to be encumbered with them now. We all wish your worship good day, and hope we may come to speak to you of that little affair of the fifty pounds."

The men whom the officer had in his service, were all pretty well mounted, and it was quite a sight to see how they all rode off now, leaving behind them the very man, of all others, whom they would have galloped twenty miles to see; and notwithstanding all his courage, Claude, even with the assistance of Jack, could have had but a poor chance in the open road against so many.

With what a look of joy Cicely regarded Claude as all her foes thus galloped off upon a wrong scent, leaving to him the mastery of the field. When their horses' hoofs began only to sound faintly in the distance, and when it was quite out of the question that any of them should see what was going on amid the little group of friends they had left behind them, Cicely sprung to Claude, exclaiming—

"You are saved! You are saved!"

"Yes, Cicely, for this time I am, and you too."

"Do not think of me, Claude. All the danger is to you. But do not linger here. You cannot possibly maintain this disguise for long; and those men, who are in too great force to cope with, may return yet to your detriment. Oh, fly!—fly!"

"Yes, can well imagine," said Claude, "that this neighbourhood is not just now the safest for me, nor is it to you, Cicely; for when it is found out that you have been liberated without authority, there is no knowing what injustice may be perpetrated against you. I must leave here, but you must leave with me."

"That is true," said Jack.

"We will protect her with our lives," said the people who belonged to the farm. "You know, Claude, that we will protect her to the utmost stretch of our power so to do."

"I do know it, my dear friends," said Claude, "and that is yet another reason why I should not bring ruin and trouble beneath your roof by your being good to me, and to mine. Will you come with me, Cicely?"

"To the world's end, Claude."

"We shall be very loath to part with her," said the young farmer. "Will you come back again when the danger is blown over, which it soon will?"

"Yes," cried Cicely, "I will come back again, and when I shall return here I shall feel myself happy, for the happiest and serenest days I have known have been spent beneath the roof of yon farm-house. I am ready, Claude."

"If it must be so, then" cried the young farmer, "why it must, and I can't deny the reason of the thing. I will go and get a horse for Cicely from the farm stables, and then—Ah! To your arms, Claude.—Who have we here?"

A single horseman wrapped up carefully in a very capacious cloak, rode among the group.

"You are more bold than prudent, sir," cried Claude, as he dashed towards the intruder, but then he suddenly checked himself, for the horseman let fall the portion of his cloak that covered the lower part of his face, and disclosed that he was the very justice from whom Claude had borrowed the suit of clothes that he then wore.

"What, sir, is your errand here?" said Claude. "I am very unwilling indeed to quarrel with you."

"There is no occasion. Am I right in supposing that the group of horsemen who have just now passsed me on the road, after some rather nude scrutiny, have taken you to be me?"

"They have, sir," said Claude, "but I am very happy to find they have not paid you the doubtful compliment of taking you for me."

"That they certainly have not. Will you confide in me so far as to tell me what you have said and done in my name?"

"Willingly, sir."

Claude then in a very few words told the justice what had past, including the offer of the fifty pounds, and saying how he thought it necessary to take Cicely to town in consequence of what had taken place.

"You can do that or not do it," said the justice, "as you see fit; I have already told you that on account of a near and dear relation of mine, I owe you a debt of gratitude. I will make an attempt to repay it by taking upon myself all that you have said and done in my name. The arrest of your wife is surely illegal, and consequently the assault committed in her defence is no offence. So far, then, in your favour, I can go, and after that remember that I know nothing whatever of you. I now leave it quite to yourself to decide whether you need take your wife to London or not, only I hope you will be sufficiently careful of yourself, as to keep me from being called upon for that fifty pounds you have so liberally promied for the capture of Claude Duval."

Slightly touching his hat, then, and without waiting for one word in answer to this generous speech, the justice at once rode away from the spot, leaving them all quite astonished at his conduct.

"What an injustice that man did himself," said Claude, "upon our first interview together. How much of the gentleman it is evident he can really be. May I trust him? What is his character in the neighbourhood?"

"He is considered," said the young farmer, "a violent but not altogether an unjust man. He is passionate in the extreme."

"That will do," said Claude, "I will trust him, then. Cicely, I now, with the permission of our kind friends, urge your stay here, where you know and are known, in preference to concealment, with all its troubles, in London."

"Your will, Claude, is my law. I will stay, and you will come to me as soon as may be?"

"Trust me, Cicely. I will, I feel that I ought to place it beyond a chance, that the justice should not have to pay the fifty pounds; so, for fear our friends on horseback should chance to have any kind of misgivings, and come back again, Jack and I will be off at once at a good pace."

Claude stooped from his horse and kissed the brow of Cicely; and then smiling an adieu to his friends of the farm-house, he cried to Jack—

"Off, and away, Jack! Let us place a mile or two of ground between us and those who are so anxious to be better acquainted with me this morning than suits my convenience."

"Ready," said Jack.

They both put their horses to a gallop, but not a distressing one, and off they went.

"The parson did not ask for his coat again," said Jack, as they slackened their pace about a mile on the country side of Tyburn-gate.

"No, Jack; and do you know I begin to like that fellow."

"It's the first parson, then, Claude, that ever you did like."

"Yes, and it only shows us how careful we ought to be in condemning whole

classes of men, even if the great majority should happen to be no better that they should be. That parson has, no doubt, a bad temper; but the great distinction between a bad-tempered man and a bad-disposed man, should never be forgotten. Pay the toll, Jack."

Jack paid the toll at Tyburn-gate, and they passed on to Oxford-street. As they got into that even then populous thoroughfare, they thought it advisable to keep up to a greater extent the difference between them as regarded the appearance of master and man.

"I will take my place," said Jack, with a smile. "I will, however, be sufficiently near to be of assistance in case of anything happening amiss."

"Thank you, Jack. You have only to say the word at any time, and you know I shall be quite willing to play the man while you play the master."

"Pho! pho! Claude. I hope we understand each other better than that. It is all right. Push on, and for my part I don't care a straw what part I play, so that we are as soon as possible clear of London."

"I shall not linger in it a moment longer than may be absolutely necessary Jack."

With this, Claude at a steady canter, still attired in the very respectable costume of the country clergyman, made his way down Oxford Street, and Jack kept at the orthodox distance from him that a groom ought to observe, and by the steady demure look which he put on, made himself in all respects a suitable attendant upon a gentleman of his master's presumed cloth and standing in the church.

To be sure there were several persons who knew a little of such matters, who paused to cast a glance of admiration at the superb horse which the supposed clergyman rode, and then to admire likewise the animal upon which his groom was mounted; but none of these had the least suspicion that they were either of them other than they looked.

In this wise, then, Claude and Jack reached Holborn, and keeping to the highway for the whole distance, they arrived at the corner of the Old Bailey. There Claude paused, and Jack in a moment was by his side.

"I think, Jack, I will dismount here, and walk to the gate of the prison."

"Oh, Claude," whispered Jack. "As I came along Holborn, the danger, and I might almost say the folly of this desperate expedition has come strongly across my mind. Up to this point, I do believe, although we have terribly tempted our fate, that we have come safely; but now I beg you to go no further."

"Nay, Jack, I must keep my word with the turnkeys, and the officials of Newgate—they must have the money."

"I don't speak for the money, Claude; but for you. Let them have the money; I think, under all the circumstances, that it is much better that they should; but you really expose them to too much temptation by going with it yourself.—I will take it."

"And what will they think, Jack? Why, just that I was afraid to go myself with it; and if once the feeling gets abroad that Claude Duval was afraid of anything, it will be soon all over with me. No, Jack, don't think that there is any danger. You wait here, with the horses; and you may depend I will cut the interview as short as I possibly can."

CHAPTER CLXXVI.

THE OLD COAL-HOLE IN FINSBURY.—STARTLING ADVENTURES.

Jack knew well enough, from old experience, that when Claude had made up his mind to anything, no appeal to his fears was at all likely to have the least effect in turning him from his purpose; so when he spoke so decidedly, Jack said no more, but, with a sigh, took the horse by the bridle and prepared himself to wait with what patience he might the return of his friend.

And now, who that had seen Claude upon that occasion—and there were many who saw him—could for one moment have supposed that he was going upon so hazardous an expedition? Who could have thought that there was the man, who, with almost incredible courage and skill, had so recently escaped from Newgate, and who had now ridden a dozen miles to come and tap at its wicket, and with a certainty of being known too?—for he did not mean to attempt to deceive the officers who might be in the lobby with regard to his identity.

But a little consideration will show that in the very boldness of this proceeding lay its security. No one but the officers to whom he intended to make himself known could dream that he was there; and, as cupidity and personal interest is well known to be the main-spring of action, it was quite clear that their best plan was to take what Claude now brought them, and let him go again, making sure of him, as they did, at some other time, when no charge of betraying their trust, or of being paid by Claude Duval, would be brought against them; whereas, if they now were to betray him, of course he would relate the whole affair, to their discomfiture.

Thus then was it, that, viewing the whole affair, Claude did not think that he was running a great risk.

When he reached the wicket-gate of Newgate he had to pause for a moment to allow some one to come out. It was a gentleman, very plainly dressed; and the glance at the face that Duval caught convinced him at once that it was Judge Manning.

An irresistible desire to speak to the father of Grace came over Claude, and stepping after him, he slightly touched his arm, saying—

"Have I not the honour of addressing Judge Manning?"

At the sound of his name, the judge turned, and bowing slightly, he said—

"I regret that I have not the pleasure of recollecting you, sir; I am the person you name."

"Is my disguise so good," said Claude, "that the father of Grace does not recollect Duval?"

The judge started as he said—

"Good God! what do you do here?—can you be tired of your life that you linger in this neighbourhood? I was in hope that by this time you were far away from London. Do you want money? Command me if you do so; or in any other way that I can be of use to you."

"Many thanks," said Claude; "but I can manage very well. I hope your daughter is well."

"Quite well; and full of gratitude to you and your friends for her preservation. Let me beg of you to come to my house, and speak with me about your future prospects. I think something may be done for you to withdraw you from the mode of life you follow, indeed I do."

"Alas! sir, I fear not."

"Nay, you are apt enough to think, that because you have been long in such a line of life as this, that there is no resource for you in any other; but in some other country, surely you might find peace and happiness, and honest prosperity."

"Sir, I thought so once."

"And why not now? You are young."

"Once, sir, I made the attempt to leave England, but I was hunted back, even from the coast; and in the attempt my wife—she who has consented to share my varied fortunes—nearly lost her life. The occurrences connected with me at Winchester must have reached your ears?"

"Yes, I certainly heard that by the courage and skill of the officers, you and some gang of accomplices were prevented from carrying off the sacramental plate from the old cathedral."

A bright flush of colour came to Claude's face, as he said—

"And is that the story told of that affair, sir?"

"It is indeed, and it was most industriously circulated by the authorities. I

recollect it made no little noise at the time; but if you say it is not so, I will believe you."

"Sir, I thank you for that much. It is a base calumny. I had but one object in going to Winchester at all, and that was to make an attempt to leave England for ever; but a price was set upon my head, and I was worth too much to the officers and the blood-hounds of the law to be let escape them so easily. They hunted me back again, sir, and the consequence is that I am what I am, and what I ever shall be while life remains to me."

"Do not despair. Only say you will call upon me."

"I will, sir. Name your own hour."

"This day if you can. Now come home with me if it is convenient to you; I wish to do all that I can to repair the involuntary injury that I did you, by taking you to the police-office, and so giving the opportunity to your foes of declaring who and what you were. Will you come with me now?"

"I have a little business to transact in this neighbourhood, sir, and when that is done I will be with you."

"Enough. I will take such measures that you shall both come and go with perfect safety,"

"Expect me, then, sir, if nothing happens to stay me. Mine is an eventful life. The hands of many men are raised against me, and but few for me, so that in a great measure I am the slave of circumstances; but I will come to you, if nothing of a serious character happens to prevent me."

With this Claude and the judge parted, and the former once more made his way to the wicket-gate of Newgate. He ascended the steps, and tapped at the entrance.

"What now?" said a turnkey.

"Is Joliffe within?" said Claude, naming one of the officers whom he knew was in the plot for favouring his escape from the prison.

"Perhaps he is and perhaps he aint. Come in and we will soon see. Come in if you pleases. This here way, sir."

The highly respectable appearance of Claude induced an amount of unusual respect upon the part of the turnkey. The little gate was opened, and Duval was once again in the lobby of Newgate, and the key turned upon him. A couple of the officials of the prison were lounging about, and in one of them Duval recognised the man who was usually called Bill, and who had been the one that had come to his cell to give him a hint that he might escape if he would. Upon this Claude touched him by the arm, saying—

"I think there is quite enough present for the transaction of business. I have come to settle a little account."

"A little what?" cried Bill.

"A little account. Don't you expect something among you all from one Claude Duval?"

"By all that's outrageous, it's him," said Bill, staggering back. "Why, Duval, you have got the courage of ten men and a half, to come here in such a way. What do you expect we are to do?"

"Take your money to be sure, and not make fools of yourselves. All that Tom Brereton got was seven hundred and fifty pounds. There's seven hundred pounds. Take it all, and don't, then, say that I was worse than my promise. Divideit equitably among you, and when we do meet again, perhaps you will remember that Claude Duval is always as good as his word, and at times a little better."

The prison officials glared at him as though he had been same apparition. The idea of a man with such a price upon his head calmly coming to Newgate, was beyond their comprehensions; and the additional idea of his voluntarily parting with such a sum of money was to them quite staggering.

"Now," added Claude, "as I don't at all admire the architecture of this place, nor its air, I will bid you good morning."

"Duval," said Bill, as he flung open the wicket, "you are a regular game one. This here is a story that it won't do to tell; but we shan't forget it for all

that. You is a trump, and if you are brought into the jug again, and I'm in the land of the living, you will find a friend here."

"But," said the man on the lock, "ought we—dare we—I say, Bill? blue murder to let him go agin. It's——"

Bill sprang at the turnkey and held him by the throat, as he cried—

"Cut it, Duval. Cut it while I throttle him. Cut it at once, afore some other wagabone wants to nab you."

Claude darted from the lobby; but it so happened that some one was ascendin the little stone steps leading from the pavement to the wicket-gate at that mo ment; and Claude came out with so much force and precipitation that he en countered the person; and at once upset him, and rolled him over steps and pave ment into the not over salubrious kennel of the Old Bailey.

"Murder! Murder!"

"The devil!" said Claude. "I ought to know that voice." He glanced at the fallen man, and at once recognised Tom Brereton, who at such a very inopportune moment had arrived at Newgate to hold a consultation with his friend, the Governor, about the loss of the money that Claude had taken from him, and just made so liberal an use of.

"Confound you," said Claude.

"Murder! Murder! Help!"

"Be quiet, idiot, will you?"

Probably Claude would have said something more threatening to Tom Brereton; but several people began to collect; and others from the opposite side of the way began to cross over, so Claude thought it prudent to get away as quickly as he could; for although he had not as yet been recognised by Tom Brereton, he did not know a moment when he might be; for that personage knew him rather in conveniently well.

Accordingly, then, Claude, with rapid steps, made for the corner of the Old Bailey, by Newgate Street, where Jack was, with no small amount of impatience, waiting with the horses. Jack, from where he was, could see that there was some sort of bustle at the door of Newgate; but when he observed Claude coming towards him, he felt it as a great relief to find that he was not in it in any way; but this was an opinion which he soon found the most ample cause to correct.

Tom Brereton, after rolling a sufficient time in the kennel to give himself the lively appearance of a man who had taken a mud-bath, rose full of ire and indig nation; and the mob that had, with the marvellous rapidity that mobs collect in London, giving way before so muddy an assailant, permitted him to rush after Claude at a furious rate.

"Stop! stop! you villain!" cried Tom Brereton. "You shall pay for my coat—you shall! Stop him! stop him!"

Claude sprang into his saddle.

"Good Heavens!" said Jack. "What is all this about?"

"Nothing particular," said Claude. "He don't know me. Push on towards Smithfield, Jack. He may recognise us yet."

"Stop him!" still shouted Tom Brereton. "Him on the black horse. Why —why that's Claude Duval's horse, the famous highwayman. Murder! That's Claude Duval!"

"Who—who?" cried the mob in chorus.

"Claude Duval, the highwayman. Murder! murder!"

Tom Brereton was knocked down, and trampled over by at least twenty people in a moment, and a whole chorus of voices shouted—

"Stop him! stop him! A highwayman! Stop him! There he goes—a high wayman! Stop him!"

"We are rather in for it, now, Jack," said Claude.

"We are lost!"

"Not at all. Push on, and follow me. This way—this way. Don't look behind you, and if any one should touch you or your horse, down with him

with the loaded handle of your whip. We will show them soe spot y et, or I am much mistaken."

At a smart hand-gallop, Claude and Jack made their way up Giltspur Street, and dashed into Smithfield. The alarm had been so sudden, and the escape so quick, that the people on each side of the way looked about them in a scared kind of way, not knowing what it was all about.

CHAPTER CLXXVII.

THE THIEVES' KEN IN REDCROSS STREET.—A NARROW ESCAPE.

Jack kept as close to Claude as he possibly could do without impeding him in his flight, and so they got through the area of Old Smithfield with incredible rapidity. Jack had now—as, in fact, he always had—the most unbounded confidence in the resources of Claude, and so, when he found that they were really distancing the crowd rapidly, much of the fear that at first had taken possession of him dissipated. He held his bridle more firmly in his left hand, while in his right he brandished the heavy riding whip with which Claude advised him to clear his way.

"On—on!" cried Claude.

Some man with a metal badge upon his arm, and whose general ruffianly appearance without that would sufficiently have proclaimed his connection with the market, which was then almost as gigantic a nuisance as it is now, made a sudden rush at Claude from among the sheep-pens, crying, as he clung to his bridle—

"I have him!—I have him! He won't shake me off in a hurry."

Crack went the loaded handle of Claude's riding whip upon his skull, and down the fellow went as though he had been shot.

"One fool less in Smithfield, I think," cried Claude. "On, Jack, on! Follow me closely."

"I am here, Claude."

Claude kept an even, onward course, and before three minutes could have expired from the moment that the horse sprang from the corner of Newgate Street, he and his master were in Barbican

"Ah," thought Jack, I know where he is going to now. Claude, you will go to Stevens's?"

"Yes. Push on."

But now, the first panic and surprise of the people on the route of the two flying men had, in some measure, subsided; and they were able fully to understand what was amiss. The cry of 'A highwayman! a highwayman!' came from at least a hundred throats; and in that extraordinary manner that a whole population will, at times, without knowing very well why or wherefore, hunt some one person, the greater number of people in the streets joined in the race.

But still, the great advantage Claude and Jack had was, that they were sufficiently in advance to come continually upon fresh people who, although they heard that something was amiss, did not, until the two hunted men had passed, positively connect them with the tumult; and so they dashed on down Barbican and turned into Redcross Street.

The moment they turned the corner of that street, they were out of sight of every one who, with distinct notions that they were the parties to be apprehended, were pursuing them; and then it was that Claude felt that if anything was to be done for their safety, it must at once be attempted.

About half-way down Redcross Street was a small shop where cigars, then rather a rarity, and pipes, and various tobaccos, were sold, or pretended to be sold. The doorway of this little shop was rather lofty, although not so lofty as to attract any attention of a particular character to it. But it had its uses.

Casting around him a rapid glance, which assured him no one was observing him, Duval rode his horse full at the doorway of the little shop, and in he went, horse and all.

Jack followed him.

"Hilloa, Stevens!" cried Claude.



"Here!" said a man, half-dressed, rushing from a back room with great precipitation. "Here!"

"Is it all right?"

"As a trivet, master. That will do."

Stevens darted past the two horses and banged shut his door in a moment, and shot a couple of bolts to it. Then taking the bridle of Claude's horse in his hand, he shouted—

"Ann! Ann! Ann!"

"Here ye is," said a dirty-looking girl, making her appearance, and holding on her clothes, for they had the appearance that if she were to leave go of them, they would all tumble off together, leaving her like beauty unadorned.

"Take the horses to Phillips. Be quick. Ah, I hear cries. Why, captain, they are hard and fast on your track. Be off, Ann—no faster than you can."

Both Claude and Jack dismounted, and Ann took the bridles of both of the steeds in one hand, and in another moment disappeared with them down a long gloomy looking passage.

"A highwayman! a highwayman!" cried the mob in the street. "Stop him! stop him! A highwayman!"

"Is them your friends, captain?" said Stevens.

"I suppose so," laughed Claude.

"Ah, the poor deluded wretches! But, howsomdever, there's no saying but somebody may have seed you come in here, so come on, and I'll soon take yer by the old move to the Pine Apple. Lord bless you captain, you would hardly think how many gentlemen on the road, and off the road, have made their way to the old crib through my shop, and nobody none the wiser. If the hole in the wall was only better kivered up than it is, they would have found it out long ago."

"You still use the water-butt, Stevens?"

"Bless you, yes."

"It's a good plan."

"Lor, captain, there's nothing ekal to it. You know, sir," addressing Jack, "there's a big opening in the wall of my yard that goes bang through into the yard of the old Pine Apple inn, where the stables is, and agin the hole on my side, I put the water-butt, and they does the same on their side; but a *hinfant* could move 'em away in a minute; and the grabs have never touched 'em, though they have been here on the hunting lay twenty times."

"What's least hidden, is often best hidden," said Jack.

"I believe you, sir. I do think if they was to come every day, and if I was to live here in the old crib till I was as old as Methusela, they would go away agin as green as they come."

"I don't doubt it for a moment."

Into the back parlour, where not the most savory odours arose from Mr. Stevens's cookery, he led the way, and opening the window, he sprung out of the room into a dirty yard. Claude and Jack followed him instantly, and there they met the young lady named Ann, who came back from disposing of the horses in the stable of the Pine Apple.

"Don't touch the water-butt, my duck and a half," said Stevens. "The captain and the other gentleman is a going through. Is old Figgins at home?"

"Yes," said Ann. "He wanted to know who it was, very bad."

"We will soon satisfy him," said Claude, as he placed a guinea in Ann's hand. "Stevens, I shall see you soon at the crib."

"Yes, captain. It's a long time since you passed an evening in the old Ken; and there's many an old and many a young hand that will we glad to see you. You might do worse than stay a bit."

"You are right, Stevens. I ought to call upon old friends sometimes; and I will stay at the ken till an honr after midnight. Then I must be off."

"Very good, captain. We shall make a night of it, I'll be bound. Be off with you, for some one is knocking at my shop door like mad."

"The deuce there is. Good-by."

Claude and Jack passed through the hole in the wall; and Stevens and Ann quickly replaced the old water-butt in its place, from whence it did not look to have been moved for the last twenty years.

The inn-yard in which Claude and Jack now found themselves was tolerably extensive. A kind of gallery ran along one side of it, which could be reached by an old well-worn flight of wooden steps; and from that gallery opened a

number of bed-rooms belonging to the inn. About the yard there was the usual amount of litter and confusion contingent upon a not very well ordered, but rather extensive range of stabling; but the two horses of our friends had completely disappeared.

In the course of a few moments a man came rather timidly down the stairs. from the gallery we have mentioned, and with a look of curiosity upon his face, he approached our friends.

"Good gracious! is this possible? Duval," he cried, "is it you?"

"It is, Figgins," said Claude, as he held out his hand. "Is your father well?"

"Quite. Quite. But if he were not he would be so glad to see you, that I think it would restore him. Was that riot I heard in Barbican anything to do with you?"

"A little. They hunted me across Smithfield, that was all; and so I thought of the old crib, and Stevens's shop, and in I popped.

"Right. Right. You could not possibly have done better. Who is your friend?"

"I will tell you that, or he will himself, I have no doubt, before we leave; but in the meantime you may be quite sure he is my friend."

"That is quite sufficient. Follow me, and I will take you to the old man. He would have come himself, but as I tell you he is not very well, and when he is at his best he is not now very good at getting up and down stairs."

"Our legs are young enough yet," said Claude, "to enable us to wait upon him. I long to see him, for I do not forget what a true friend he has been to me on more than one occasion."

Both Claude and Jack followed the young man up the old tottering staircase, and then having passed through several rooms they at last reached one which was very comfortably furnished, and in which sat an old man, whose hair was perfectly white, and whose face was a sufficient evidence that something a little stronger than pump-water had been in the habit of trickling down his throat for the last fifty years.

"Who is it, Dick?" he cried. "Who is it?"

"Duval, father," said the young man.

"What, Claude?" cried the old man, rising from his chair quickly, and then sinking into it again with such a howl that both Claude and Jack started back in amazement.

"Don't be frightened," said Dick. "It's only the gout."

"Only the gout! You hideous horrid rascal," cried the old man. "Only the gout! I only wish I had anything handy here to throw at your rascally head for saying, only the gout; but you will have it some day yourself, and that's a comfort. Duval, I am really glad to see you."

"And I to see you," said Claude, as he shook the old man by the hand. "Will you forgive me for not coming oftener?"

"To be sure, I will. Business, my boy, is business, and you can't be always making calls. But who is this you have with you? Is it an old friend or a new one, Duval?"

"Look well at me," said Jack, as he placed himself in the light. "Look well at me, Mr. Figgins, and I think you will know me again."

"Again?" said the old man.

"Yes, you knew me well enough once."

The old man shaded his eyes with his hands for a moment or two, and looked in Jack's face. Then he suddenly said—

"It must be true, though I didn't believe it when they told it to me. It must be true after all. You are Sixteen-string Jack."

"I am."

"Then you were not hung after all?"

"Yes, I was; but brought to life again, all of which I will tell you, at length, before I leave; and now, old friend, give me leave to shake hands with you

and to tell you how glad I am to see you once again, although you don't look so young as you did twenty years ago."

"No," said Figgins, "you are right enough there, Jack. I do not look so young as I did twenty years ago; but it seems at this moment to have knocked off one-half that time to hold your hand in mine once again. Why, I can—Murder!"

"Good God! what's the matter?"

"Oh," said Dick, "it's only the gout. Father forgot it again, and was going to get up. It's only the gout in his toe,"

"Oh, you villain," cried the old man. "Duval, can you lend me a pistol to shoot this insulting scoundrel with, or can you, Jack? Only the gout, indeed!"

"Never mind him," said Claude. "Let us sit down here quietly, and talk over old times a little."

"Ay, we will; and Dick, my boy, go to number forty-two in the cellar, and get up a couple of bottles of the old madeira, my boy; and when you speak of the gout again, call it the gout; and not only the gout—Oh, don't—I wish you had it for an hour or two."

"Thank you, father."

Dick, the old man's son, soon brought the two bottles of the old madeira, and notwithstanding the gout, he (the old man) continued during the next hour to drink his fair share of the wine.

During this time, too, Jack told the old man the whole of his truly wonderful story, with which the reader is sufficiently familiar; and then, when there was a proposition on the part of old Figgins for two more bottles of the old madeira, Claude negatived it by saying—

"You know, old friend, that my avocations are not favorable to much repose; and, therefore, whenever I do find myself fairly housed for a few hours, I think it is throwing away my opportunities not to indulge myself with a nap."

"Certainly—certainly."

"Then, with your permission, as I mean to make my appearance in the Ken to-night, I will lie down for a few hours first, and, I dare say, Jack will be gld to do the same."

"I shall, indeed," said Jack.

"And you really will then pass some time in the Ken?" said Figgins. "That will be glorious. I'll go, and at once—Murder! Oh, you rascal! Dick, why don't you put me in mind of the gout, you villain! But you never do. You never do!"

CHAPTER CLXXVIII.

A FIGHT UNDERGROUND.—THE DEATH OF THE OFFICER.

Right under the bar-parlour of the old Pine-apple Inn, and extending for a considerable distance back beneath the stable-yard, was a large vaulted room or hall. The flooring was composed of flat red tiles, laid down very nicely, and the walls were of plaster, with, here and there, a plank placed in it flat-wise for the purpose of keeping it up, as immediately behind the plaster was nothing but earth.

Along the ceiling of this large apartment hung at regular intervals six hoops of tin, made each of them to hold a dozen candles, so that when the whole were lit, the place had a tolerably brilliant effect. Right down the centre of the place was a range of tables, and, at least, a hundred seats of various sorts and sizes were upon the floor.

This was one of the most celebrated Boozing Ken in the City of London. It could only be reached by going through the bar-parlour, and then there were two more playing the part of sentinels, who had to be satisfied regarding the propriety of admitting any one before they were allowed to go on, so that it was next

to impossible for any officer or spy to make his way into the place ; and it was in such places that daring robberies were concocted—that assignations for burglaries and highway peculations were made ; and, in fact, all the business of the London thieves was conducted at the Boozing Kens, of which there were in London about six, and all of them perfectly well known to the police.

To those who are unacquainted with the mode in which Police business was then carried on in London, it may appear rather extraordinary that such nurseries of crime were allowed to exist; but the thing was a regular system, and the officers went upon the idea, that if there were no thieves, there would be no need of officers ; therefore, Boozing Kens, as nurseries for thieves, or Family Kens, as they were sometimes called, were no bad things in their way.

It was very seldom indeed that any of the regular officers intruded into such places, but they had, no doubt, their spies in most of them, so that when any gentleman was wanted particularly, they could dog him from one of the Kens and pounce upon him without his being aware that he was watched from his bacchanalian orgies in the Family Ken.

It was about one hour after dark that Duval and Jack made their appearance in the bar-parlour in order to go into the Ken, where there would be many that, no doubt, would know them both well, and where from all they would be sure to receive the welcome that their celebrity warranted.

Old Figgins had managed, by smothering up his gouty leg in many bandages, and then keeping it from the floor, by the aid of a long piece of list going round his foot, and then round his neck, to hobble, by the help of his son, down the short flight of twelve steps that led to the short passage at the end of which was the Family Ken.

A large blanket hung before the entrance, and it had hung long enough to have assumed a colour more resembling the back of a chimney than a blanket, but it was liked better than a door would have been by the frequenters of the place. It never made any noise, and it was always closed of itself, easily, silently, and closely. Its hinges and its lock were never out of order; and, moreover, it smothered noises much better than any door would have done, let it have been ever such a good one.

Already a sufficient number of persons was assembled to make a confused murmur of noises come upon the night air, even through the blanket entrance to the Ken. The two sentinels stepped respectfully aside, when they saw old Figgins.

"Getting better, Mr. F.?" said one.

"A little, Bill, a little."

"Oh, you will be all right again, soon," said the other. "They say the gout is a very healthy thing to have, and shows a man is in good condition."

"Do they? I should like to be out of condition a little then, so that I might give it the go-by. Open the curtain, these are friends of mine."

"Then they are of the right sort."

The blanket was pulled aside, and the roar of voices and the steam of tobacco smoke that came from the Ken were for the moment quite overpowering, and perhaps, to Claude and to Jack, who were much used to the pure air of the open country, the loaded atmosphere of that place was much more offensive than to any inhabitant of the city of London.

Neither Claude nor Jack, though, let those about them see that they shrank in the least from the atmosphere of the Ken. It would not have been policy so to do.

But little notice was taken either of Duval or of Jack on their first entrance into the Ken, but old Figgins, turning to his son, said—

"Now, Dick," and the young man, who was very powerful, at once lifted his father on to the end of the table nearest to him. Upon this he was seen by all in the Ken, consisting of about forty persons, and a loud shout arose, of—

"Figgs—Figgs! Old Figgs is on his legs."

"It's a lie," shouted Figgins. "I am only on one leg. I only wish you all had a touch of the gout, that's all."

"Thank you, Figgs."

"Stop a bit, that wasn't what I came to say to you all. Nothing at all like it. I came to announce 'Duval.'"

"Duval!" cried all the company at once.

"Yes, Claude Duval and Sixteen-string Jack."

"Stop—stop," said Jack. "Don't announce me, I am supposed to be dead, you know."

"Yes; but I'm very happy to be able to assure everybody here that you are not. Claude Duval, my family kids, and Sixteen-string Jack. Hurrah!"

A wild shout burst from the lips of all present, and the candles in the tin hoops shook again with the concussion of the air in that strange place.

"Sixteen-string Jack, poor fellow, suffered at Tyburn," cried a loud voice, "and it ain't the thing for any new hand to pick up an old pal's name."

"Ain't it? Well I——"

"For the love of Heaven say no more," whispered Jack. "I do not wish to be known to be in the land of the living, save to the few that I call my particular friends. Let the subject drop, I pray you."

"Very well—as you please, Jack."

"You will much oblige me."

"It shall be so. Now, my family men, I leave Claude Duval with you, and hope you will have a pleasant evening."

Another shout rose from the throats of the strange and motley assemblage, and Duval, turning to Figgins, said—

"A dozen bowls of punch as soon as convenient, old friend."

"And he has ordered a dozen bowls of punch," added Figgins, in a loud voice.

If anything had been wanting—which, in good honest truth, it was not—to add to the popularity of Duval, this would have fully supplied the deficiency. The shouting became quite prodigious; and it was not stilled until Claude raised his hand, and getting a brief silence, said—

"My friends, I beg of you not to create undue attention to the Ken to-night. I have many enemies, and I do not want them to fancy I am here. I know your good feelings towards me, and all I can do is for a few hours to take a glass with you, and then be off."

"To the road?" cried a voice.

"Yes," added Claude; "to the road!"

"Hurrah! hurrah!"

Another cheer was given, and then all was comparatively still. Claude and Jack went up to the farther end of the Ken, and a chair being placed upon a table, Duval was made to occupy it, whether he felt inclined to do so or not; and then, in the course of ten minutes, in came the steaming hot punch, which was welcomed with another shout of exultation by all present. Again Claude held up his hand, asking for silence, and the roar of voices again subsided in obedience to his wishes.

At this moment some ten or twelve new comers added to the boisterous hilarity of the scene, and the fun and frolic was at its height, when one suddenly cried—

"Bill Jinks is nabbed!"

There was a stillness for a moment or two, as though death had stopped the current of life-blood in the breast of every one present, and then a murmur of conversation arose, and another voice cried—

"Ned Soames has been shot, and left a blessed *widder* and eight babbies!"

"Let's have a collection, then," cried another. "We can give a shilling a-piece now, and a promise of future favours, can't we? Will you go round with the bag, Jerry?"

"That's your sort," said a tall man with a profusion of bright red hair. "I'll go round and collect the bobs. Now for it. Here's the bag. Anybody may put in what they please, but nothing short of a bob. That's the ticket. I knows the face of everybody here, so I shan't make any mistakes."

This individual produced a coarse canvas bag, and he then went from one to another of the company collecting the subscriptions, and giving the bag a shake as he came to each one, and making some jocose remark about the means of the party, which generally had the effect of extracting more than the shilling from him.

Suddenly he stopped before a short stout man, profusely marked by the small-pox, and in a puzzled tone said—

"Who the deuce are you?"

"Oh, don't you know me?" said the man. "I am called Ticklish Bob."

"Are you?"

"Yes, to be sure. There's a bull for the bag. Cut along."

"And pray what are you when you are at home? A cracksman, or a toby-hunter, or a knight of the road, or what?"

"Anything in a small way. I am a family man."

"Hilloa! who knows this one?" cried Jerry, raising himself up to his full height, and indicating the man with his thumb.

Everybody looked at him, but there was a general shaking of heads consequent upon the examination. It was quite clear that the man was not known, and it was equally clear—contingent upon that circumstance—that he was in a situation of some considerable personal peril.

"Oh, this is all stuff!" he cried. "Some of you must know me. Why, I've cracked a crib or two in my time. It's too bad to pretend not to know an old pal.—It's really too bad."

Some half-dozen strong men got cautiously between the suspected person and the door, or rather the blanket that did duty for a door, and one cried out—

"If anybody does know him, let them say so. If they don't, why in course he's a sneak."

"Me a sneak!" cried the man. "Oh, that is too bad; but if you don't like my company, I will be off at once. Gentlemen, I will go if that will be more pleasing to you. Only say the word, and of course I am off directly, gentlemen."

"We isn't gentlemen," said Jerry, "but we is family coves. Don't insult us by calling of us gentlemen, I begs; and as for going, old fellow, that's a thing as you'll do, when we knows something more of you. Does anybody know him?"

"No! no!" shouted the crowd of eager faces that crowded round the man, who now turned ghastly pale, and with a sickly smile upon his face, glanced around him, upon that throng of faces, in which he could not see one that bore to him a friendly expression.

"What have I done, pals," he said, "that I should be picked out to be made a butt of? How came I here, if I don't belong to the family? Come now, I'll stand another couple of bowls of punch. Only let us have harmony."

"That's just what we wants," said Jerry. "Lay hold of him, coves. Lay hold of him."

A couple of men seized the now trembling man, and Jerry striding up to him, said—

"Now, what have you got in your pockets, old chap. You say you are a cracksman, and if you are, perhaps you have got some of your tools about you."

"No—no. I am on no lay to-night, and so I have nothing with me. All I have is this guinea, and I am quite willing to spend it, and make an end of this affair. It will get a couple of right good bowls of punch, won't it, Mr. Figgins?"

"I can't go for to take upon myself all for to say," said Figgings. "It all depends upon circumstances, you see, old fellow. We shall know more about it in a little time."

"Now," said Jerry, "I flatter myself that I can search a fellow as well as any officer in England. In course, when I talk of searching, none o' this here honourable Family Ken knows what I means, but if you all looks you will all see'

A peal of laughter followed this joke of Jerry's, for to tell the truth, the honourable company were one and all admirably acquainted with the process of searching, very few of them having been exempt from that operation, at some time or another.

The unknown man now looked as though his last hour was come, but he did not make any opposition, for that he knew would be utterly and entirely useless. He only looked unutterable things.

"Let's see," added Jerry, as he proceeded with his search, and laid the various articles on the table, close at hand, amid roars of laughter from the whole Ken. "Let's see—a snuff-box, good—a handkerchief, one constable's staff, one pair of darbies, one pistol, one warrant.—Humph, when I was quite a little boy, my father and mother forgot to teach me to read. Here, Bill, what does the warrant say?"

"How do you know it's a warrant, Jerry?"

"Why, one day, a gentleman in a red waistcoat showed me one, and it looked just like this here, and arter that he wished me to stay a month or two in a very large house, and arter that some coves said, 'Not Guilty,' one day, and out I toddled again, that's all I knows about it. What does it say, Bill?"

"It directs all Justices, Headboroughs, Constables and others, to assist Mathew Mouldy to apprehend one Claude Duval!"

A shout of rage rose from the Ken, and the officer, for officer he really was, grew faint with terror.

"Let me go," he said. "It's of no use denying it now. I am an officer, and I came to look at Claude Duval, and to follow him and nab him if I could. I hid here in the daytime, under one of the tables, and only slipped out when the candles were lit, and now let me go. What good will it do you to do me any harm?"

"Mr. Mouldy," said Jerry, "your werry humble servant, I rather thinks as you is in for it now, and that you'll be blue mouldy afore anybody outside sees you again."

"You don't mean to murder me! You surely can't mean to murder me?"

"Oh, dear no; we will only—"

"Stop!" cried Claude. "I do not deny but that this is an affair that concerns you all; but still, you must confess that it more particularly concerns me."

"Anything but letting him go, Duval," said Jerry.

"Listen to me. He has come here for the purpose of having a good look at me, so that he might dog me when I leave, and take me. Let him have his look, and keep him here till I go; then, if he likes to come out with me and try his luck, I am quite willing."

"Knock him on the head here, at once," cried a voice.

"If you do," said Duval, "this is my last appearance in the Old Ken, and I leave it on the moment. Let him be here until I go: don't let him leave before me; that's all I ask of you, and then the danger is over."

"I give up the whole affair," cried the officer; "I give it all up. I swear to you, that I wouldn't touch Duval now if I saw him on the steps of Newgate.—Spare my life, and I will give up the whole affair!"

"No, no!" cried twenty or thirty voices. "Death to the spy! Death to the sneak!"

"It shall not be!" said Duval, in a voice of thunder.

CHAPTER CLXXIX.

THE OFFICER'S FATE.—THE DISPOSAL OF THE BODY.

The tone of voice in which Duval spoke was one that quite convinced all who heard him of the complete seriousness of his intention to protect the officer, and a feeling of great disappointment came over the family men in the Boozing Ken upon that account. A dead silence prevailed for several minutes.

"Listen to me, my friends," added Claude. "I should be the last man in the world to say anything or to do anything contrary to your general wishes or intents; but it is beneath any of us to do anything to this man short of killing him, and that it would be base to do,"

"Why base?"



CLAUDE'S SURPRISE AT THE FIRE ON HOUNSLOW HEATE.

"Because, my friends, we are nearly fifty to one."

The officer shrank as close to Claude as he could.

"What will you do with him then, captain?" said a voice.

"Let him come out with me, and if he plays the traitor I pledge myself to bring him back again."

"Good, good," cried several; "let it be so. The captain knows best. Let him have his own way in the matter."

"My friends," said Claude, "I sincerely thank you for this confidence in me. Be assured that what I do, I do for the general good; and if I saw occasion that this man should die, my hand would be the first to strike him as my voice would be the first to condemn him. But let us all steer clear of murder if we can. It looks like murder for so many to take the life of one."

"So it does—so it does. Claude Duval for ever! Hurrah!"

"You are safe for the present," said Claude to the officer; "beware how you tamper with that safety. I may not be again able to stand between you and those who feel strongly concerning you."

"Thank you," said the officer. "Can you tell me if that clock there, on the Hall, is right or not?"

"I think it is."

The clock, which for the special convenience of the frequenters of the Ken had been put up on one of the walls, at this moment began to strike twelve, and naturally enough all eyes were directed to it. When it had finished striking the officer suddenly scrambled on to the table that was the nearest to him, and cried out—

"As you have been all of you so generous as to spare my life all of you, I should like to say a few words, if it is only to let you know how truly grateful I am for the favour."

"Hold your row," said Joe.

"Get down," shouted a dozen voices. "We don't want any gammon."

A great many, however, seemed to wish to hear what the officer could possibly have to say, and shouted to him to go on; and amid the tumult, Claude said to him—

"Why, you must be next thing to an idiot to court so much attention towards you. Have you as many lives as a cat?"

"Perhaps I have," he said.

"Well, the consequences of your own folly be upon your own head. I wash my hands of it."

"Gentlemen," cried the officer; "gentlemen, I—"

"Call us prigs," shouted a voice. "We aint no gentlemen here."

"I will call you anything you like, if you will only permit me to say how grateful I am to you all; and, as a proof of it, I here produce a pistol, which you missed in your search of me. It is loaded; and to show you the entire confidence I have in your merciful intentions, I here deprive myself of it, my only defence, by discharging it against the wall."

To the surprise of everybody there, who saw no occasion for such an exhibition of confidence, the officer discharged his pistol against the earthen wall of the Boozing Ken.

There was a pause of a few moments duration; for, somehow, there was a general feeling, that this shot was but the commencement of something in which they might all be more or less interested; and then, the landlord's son rushed into the Ken, crying—

"Douse the glims! The grabs are all round the house. Douse the glims, and cut it!"

"Bravo!" cried the officer, and he made a spring at the throat of Claude. It was a daring act; but Claude caught him round the neck with his open right hand, and, in a moment, clasped his throat, as though it had been in a vice. Claude saw the officer's face turning blue, and then every light in the place was extinguished.

The darkness in the Ken was most profound, and the Babel of voices was most prodigious. The members of the "family" were availing themselves of all their knowledge of the localities of the place, to make their escape, and the riot was terrific.

It appeared that at the sound of the officer's pistol, which was an agreed upon signal between him and a strong force of officers on the outside, in case anything

should go wrong in his original arrangement, they were to storm the place with the hope of capturing Claude Duval by a rush.

That rush was now being made, and everything in the public-house was being upset by some fifteen well-armed officers, in their attempt to reach the Boozing Ken, where they only cared to make one prisoner; but that one was Claude, and in their estimation, worth all the rest.

Duval still held the officer by the throat, until he felt quite sure that he was no longer in the land of the living; and then he flung him a considerable distance from him.

Suddenly, Claude felt his arm clutched, and the voice of the son of the landlord sounded in his ear, saying—

"Follow me."

"Anywhere you like," said Claude.

"Hush!"

At this moment, as Claude followed wherever the young man chose to lead him, he heard the doors above in the house—doors that had been closed to keep back the officers, being broken open, with a crashing sound,

"Our friends are in earnest," whispered the young man. "Take hold of my coat, and keep as close to me as you can. We will baffle them yet, I think."

"I hope so."

Claude had not the least idea of where he was being led to; all he was at all aware of was, that the places through which he passed had a very peculiar earthy smell, as though damp and mildew had for long marked them as their own. But he knew that he could well, and truly, keep implicitly to his guide; and he felt a confidence, that not ten times the reward that was offered for him would induce either the old publican, or his son, to betray him.

"Don't speak," whispered the young man, "until I tell you that we are effectually out of all possible earshot of our foes. Then say what you like."

Claude upon this was profoundly silent, and continued to follow his guide wherever it might please him to go.

The gloomy, earthy smell of the passages continued, and at length the publican's son said—

"All's right, I think, now. You are safe, Duval."

"And I have to thank you. Where are we?"

"We are in the cellar of a house three doors off from our own; of course, we must be tolerably careful not to create any alarm, although, by this time, the inhabitants of the house are, of course, in bed."

"Then, you don't know the people?"

"Oh, no—only by sight and name. They have not the remotest idea that their cellarage is one-half so extensive as it is, nor that there is a narrow communication between one dark corner of it and the Ken. The fact is, this house once belonged to a man called Slashing Tim, who suffered at Tyburn."

"I have heard of him."

"Well, he and my father were old pals, and they made the communication between the cellars here and the Ken themselves; but that was long ago, in the old man's young days."

"So I should think. But how still everything is."

"Yes, expect the officers have met with a little disappointment. They have, no doubt, by this time found their way, with lights, into the Ken, and are rather astonished not to see you. They will not interfere with any one else; for, luckily, the only two or three they would have pounced upon, are not here to-night."

"In truth, I am glad of it; for it would have been my presence alone that would have brought the danger upon them; and now, the sooner I get off and away, and on the road, the better I shall be pleased. There is one thing, however, that gives me uneasiness."

"What is that?"

"My horse. I expect it is tolerably well known to some of the officers; and if they should chance to hunt your stables through, and find him there, they will guess that I am not far off."

"Make yourself quite easy about that, Claude. Has your horse three white feet and a white star on his forehead?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Yes, Claude, he has, and if you were to see him now in our stables, you would find all those distinctive marks upon him."

"Ah, I understand you. You have been so good as to whiten him a little to prevent prying eyes from saying—'That is Duval's horse.'"

"Exactly so; and now will you exercise your patience a little, and stay where you are, while I go and see what is going on at the bar; I will not be away one moment longer than may be absolutely necessary."

"A thousand thanks. Don't hurry on my account."

Claude, in another moment, found himself alone in the cellars, and so profoundly dark were they, that he literally could not see his hand before his face, and it was only by cautiously feeling all round him, that he satisfied himself he was not quite close to some wall, against which he might hurt himself, if he moved a step.

Suddenly a faint starlike light broke the intense darkness of the cellar, and from quite another direction to that in which the son of the old publican had disappeared, there came a figure which filled Claude for the moment with astonishment.

A very little, old, decrepit man, attired in a miserable dressing-gown and carrying a candle-end stuck in a piece of cleft stick came tottering into the cellar. He was muttering to himself as he came, and Claude could just catch the words—

"Ay, ay, it all helps. It all helps. Who knows but I may get old some day?—I ain't at all old now. What is seventy-seven? Nothing—nothing, and it all helps.—Only another guinea, but it is another, that's a comfort. It is another.—Ay, ay—it all helps."

The old man repaired direct to a particular portion of the cellar-floor, and then with a knife, which he took from his pocket, he began digging, until at only a couple of inches or so from the surface, he dug up a small iron box. This he dug up and held in his trembling hands with quite a religious veneration.

CHAPTER CLXXIX.

DUVAL IS ON THE ROAD AGAIN, AND STOPS TWO PASSENGERS.

Claude was quite astonished at the conduct of the old man, but when he saw him open the little iron box, and by the light of his candle-end, gloat over the sight of some gold that was in it, he fully comprehended that he was one of those miserable beings who submit to a hundred privations to accumulate gold, lest by some freak of fortune, they should be compelled to submit to two or three.

"All safe—all safe," muttered the old miser. "Here is my money and no human eye looks upon it but myself. Yes, all is very safe indeed, here."

How little he suspected that one of the most celebrated highwaymen of the age was within twelve paces of him!

"Yes, yes," he continued, "all's safe, and here goes the other to add to the store. Ah, my glittering beauties!"

Claude felt some one touch him lightly on the arm, and upon turning, he found it was the landlord's son. They both looked on with no small amount of amazement at the miser's proceedings.

"It would almost be a charity," whispered the son, "to take his gold from him."

"It would kill him. You had better take his life."

"I will take neither; but yet a knowledge of this secret of the old man may be useful some day."

"Hush! he is listening."

The old miser thought evidently that he had heard something, for as he knelt upon the cellar-floor, he put himself into a listening attitude; but as both Claude and the landlord's son remained now profoundly quiet, he thought he was deceived.

"It is nothing," he said. "Nothing; or, if anything, only some rat. Ha! —ha! I have no objection to the rats looking at me—it is rats on two legs that I dread. Ha!—ha! All his safe."

After this the old man covered up his little iron box of gold, and having patted down the earth above it, he took up the little notched stick, in the cleft of which the candle-end was nearly expiring, and hobbled from the cellars.

"All is right in the Ken," said the young man to Claude.

"What, have the officers left?"

"They have; and what is more, they have left without noticing the dead body of their comrade, which had rolled under one of the old tables and lay there quite hidden."

"He is dead then?"

"Yes. You, I suppose, managed that for him, after all."

"I fancy I did; and after the trouble I had taken to save him, it was perhaps more my business to do so than any one's else in the whole Ken. I am sorry he brought such a fate upon himself, but he amply deserved it. It was the fortune of war."

"It was. Follow me, Claude, and you shall soon see the night sky again."

"It will be very welcome. I assure you that if I am many hours without breathing the open air, I get unhappy; and the air that is loaded with the damp smell of vegetation, amid trees and flowers, is the most welcome of all to my senses."

The young man led the way from the cellars of the house into a small area, and then forcing a door, that had upon it a very flimsy bolt indeed, they found themselves fairly in the house. They then lit a dark lantern, and saw that it was a kitchen into which they had made their way.

After this, although the kitchen-door was locked, the difficulty of getting to the passage and street doors was not by any means great to persons so accustomed to overcome that class of obstacles as Claude and his friend were.

The street-door being made fast upon the inside, of course, opposed no obstacle whatever to their progress, and Claude, with his friend, soon stood in the open street.

"My horse!" said Claude. "Oh, for my horse!"

"It is here," said the young man.

As he spoke, a lad, leading Claude's horse, made his appearance; and the transformation created by the white marks that had been made upon the animal, was so complete, that even Duval himself, with all his intimate knowledge of the animal, would have hesitated to pronounce him his.

"If I were as well disguised," said Claude, "I should think nothing of calling at Newgate or at Bow Street to ask them what the time of day was. Will it come off?"

"It is only whitening and gum."

"Good. I will let it be until I get to the country. But where is Jack?"

"Here," said Jack, stepping up. "I am all right, Claude; for Heaven's sake, let us be off. I have a horrid tale to tell you of that poor devil of an officer as we go along."

"But he is dead?"

"Yes, now."

Jack shuddered as he spoke; and then he mounted his horse, which he himself had, and Claude mounted his; but before they trotted off, Claude shook hands with the landlord's son, saying—

"Remeber me to your father, kindly."

"I will; but the old man has a dismal presentiment upon his mind that he will never see you again in this word, Claude Duval."

"Has he? I will soon knock that out of his head. Wait for me a moment, Jack."

"What would you do?"

"Nothing particular. I will be back in a moment; I am only going to disprove my old friend's presentiment, that he will not see me again in this world, that's all; and if all the officers in London were in the way I would shake hands with him yet, and wish him good night, or rather early morning."

Despite the fears of Jack, that he would be running into the greatest danger by so acting, Claude must needs call upon the old gouty publican; and springing from his horse at the door of the house, he strode in, anxious to conclude the interview as shortly as possible.

"This way," said the son. "Father is this way."

"All's right," said Claude, as he ran up stairs after him; and then in another moment, he was shaking hands with the old man, and saying—"So you thought you would see me no more, did you old friend? but here I am after all."

"Oh, why did you venture?"

"To see you."

"But it is madness. I am certain as that I live that the officers are hiding in the house even now, and if they see you, or if they suspect that you are here, you are lost—lost!"

"I'm off in a moment. We are not all lost that are in danger. Good-by, old friend. You and I will meet again, depend upon it."

"No—no, I have a presentiment that we shall not."

"And I," said Claude, "have a presentiment the other way; so I am resolved that mine shall come true. Farewell."

Claude had only taken two steps towards the door, when it was slammed shut violently from without, and locked, and then a loud voice cried—

"I have him! I have him! He is in this room! Come on! I have him! Here! Here! I have him at last! This way, comrades, I have locked the door!"

"Have you really," said Claude; "but you forgot the window."

The window was a French casement, and opened on a low small balcony.—Claude was on that balcony in a moment, and Jack saw him.

"My horse," said Claude.

"Yes, yes," cried Jack. He understood fully what Claude meant, which was, that the horse should be brought under the balcony to facilitate his descent. Jack placed the obedient steed in the required position, and in an instant Claude disappeared on to the saddle.

"All's right," he cried.

"Thank the fates, it is," said Jack; "and now, let us be off out of London, Claude; for the risks of the last few hours have made me sick at heart. Off—off——"

"In a moment, Jack. Now for it."

In another instant, Claude would have been off, and would soon have distanced all pursuit; but suddenly, a man appeared at the door of the public-house with a thick holster pistol in his hand; and, levelling it at Claude, he cried, as he fired it—

"Take that! I don't miss often!"

The bullet struck Claude upon the left arm, producing a strange stunning sensation, but, at the time, nothing more, and in an instant Claude drew one of his pistols from the side of the saddle, and firing it at the man, cried—

"I never miss, where I mean to hit!"

With a yell, like the last cry of some wild animal, the officer fell back into the passage of the public-house.

"That's done," said Claude. "Now, Jack, for a trot."

They clapped spurs to their horses, and went at a rapid pace into Finsbury Square; and then, turning their horses' heads westwards, off they went at a gallop

that soon left all chance of pursuit far behind them. The horses were perfectly fresh, and had been well looked to at the public-house, so that they did not flag in their pace in the least. The long straggling thoroughfare of the New Road was passed; nor did Claude materially slacken his pace until he found himself in the green lanes, and among the meadows, which now form the site of Cambridge and Oxford Terraces.

All danger from any pursuers had long since been passed, and it was with a face full of satisfaction that Claude now once again, after so many perils, found himself once more in the open air; and as the light of the early morning shone upon the tall trees in the hedgerows, and the wild birds began to sing their early songs, he felt that glow of the imagination which all true lovers of nature feel when in the midst of her glorious and beautiful works.

"I breathe again, Jack," he said.

"And I, too," replied Jack. "London is something to me very like a large prison, Claude."

"It can be compared to nothing else, Jack; for amid its wilderness of bricks and mortar, are you not shut out from all that is bright and beautiful in nature? How those who can fly to country sights, and country sounds, voluntarily submit themselves to the tiresome artificialities of city life, is to me inconceivable."

"And to me. Hark at that!"

A thrush was sitting upon a blackthorn bush not far from them, and was pouring out a gush of melody.

"Yes, that is better music than any over-dressed crowd ever heard in the heated atmosphere of a concert-room."

"It is, indeed; but where do you think of going to, Claude, now? We are rather too near town to be quite safe."

"We shall never be quite safe, Jack. But I intend to keep on the western road a little while, and do what business I can. I look upon the route from Tyburn Pike to Guildford as my manor, and I take toll of who I can. I am not over rich, and you must recollect that now I have all the responsibilities of a married man upon me. Ha! Who comes here? Don't you hear the sound of horses' feet, Jack?"

"I do."

They both rode a little on one side, and in the course of a few minutes a couple of mounted men came up. One of them was a thick-headed bully of a fellow, but the other had all the primness and neatness of a gentleman in his clothing, although a certain air of vulgar religious fashion about his clothing very much detracted from his general aspect. Upon observing Claude and Jack, he rode up to them, and said in a canting nasal sort of tone—

"My friends, have you been long hereabouts?"

"No," said Claude, "not above a couple of hours."

"I do not wish to offend you, but I have had information that the notorious Claude Duval will be in this neighbourhood shortly, and if you have no objection to a fifty-pound-note, and will assist me to capture him, you shall have it."

"I have not the least objection to the note, but is not this notorious Claude Duval—I suppose it is the highwayman you mean?—a very desperate fellow?"

"He is, but here are four of us, and although he has a companion with him, I think we may capture him."

"How came you to know he would be hereabouts?"

"Why if you must know, it was Dick Turpin told me."

"Dick Turpin?"

"Yes. He, you know—or you may have heard—is no better than he should be, and he gave me the information. How he got it I don't pretend to know."

"And pray where is Dick Turpin?"

"On the road here somewhere. I and my man took him prisoner; but upon his giving us the information regarding Claude Duval, we let him go, for, you see, no reward is offered for him."

"Quite a sufficient reason, I grant, quite sufficient. I should like to see this

Dick Turpin, though; but as it is, I consent of course to your terms, and only hope you have the money with you."

"Oh, yes, I have it, and as soon as Claude Duval is taken and I have a good hold of him, you shall have it, you may depend. This is your servant, I suppose?"

"Yes, he is, and he will assist us very much. Of course, you will give him something, likewise?"

"I don't mind a ten-pound-note if we are successful; but mind you, I give nothing unless I have fairly hold of Claude Duval. Then the money is due, and you shall have it on the instant, for if he gets away after I have got a grip of him, I will give him leave, and say that he is the better man."

As he spoke, he stretched out a large bony hand, which certainly might, if its owner had courage as well as strength, be of some service in holding any one tolerably tight.

"Well," said Claude, "I have not a very long time to spare, and I must be getting on a little, so let us walk our horses westward. If we meet him, well and good. If we don't, of course it can't be helped; but somehow, it comes across me that we shall."

"So it does me, my friend. I dreamt it, last night, and my dreams generally come true."

"So do mine. Do you know, I dreamt that I met an idiot, who handed me a fifty-pound-note for nothing at all."

"And idiot, sir?"

"Yes, to be sure, and you are the man. Jack—Jack."

"Yes. I am here."

"Look to that fellow behind, and blow his brains out at once, if he stirs an inch. Now, my friend, your dream has come true, for I am Claude Duval; and my dream will come true, for you will hand me the fifty-pound-note; so you see what wonderful and providential things dreams are, at times."

The man glared at Claude, as though he had seen a spectre, and he repeated the words "Claude Duval!" as though they had only come to him floating on the air, and he had not the least idea in the world as to who had given utterance to them. Then, suddenly, in a screaming voice, he called out—

"Jenkins, catch the other one, I've got this!"

The great, bony hand was stretched out, and Claude's collar was fastened upon with no despicable grasp.

"You would be wise," said Claude, "to take your hand away."

"Catch the other one, Jenkins! Catch the other one!"

"I have got him," growled Jenkins.

"Call out murder, Jenkins! Call out murder, Jenkins!"

"Murder," said Jenkins, in one of the quietest tones in the world; then Claude darted forward his right hand, and caught the sanctified-looking person by the throat, with a grasp that seemed to be something superhuman.

"Let's see," he said, "who will hold on the longest."

The face of the would-be captor of the highwayman grew red, and he shouted—"Jenkins—Jenk—Jen—Je——"

Claude's fingers compressed his throat too closely to enable him to speak, and the hold he had taken of Claude's collar gradually relaxed, and finally fell off altogether.

"Fool!" cried Duval, as he gave him a shake, and then letting go his throat, he slid off his horse to the ground. "Jack, where are you? Is it true that you are a prisoner?"

"Not exactly," said Jack. "This fellow is as quiet as a lamb. I never met with a more favourably-inclined man."

"Who are you?" said Claude, riding up to the bullet-headed looking man, who was quietly seated on his horse, looking at Jack, who had levelled a pistol at his head. "Who are you, fellow?"

"Take it easy."

"But who are you?"

"Jok Jenkins; I always takes things easy. You are the biggest, so I lets you have your way. I always gives in to the strongest and biggest, I does. If I was to come across some little boy, I could whack him; but otherwise I takes things easy."



THE HORROR OF CLAUDE AND PARTY AT FINDING LUCY A CORPSE.

"Why, you are quite a philosopher, Jenkins."

"Anything you like, sir."

"Well, I will trouble you to dismount, and to take your master there, and throw him into yon ditch with the duck-weed upon it."

"Certainly, sir; oh, certainly. Take it easy. Of course, sir. Anything you like; you are a great deal the biggest, sir, as you will see when I get down. Then

don't you see, I'm bound to do just what you like, you see, in an easy way, sir: Throw master in the ditch? Oh certainly."

"Well," said Claude, "you certainly are the drollest fellow ever I came near. Before our friend here goes into the ditch, Jack, just lighten his pockets of anything that would not benefit by a damping."

Jack rifled the half-insensible man's pockets, in a few minutes. He was slowly recovering from the insensibility that had been induced by the squeeze Claude had given his neck; and while jack was rifling his pockets, he glared at him with a stupid half-stunned sort of look, not knowing very well what was going on. Claude started both the horses, and they went off at a good canter down the green lane.

"Now," said Claude to Jenkins, "you can do what I told you."

"Yes, sir."

He lifted his master from the ground easily enough, for Jenkins had a good quantity of brutal strength about him.

"Help, help!" cried the sanctified-looking personage. "Help, murder, what are you about, Jenkins?"

"Take it easy. They are both bigger than we are, master. Take it easy; anything for a quiet life, you know. I am only going to throw you in the ditch. That's all, master. Take things easy."

"In the ditch? Murder—murder!"

"I must. Look at him. Big he is; and so it's quite right, and it must be done. It's of no use your kicking, master; there you go."

Splash! The sanctified-looking man was struggling in the ditch among the duck-weed, and it was well for him that he had recovered so far as he had, or he would inevitably have been drowned, for all Jenkins would have troubled himself in the matter.

"Ah!" said Jenkins, as he saw his master gradually struggling up the bank. "Ah, he don't look nice, but it had to be done. We must in this world give way to the biggest."

"Murder!" screamed the unfortunate wretch who had made in his mind so sure of capturing Claude. "Murder, I am smothered."

The duck-weed had stuck to him in the most eccentric manner, so that he seemed as though, by the touch of an enchanter's wand, he had been changed to green, including his face and hands.

"Is he to be pushed in again, sir?" said Jenkins to Claude.

"No," replied Claude, as he mounted, "I think he has had enough for this once; and I leave you now, Mr. Jenkins, with the most profound admiration for your philosophy."

CHAPTER CLXXX.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE MOCK DICK TURPIN.

"Come on, Jack," said Claude.

Off they both went at a sharp trot from the scene of the late encounter. There was not the least likelihood of either Jenkins or his master following them, seeing that those two worthies were now on foot, but still Claude and Jack thought it best to place as speedily as they could a few miles between them and their late adversaries. At length, with an explosion of laughter, which he could no longer resist, Claude drew up, and turned round to Jack.

"Did you ever, Jack," he cried, "in all your life and experience, meet with such a fellow as that Jenkins?"

"Never," said Jack. "He is the most extraordinary original I ever encountered. I wonder if that odd manner is natural to him, or only assumed as a result of a general feeling of disgust at society at large."

"Oh, it is natural, Jack."

"Can you really think so? It sounded to me like the most exquisite piece of grave irony that I had heard for a very long time indeed; bid extremes meet, Claude, and we can only say that our friend, Jenkins, is either a great fool or a great philosopher. When I held my pistol to his head, and told him to stir upon risk of death, he replied, 'Just so,' and from that moment did not make the smallest effort to take any advantage of me."

"He is, in truth, an oddity."

"Most surely. But look at the pocket-book, Claude, that I took from his master. I have not had time to examine it. I hope there will be something in it to make it worth the trouble of taking."

Jack handed the pocket-book to Claude, who opened it with all due gravity. The first thing he took out of it was a very carefully folded, but terribly worn, silk nightcap: the second thing was the unpaid bill of some laundress, amounting to two shillings and four pence; and that was all.

Claude looked at Jack, and Jack looked at Claude, and then the latter again burst out into an uproarious fit of laughter, while Jack pulled rather a long face, and quietly said—

"We are done."

"Yes, Jack, we are done; and upon my word this, to me, has been a most amusing adventure. I don't think the poor devil had one farthing in the world, and the offer of the fifty-pound-note to me for my own apprehension was only a magnificent piece of bombast to secure some efficient assistance. There is only one thing that I do not comprehend in the whole affair, and that, to tell the truth, does disturb me very much."

"And that," said Jack, "I can guess, is the use that has been made of the name of Dick Turpin."

"True—most true. I would stake my life upon the good faith of Dick; but it does puzzle me to find that, for the second time, information of my whereabouts is by two distinct people attributed to him."

"But you don't believe it, Claude?"

"No, upon my life, I do not, and until I have it from the lips of Dick himself I will not believe it. But come on, Jack. We are most magnificently done as regards the pocket-book, and the poor devil who owned it is very appropriately punished. Let us push on over Wormholt Scrubs here, and who knows but we may meet with better fortune?"

"Don't you think it would be advisable to change your costume, Claude?"

"Why hardly yet, Jack. I flatter myself that in this present dress I look very respectable, and like some gentleman of independent means, while I must confess your getting up as a first-class groom is exquisite. I do not think that we have any enemies close upon our track who know of this disguise, and to fresh foes it will carry us through anything."

"There is reason in that, Claude; so let us, as you say, push on over the Scrubs."

Wormholt Scrubs was then a very much wilder and more country-looking neglected a spot than it is now that a slashing railway passes through the middle of it; and when Claude and Jack came upon it, they could, in the wide expanse before them, see no sign of any human being save themselves. They took a direct route across the Shrubs in the direction of Hounslow, where upon a more mature consideration Claude intended to dine.

About three hundred yards to the left there was a small clump of fir trees, and it was about the only shelter for the space of a mile or more; and just as they passed this little clump of trees, there issued out from it a horseman, attired in a faded sky-blue coat with tarnished silver lace upon it. Huge jack-boots were upon his feet, and he wore likewise a slouching hat with a very large buckle. His horse was rather a smart-looking animal enough, and take him for all in all, he looked like some unattached drunken subaltern officer in the army, who upon slender means contrived to cut a sorry dash among a not very creditable class of

society. Such characters—now happily extinct, for an officer is forced to be a gentleman—were very frequent even fifty years ago.

He came prancing on, with a devil-may-care sort of look, and as Claude had passed on, he encountered Jack, to whom he said, in an authoritative voice—

"Who is your master, sirrah?"

"A gentleman," said Jack.

"But his name and calling, sirrah? Answer me."

"He it just before you," said Jack; "and you had much better ask him yourself. Information is always best from the highest scource. Here he is."

"B——Sir, I'll remember your insolence. Hang it, sir, how dare you speak to me in this way?"

Hearing the altercation, Claude turned his horse's head, and trotted back.

"What is all this about?" he said. "Is the gentleman out of his mind? or has he lost his way on the Scrubs?"

"No, sir," said the fellow, "this gentleman is neither mad, nor has he lost his way upon the Scrubs. Confound my blood, sir, I am a gentleman, and in want of a little ready cash; do you understand that, sir?—Curse everybody—eh, sir?"

"Yes," said Claude, "I understand it, as well as your ridiculous and stupidly profane oaths will permit me."

"Oh, oh, you belong to the church, do you? Well, well, my fine dressed gentleman, we will borrow a few guineas from you. In a word—your money or your life!"

"What! Are you really, then, a highmayman?" said Claude.

"Call me what you like; but stand and deliver!"

The fellow produced a pistol nearly as large as a small carbine, which he levelled at the head of Claude, who, however, took no more notice of it than as if it had been a bit of stick; but turning to Jack, he said—

"Here is a highwayman, if you never saw one before. He is quite a curiosity in his way. Let's ride round him and have a good look at him. How often I have wished to meet with a real live, bragging, bouncing, cowardly rascal, such as this."

As Claude spoke he walked his horse slowly round the fellow, who, with a growing fear upon his face, kept turning and facing him, still keeping the immense pistol presented at his head all the while.

"Come, come," he said, "these tricks won't do for me."

"Nor for me," said Claude; "so go your way, and I will go mine. I have seen quite enough of you, my friend."

"But I have not seen enough of you, my friend; and so, I say again, your money or your life! I am one too accustomed to say 'Stand and deliver!' to be trifled with."

"Do you mean seriously to say that you want my money?"

"Ay, brother; and your watch and jewellery too. Ha!—ha!"

"If you will stand on your head for five minutes I will give you a shilling, but not otherwise, my fine fellow."

"Then you and your servant may as well say your prayers, for your two lives are not worth a minute's purchase. Perhaps, when I tell you who I am, you will come to a different conclusion. I am Dick Turpin!"

A sudden light broke over Claude's countenance. Here then, at once, was the mystery unravelled. This fellow was personating Dick Turpin in the neighbourhood; and not a doubt remained in the bosom of Claude but that it was from this man that the gentleman in the ditch had obtained his information.

"Dick Turpin?" said Claude.

"Yes. You have heard of me?"

"Oh, surely. Really, this is one of the pleasantest adventures that I have met with for a very long while, indeed. I am Claude Duval!"

The fellow reeled again in his saddle, and the gigantic pistol fell from his palsied fingers to the ground. Claude sprung upon him, and clutched his arm.

"Stir a step, and you are a dead man. I will blow your brains out with as little compunction of conscience as I would those of a mad dog."

"Oh, spare me! I—am—only a poor fellow!"

"I know it; and a pitiful fellow are you into the bargain, you vagabond. Tell me this moment why you assumed the name of one who is as different from you as Hercules is to a sick child? Speak, dolt! Jack, keep an eye on him. Pitch him off his horse, or he will give us a race after him yet."

Jack charged against the fellow, but he anticipated the shock by slipping off his horse on to the ground, and leaving the animal quietly to crop the scanty herbage on the common.

"Spare my life," he moaned, "and ask me what you like. I will tell you everything. Only spare my life!"

"Why did you assume the name of Turpin?"

"Because—I—found—that it frightened people, and so they let me rob them when otherwise they wouldn't."

"How comes it that you have given information concerning me to several people?"

"I—only—slightly—mentioned——"

"Come—come; let us have no prevarication. You gave certain information concerning my movements: why did you do so?"

"I will tell the truth. I was afraid of meeting you about this neighbourhood, and thought it would be a good thing to frighten you away to some other road—that was all."

"But your information—how did you procure it, for it has been strangely correct?"

"There is a girl named Lucy—you knew her once?"

"Ah!"

"Yes; she was your girl once, you know, Claude Duval, and when you cast her off, you thought she came by her death; but she didn't, and she is now with me; but she don't, and she won't forget you; and she says she will never rest until she sees you hung. She dogs you as much as she can, and when she knows anything she sets the officers after you. I warn you to beware of her, Claude Duval, for the passion of a jealous woman knows no bounds. This that I tell you you may rely upon. It is the whole truth."

"By Heaven," said Claude, "it must be so! It has the aspect of truth about it. Tell me—what does she know of me?"

"She knows, she says, that you are married, though I tell her that it is not very likely, because——" (Claude made an impatient gesture.) "Well, she says you are married, and I believe, if she could get at your wife, she would take her life."

Claude staggered a little.

"Do you hear that, Jack?" he said in a whisper.

"I do, Claude; and a bitter thing it is to hear."

"Very—very, Jack. What can I do?"

"Above all things, Claude, do not let the man see that you are so keenly touched by what he has told you."

"But you believe it, Jack?"

"I do. There is, I think, something about truth that carries conviction with it. I do not think he has deceived. In his fear he has spoken out the exact truth, Claude, and it is well that you know it."

"And yet I was happy in knowing it not. But no matter—no matter. He has, by truth-telling, disarmed me of all resentment against him now. I will speak to him again."

Claude turned away from his brief conference with Jack, and again addressed the man.

"My friend, I believe that which you have told me; and because I do believe it, I hold no enmity against you for what has passed. I advise you, for the future, not to take the name of Turpin, for he is a man of rather sudden and

fierce temper, and should he encounter you, and know that you have played him such a trick, I would not give much for your life. So much I say to you in the way of advice."

"I thank you, Duval. I will no more personate Turpin. I am very much obliged to you. I was not always the disreputable devil that I am now."

"I don't think you were. Your language has a smack in it of something better."

"You are right. There was a time when—But, no matter. I am what I am, and to think even of the past, is like planting daggers in my heart. I have no friend in all the world now."

"You may make one in me if you like."

"May I indeed? Do you really mean it?"

"From my soul I do."

A change came over the face of the man, and he was evidently too much affected for some few moments to speak. Then he held out his hand, and in choking accents, he said—

'Will you take it?"

"Freely," said Claude, as he clasped it in his own. "Most freely. And now that we understand each other, tell me how I can serve you?"

"No way at present, Duval; but I can, I hope, serve you by keeping such a watch upon Lucy, that she shall have no opportunity of doing any harm to one whom I can easily imagine you value before all the world. That I think I can do for you, Claude Duval; and this, so help me Heaven, I will do for you."

CHAPTER CLXXXI.

CLAUDE SEEKS THE RETREAT OF LUCY.—THE LONE HUT ON THE HEATH.

Claude looked very serious for a few moments, and then he said—

"I have that degree of faith in what a madly jealous woman may do, that I shall not be easy until I see Lucy myself and speak to her."

"That you can do."

"Tell me, then, where I may be sure to find her."

"I will so describe the place to you that you cannot miss it. There is upon Hounslow Heath a pond, and near to it an old barn, with the roof blown off."

"I know it."

"Well, a few paces from that barn there is a cottage with a very small patch of garden-ground reclaimed from the heath, and there you will find her. But I would like to know when you purpose coming, for I would take care she shall be at home to receive you."

"I beg you," said Claude, "not to give her the slightest hint of my coming, as that would spoil all."

"Depend upon me, I will not."

"Then to-night, during the hours between twelve and one, expect me. If I get the girl's promise to rid herself of her wild resolve, I shall be satisfied, for I do not think she would break such a promise made to me."

"I am afraid, Duval, you do not know her so well as I do. While she thought herself yours, no doubt her behaviour to you was gentle enough; but now she is a very devil incarnate."

"Well—well, I will see her, and try what kind words will do, and if they will not, my duty to others calls upon me to adopt some course that will protect her, who is best of all entitled to my protection."

Duval and Jack very shortly then took leave of their new friend; and when they were alone again, Jack said, with much earnestness of manner—

"Take care of yourself, Claude, when you visit that girl, for at the sight of you in the bitterness of her rage she may try to do you a mischief."

"I will be careful, Jack. I must confess that her threats against Cicely fill me with uneasiness. But I will come to some conclusions upon that matter to-night. Ah, whom have we here now?"

Two persons on horseback, a lady and a gentleman, approached. The lady was young and handsome, but the gentleman in every part of his attire, and even in the manner in which he sat on his horse and held the bridle, showed the coxcomb. As he approached Claude and Jack, he put an eye-glass to his eye, where, by a curious contraction of the muscles, he held it fast, and glared at them both for a moment or two in silence.

Jack was, or this exquisite fancied that he was, in his way slightly, so he drawled out—

"Fellow, get out of the world, will you! Don't answer me—I can't hold any conversation with the lower classes. I think they ought all to be put out of the world. Out of the way, fellow."

"Did you address me?" said Jack.

"Ah, he speaks. Out of the way, fellow, and don't let me hear your horrid low class voice."

"Don't be angry, Jack," said Claude, laughing as he saw the colour mounting to Jack's cheek. "Dont be angry; he is only a curiosity. You should never be annoyed at any animal following its vocation, and its natural impulses, Jack. Men are men, apes are apes, as you see by the specimen before you."

"Good God," cried the exquisite. "I shall have to finish this fellow. Stand aside, my dear Helen, while I send him into another world."

With this the conceited personage drew a remarkably slender sword, and made a flourish with it in the air, no doubt fully expecting that Jack would start back in alarm; but when he found that such was not the case, but that with his hand raised, Jack watched him steadily, he said—

"Fellow, I will spare your life. It my be useful to you, fellow, so I shall spare it. Pass on, pass on, fellow. Low man, you are spared."

Claude was very much amused at what was going on, and probably much more so on account of the evident rage that Jack was in; a rage which he had the greatest difficulty in keeping under, but of the existence of which the dandified personage who had provoked it, did not seem to have the least idea.

"Are you going to get out of the way, fellow?"

"No," said Jack.

"Oh, ah. Then I shall go round, for nothing can be so very horrid, after all, when one comes to think, as to touch a low person, even if one has his own gloves on."

"You really think so?"

"Come on, Frederick, come on," said the young lady, most imploringly. "Why will you thus insult quiet people on the highway? Gentlemen, think nothing of it. Come on, Frederick, come on."

"But I do think something of it," said Jack.

"For my sake, I hope you will not," added the young lady; "now, Frederick, I hope this will be a lesson to you."

"For your sake I will forego," said Jack, "my just resentment in its full extent; but unless this coxcomb asks my pardon, he shall not pass me with his head on."

"My—head? Ah!"

"Yes, your head. I don't expect to find anything in it, tbu I'll knock it off if you don't ask pardon."

"Oh, I couldn't—I shall have to slaughter you, fellow, after all. I shall have to send you to another world."

With this the coxcomb made another intimidating flourishing of his sword, and Jack dashed at him, and took it from him in a moment. The young lady screamed, and Claude, as he hurried up to her, cried out—

"Moderation, Jack, moderation."

Upon which Jack only broke the sword in two, and flung the pieces in the owner's face.

"Do not be alarmed," said Claude to the young lady, "but you will act very injudiciously if you lay your commands upon my friend not to humiliate Frederick. Is he your brother?"

"No—no."

"Not your husband?"

"Oh no—nor never will be. He is a cousin."

"Oh, very well. Now, Mr. Frederick, I am quite sure all that my friend requires of you is to dismount, beg pardon on your knees, or else I assure you he is just the man to blow your brains out."

"Which I would rather do at once," said Jack, "and have no more bother about it."

"Murder!—blow my brains out?"

"Yes, if you have any. You prefer it, I see," added Jack, and he took a pistol from his pocket, and began to examine the priming very carefully indeed. Upon this, the dandified gentleman was so stunned, that he slipped off his horse, and plumped down upon his knees in the mire of the road, crying—

"Oh, ah! I beg pardon."

"Very good," said Jack. "Now, as far as I am concerned, you may pass on. What my friend may have to say to you is quite another affair, sir."

"I am not at all offended," said Claude, "and shall merely treat the gentleman professionally. Your money, watch, and jewels, sir, if you please, unless you prefer me taking them from your insensible carcass, after I have placed a couple of slugs in your skull."

"A highwayman, by Jupiter!" gasped the dandy.

"Exactly so," said Claude. "Be quick, sir."

In a moment a well-filled purse, a watch, and some rings, were, with an amount of nervous trepidation quite ludicrous to behold, handed to Claude, and the young lady said—

"I have nothing but a small watch, which is not of much value. Here it is, sir."

Claude bowed, as he said—

"I pray you not to do me the injustice of supposing that I could take it from you. I am only vexed to find so much beauty in such indifferent company."

"You are Claude Duval?" said the young lady.

"I am; but I do not know how you could be aware of that fact. I do not, however, deny it."

"I guesssd it from your manner, sir. A lady of my acquaintance was permitted by you to retain her watch in the same way that you permit me to keep mine, and so I made a guess which turns out to be correct. I hope I may ask of you the favour to let this young man go without any injury or any practical joke being played off upon him."

"Certainly. He is free as air. Jack, you have done with your friend, I suppose, now?"

"Quite so," said Jack. "He is too contemptible to have anything further to do with. Let him go."

"I would prefer," added Claude, as he bowed again to the young lady, "that the knowledge of my name should remain in your own breast."

A glance at the exquisite let the young lady know what Claude meant, and she bowed in acquiescence.

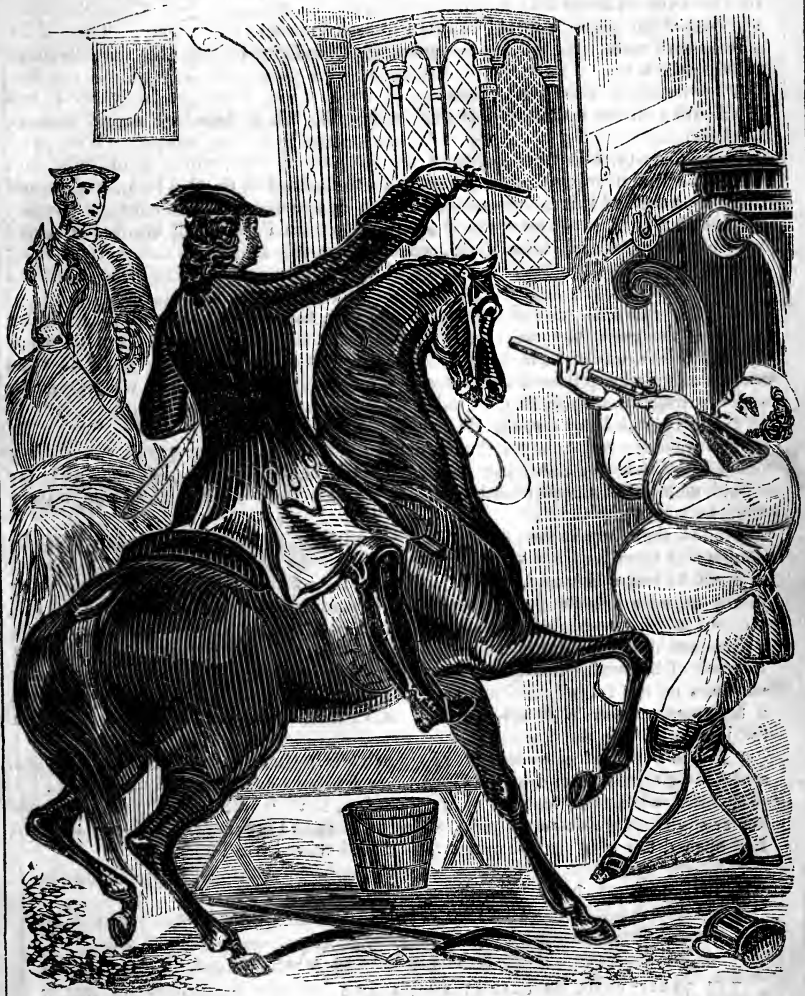
"Now sir," said Claude, "mount and be off, for we don't want your company on the road any longer."

Upon this, feeling quite happy to get off so well as he was, the dandy mounted again, and minus his sword, watch, purse, and rings, left the spot, accompanied by the young lady, who at the last moment looked her thanks for his being let go so easily, considering all things. When they were gone, Claude, despite the many anxieties that were then passing upon his mind, could not help laughing very

heartily at the scene that had taken place; and after a time, Jack, although he really at the moment had been very much provoked, could not help joining in the laugh.

"Well, Claude," he said, "it was ridiculous."

"Most essentially so, Jack, and I really believe that if I had not been here to



CLAUDE FIRED AT BY THE CORPULENT LANDLORD OF THE ROAD-SIDE INN.

cry out moderation to you, you would have actually demolished that unfortunate young man, who, after all, was more ridiculous than noxious."

"I ought only to have laughed at him."

"Nay, Jack, I will not go quite so far as that. I think that in breaking his sword you served him quite right, but that was enough. And now until the time shall come for me to keep my appointment with our new friend, who will enable

me to have a meeting with Lucy, I will go to the farm and pass a short time with Cicely. We are sure of a cordial welcome there."

"With pleasure," said Jack.

The fact is that Jack always lived in the hope that the time would yet come when Claude would find a means of quitting the perilous and most nervous profession, if it might be so called, in which he was engaged; and he, Jack, thought that if anything more than another could put such thoughts into Claude's head, and keep them there, it would be often to seek the society of Cicely. Thus, Jack was almost more than willing to encourage Claude in turning his horse's head towards the farm.

They both knew the bit of country in which they were amazingly well, and it was after all but a sharp trot of half an hour to bring them to Ealing Common, in the immediate neighbourhood of which was the place they sought. With great joy and alacrity, Claude dived down the little shady lane, which would take him by the back and unfrequented route across the meadows to the farm, and he and Jack soon passed through a well-known gap in a hedge, and made for the friendly shelter of that roof, beneath which poor Cicely found as much comfort as could possibly be hers in this world, considering the many anxieties that must naturally continually possess her upon Claude's account, knowing as she did the perilous life he led.

If Cicely had not chanced to be, as she was, the companion of Claude, during some of the most perilous of the scenes connected with his attempt to leave England, she would have been much more urgent to him than she now even was to abandon a course of life which was so full of perils. But whenever she did say much upon the subject, Claude had a ready answer by saying—

"Cicely, did I not try, and do you remember the result?"

Too well she remembered that result; and when he did so speak, the gloomy aisles of Winchester Cathedral would rise up before her imagination, and she would shudder at the recollection of the awful scenes of bloodshed and misery she had then gone through.

Hence, then, was it that poor Cicely led a life of continual anxieties, beset by doubts and fears, and not knowing whether to urge Claude to make yet another attempt to leave England, or to let him be for awhile, until some opportunity might arise to promise him a complete emancipation from his course of life, without any of the perils he had encountered in attempting before to leave it.

She had not seen him now for some days, and she had got naturally anxious to know of his welfare. When, therefore, upon glancing from one of the upper windows of the farm-house, she saw him and Jack leading their horses though a little gate from a small paddock into the farm-yard, her heart leaped for joy.

"He is yet safe," she said. "He is yet safe. Heaven has heard my prayers, and he is guarded from death. Once more I behold him free and unharmed!"

So intense were her feelings of gratification, that it was some few moments before she could go down stairs to welcome him, and previously to doing so, she had opened the window and called to him and waved her hand.

CHAPTER CLXXXII.

THE GREAT PERIL OF CLAUDE AMONG THE GIPSIES ON HOUNSLOW HEATH.

CLAUDE DUVAL had some happy moments of his life. One of them certainly was when he saw Cicely's face at the window, radiant with delight at seeing him.

"Well?" he cried. "Well?"

"Yes, Claude; and you?"

"Oh, yes!"

She disappeared from the window, and in the course of the next few moments was in his arms, and sobbing upon his breast.

"So you are quite well, Claude, and you are not hurt—you are sure you are not hurt? You have perhaps been in great danger though, while I was safe and secure. Ah! no I was not secure. I never am secure except I am thus—thus, Claude, close to you, and with the full assurance at my heart that you are not snatched from me by any unexpected blow of fate."

"And I, Cicely, am never happy except when I can look into your eyes, and know that I am with you; and feel that you are all my own."

"And you will, neither of you," said Jack, "ever be quite happy until the sea rolls between you and England."

"That is true," said Cicely. "Do you hear it, Claude?"

"I do hear it; and well I know that both you and Jack wish for nothing in the world so much as my happiness and safety; but we will not talk of this now. Neither time nor place are fitting."

"Come in, then," said Cicely, "come into the house. There is an old friend there waiting to see you."

"A visitor?"

"Yes; one who has come on purpose to see you, but who would have left this evening without doing so if you had not chanced to come."

"Tell me who it is, Cicely. I hope you have not been indiscreet enough to take any artful stranger into your confidence? There are many who if they did but know where to find you, would come to you under the pretence of knowing me."

"But this one really knows you. It is my brother."

"Mark Brereton?"

"Yes. It is he, Claude, and with him you know you are quite safe. Is it not so?"

"Yes, indeed; but I thought that he was very far away by this time, indeed."

"And so did I, Claude, and so did everybody; but here he comes himself to speak to you, and you may see by his looks how very glad he is to see you. It is partly for my sake, Claude, and partly because he says he cannot help liking you, whether he would or not. Mark, here is Claude."

These two men, with such dissimilar habits and pursuits, met and shook hands most warmly; nothing attaches men so much together as having passed through serious dangers in each others company, and Heaven knows that Mark Brereton had by the merest accidents and freaks of fortune, been thrown into many strange situations with Claude Duval, and he had had, consequently, opportunities of observing what a fine spirit was lost to some worthy career when he, Duval, took to the road.

"And so you are among us again?" said Claude.

"I am. I could not rest until I had seen you and Cicely; and believe me I am not a little pleased to see that you are so well, as you seem to be."

"I am quite well. And you? I fancy I see an improvement in your looks. It is so, is it not?"

"Oh, yes. My health is better. I have been travelling, and that, I find, is always beneficial to me. But I really began to think that I should have great trouble in finding you. I consider your dropping in here to be quite providential."

"Ah, Mark, if you had chosen to stay here a little longer, you might be sure of seeing me here. I only stay away when I cannot help it, and as soon as I feel myself with some hours of liberty upon my hands, my thoughts fly here, and I fly after them."

"I do not doubt it."

They all entered the house together, and then the farmer and his family began to welcome Claude in the warm and kind-hearted manner with which they always greeted him; and in answer to his inquiries, they said that since the little fracas with the parson, of which Claude was quite cognisant, they had not met with any annoyance from any quarter whatever, but lived in perfect peace

and security, feeling quite sure that the reverend gentleman had so far kept his word towards them.

All this was pleasant enough news for Claude to hear, and turning to Brereton, he said—

"If all the world would be kind enough to forget me, and allow me to live in such a place as this, the quiet life of a lover of the country and of country pursuits, I should be one of the happiest of men. But they will not. No! Nothing makes the world so angry as any attempt to escape from it; and if you do but try it, slander will be busy with the past, and there are hundreds who will raise the hue-and-cry after you from very wantonness and mischief-loving."

"That is but too true," said Brereton.

"I have found it so, my friend," added Claude. "But we will not sadden any of the joy of this happy meeting by such reflections. The evening is but creeping on, and it will be midnight before I need leave you."

"Leave at midnight?" said Cicely.

"Yes, dearest, I have an appointment with a friend which I hope will not occupy me more than two hours, and if not, I will return here again, But I cannot swear to be back to night again."

"Ah, Claude, your visits are indeed to me like angels; few, and far between."

"Nay," said Claude, with a smile, "but what I am going upon is real business, which ought not to be neglected, as I will convince your brother. Mark, when I tell him; and you will not ask me what it is, I know, Cicely, if I do not freely volunteer to tell you."

"No, Claude, I will not."

"A model of a wife." said Jack, with a smile. "There is but one Cicely in the world, or I think that, tattered by fortune as I am, I might almost yet venture upon matrimony. What say you, Mr. Brereton?"

"You might do worse, Jack."

Claude stepped apart with Brereton, and told him evidently what he was going about at midnight, upon which Brereton replied that he ought not to go alone, and at once proffered his own services to accompany him, adding, that he and Jack would be company for each other while waiting for him, Claude, and that in case of any treachery or unforeseen danger, they could be close at hand to render him effectual assistance.

"I do not anticipate," said Claude, "the slightest peril, for I have ample faith in the man who gave me my information, and who might with the greatest ease have withheld it from me. But if you choose to come, I will not say no. You have a horse here, I suppose?"

"Yes, and a good one too."

"Be it so then; and Jack, who, as a matter of course, will follow me, will be glad enough of your company, and for the matter of that we can all ride together to the common."

"We can, and I sincerely hope, for all our sakes, you will be able to ward off any threatened danger from the desperate woman you mention. The passions of such persons are dangerous alike to themselves and to others."

"It shall be done," said Claude.

We must not follow the conversation that took place at the farm-house now, further than to say that it was of a most friendly and affectionate character among all these assembled, until Claude, upon hearing the old kitchen clock strike twelve, rose and said it was his time to go.

Upon this, both Brereton and Jack rose likewise, and although the cause of his absence at such an hour happened to be one which Claude did not like to explain to Cicely, she felt tolerably satisfied upon finding that Jack and her brother were going with him. He promised to get back with all the expedition in his power, and the fact of Mark Brereton accompanying him was of itself sufficient to assure her that it was no perilous, marauding adventure he was going on, for had such been the case she well knew that Brereton would have nothing to do with it.

The night was more than usually dark, and neither Claude nor his companion could have had much chance of reaching the high road, had not one of the family from the farm-house come with them as a guide that far. The young man who accompanied them led Claude's horse, and the rest followed until they were on the high road that goes along Ealing Common.

"Ah," said Duval, "I know where I am now. I could find my way where I am going blindfolded, if it were at all necessary, so well do I know every inch of it, and every tree, and every turning and winding it can take."

"Then I will leave you now," said the young man.

"You may, my friend, and I thank you for coming so far with me. I hope to be back at the farm in two hours. Now, my friends, a sharp trop will very soon take us to Hounslow Heath."

They all three set off at a trot that got over the ground very quickly, for the horses had been well seen to at the farm, and were consequently in first-rate condition. It seemed as though they reached Hounslow Heath in an incredibly short space of time; and when Claude suddenly cried out—

"Here we are."

Brereton said, "Where?"

"Why, on the heath," said Claude.

"Indeed! You must have brought us by a very near route in good truth, Duval,"

"Yes, both Jack and I know the way pretty well. But now, my friends, I will, if you please, go forward alone, and you can easily keep quietly in the neighbourhood of the spot to which I am bound. Jack, you know it well enough?"

"I do," said Jack; "but let us agree upon some signal, which if we hear will be a hint to us to ride up."

"Very well. If you hear a pistol shot, you may safely enough conclude that your presence will not be amiss. But I do not for one moment anticipate any danger, only I grant always that it is best to be prepared for the very worst that may happen."

"Unquestionably," said Brereton; "so we shall listen for the signal with the hope of not hearing it, for it will be much better if you are able to settle the affair amicably, Claude."

"Much, indeed. Farewell now for a brief space, I think, only. Yonder lies my route."

With this Claude rode off, and was in avery few moments completely lost to all view in the dense obscurity of the night, that seemed to hang over the heath like a funeral fall.

Before he had proceeded very far on his road, which he had to guess at more by instinct than anything else, he became conscious of a dullish red light some short distance ahead of him, and apparently just in the direction he was going, for it shone faintly upon the ruined barn which had been mentioned to him by the man who had personated Dick Turpin.

Claude could not conceive what this light could be, and it was so very near to the earth, too, that upon that account it still more puzzled him. While, however, he was straining his eyes to make something more of it, it suddenly disappeared.

"This, I suppose, is one of the mysteries of the heath," he said, "which probably my new friend may be able to tell me something about, when I am so fortunate as to see him."

He did not in the least relax in his speed on account of this phenomenon, and he soon felt conscious that he must have reached the old barn. He accordingly slackened the speed of his horse. He dismounted, and reaching out his hands, distinctly felt the wall of the old barn, and after a little time he found a place to which he could attach the bridle of his horse; and having done so, he went carefully on, on foot, until he suddenly, upon turning the angle of the barn, came upon the cottage, which was clearly enough observable by the light that streamed out from its little casement.

"All's right," he said, "that is the place."

He advanced rapidly, and tapped at the door with the handle of his heavily loaded whip. In a moment it was opened, and the man whom he had expected to meet stood upon the threshold.

"Ah, I am glad to see you," he said.

"Thank you," replied Claude; "is she here?"

"No, but walk in; I don't know what has come over her to-night, she has been in and out a dozen times at the least. She will be back very soon, I feel assured.

"Why, where has she got to go to?" said Claude, as he slipped into the cottage. "I don't know of another habitation within a good half-mile of this upon the heath."

"Nor I; but there are some gipsies' tents in the neighbourhood, and she seems to have struck up some sort of acquaintance with them."

"Nothing more likely," said Claude. "She always used to make a kind of joke of saying there was gipsy blood in her veins, and I suppose it was true enough. But I will wait for her, and talk to her, poor girl. I hope she will come soon."

CHAPTER CLXXXIII.

CLAUDE IS ATTACKED BY THE GIPSIES, INCITED BY LUCY.

The place in which Claude found himself now, was by no means one of the most inviting in the world. In fact, a hut more destitute of common comforts than that was, could not have been imagined.

With the meanest and poorest habitation the world ever saw, there is always a something to be done, if there is one to do it, that will give it an air of home comfort; but then again, it requires some one who loves a home to do that, and not so brooding and strange a spirit as that of the young girl whom Claude had come to see. What cared she if the cottage looked squallid or not? Her own cruel passions were all that occupied her thoughts; and having an undisguised contempt for the man who was the sharer of the wretched abode with her, it was not likely that she would even make an effort of the slightest description to bestow an air of home comfort upon the place; on the contrary, she took a gloomy and misanthropical satisfaction in it being what it was.

The walls were marked with unwholesome damps; a glimmering fire was upon the hearth, and the sole furniture consisted of a broken-down deal table, and some apologies for chairs. In one corner was some course pieces of board nailed up so as to make something resembling shelves, upon which some cracked and chipped pieces of crockery were placed; and another corner had partially hiding it a kind of curtain hung to a cord, but it was so blackened by age, that its material could not be defined. The floor was sanded, and as that had been freshly done, the material being in abundance upon the heath, that portion of the wretched dwelling looked better than any other.

"This is a sorry place, Claude Duval, to introduce you to," said the man.

"It certainly is not a palace, my friend. You don't seem to find the road very profitable?"

"I don't know. I dare say it's as good to me as most, always excepting such as yourself. But she won't let me be comfortable. Oh, she's a hard bargain."

"Why don't you leave her, then?"

"Well, somehow or another, I have got used to the girl, and when I do come here, I like even to have her to talk to, in preference to nobody. But she might make the crib a little tidier."

"Truly, she might, my friend. What is that?"

A faint low whistle had sounded from without, and Claude rose from the rather insecure chair upon which he had seated himself at the request of the man.

'It's some of the gipsies, I'll be bound. They are, as I mentioned to you,

Claude Duval, in the neighbourhood, and it's odd but that they are up to some game or another. I will just pop out for a few moments, and see what they ar e about, if you like."

"Do so; and if you can see Lucy, tell her that I am here, and would fain speak with her."

"I will."

Any one less confident in his own resources, and more suspicious of foul play than Claude Duval, would have hesitated about permitting the man to leave the hut so immediately upon an apparent signal being made from the outside; but Claude took no notice of such little matters, unless he had very good reason indeed to feel this importance, nor was he wrong in the confidence he put in his new friend, as will quickly enough appear.

"For the sake of Cicely, whose safety is so very dear to me," said Claude to himself, as he glanced round the wretched hut, "I must say all I can say to the poor girl who calls this her home. I would that I could see her. Ah! that whistle again. What can it mean?"

The door of the hut was opened a little way, and the head and face of a man looked in. It did not require more than the most hasty glance to let Claude see that he was one of the gipsies.

"Izra," said the stranger. "Where are you now, girl?" and then observing Claude by the miserable light that was upon the table, he shaded his eyes for a moment with his hands and cried—"Who are you? You ain't the usual fox that is in the old lair?"

"Do you wish particularly to know who I am?" said Claude; "for if you do not I prefer keeping that news to myself."

With a short impatient growl the stranger withdrew his head, and banged the front door shut again.

Claude, as a measure of ordinary precaution, looked at his pistols, for well he knew the extreme jealously with which the gipsies looked upon any one whom they could have the slightest reason to suppose was a spy upon them; and that they held human life under such circumstance cheap enough, he was likewise well aware. The man upon whose good faith he placed reliance, had been gone rather an unreasonable time, and Claude was upon the point of thinking he might as well sally out into the night air to make his own observations, when the door of the hut was hastily opened, and the man appeared.

"Have you seen her?" said Claude.

"I have—she comes. At the mention of your name she was furious, and I thought she would have struck me to the earth. She vows that she will have vengeance against you."

"Pho! pho!"

"You do not fear her?"

"I fear her? My friend, you know less of me then I thought you did, if you fancy that I fear her. I have come here to subdue her—to frighten her; and I will do it."

"If you do frighten her," said the man, "you will be a match for any one, be they ever so mad. But hark! I hear her footseps on the heath. She comes!"

"Tell me," said Claude quickly. "Has she seen the gipsies since you told her I was here?"

"One man she has seen and held some discourse with, but I know not the subject of it."

"Well, it matters not. Leave us together for a short time, my friend, when she comes here, but be within call, and you may be within hearing too. Indeed, I would rather you were."

"She don't know I am here. I will hide behind yon curtain if you like."

"Do so. Juick! I hear her coming."

The footpad, for such was his real vocation, had only just time to conceal himself behind the curtain in the corner of the hut, when the door was flung

violently open, and Lucy sprang into the little room. Claude never moved from his seat which he had occupied again, but he let her come right up to him, and waited patiently for what she might choose to say. Her anger and impatience soon found words, and in a voice of fury she shouted rather than said—

"So, Claude Duval, you have come here to make me a present of your life, have you? Fool! Where is your boasted cleverness now? Idiot, you are at my mercy now! Ha! ha! Yes, the famous Claude Duval is at my mercy!"

Claude slowly pointed to the open door of the hut, and in a cold, calm voice, he said—

"Shut that door!"

"What!" she cried. "You dare to address me in such a tone! You dare to do it!"

"Shut that door!"

"Ha! ha! You order me!"

"Shut that door, woman!"

She shrunk back evidently cowed, and with a forced laugh she said, as she closed the door—

"Well, perhaps one don't want all the world to hear what one says—that's all. There, the door is shut. What do you want with me, Claude Duval?"

"Much."

"Say it, then. Oh, I ain't to be cowed and beaten down by you. No. Those times are past long since, I should think. I will have my revenge. Come, speak to me. What do you want, now that you have taken all the trouble to find me out?"

"Trouble I have not taken," said Claude. "I was told where you were, and I came, so that it has not cost me any trouble. Sit down, Lucy."

"No, I will stand."

"But I say you shall sit down. Do you dare to stand when I tell you to sit down?"

She dropped into one of the miserable seats, and with a growl she added—

"There, then, I am sitting down. What do you want now?"

"Is it true, or is it false, that you have uttered threats against my wife?"

"Your wife—wife! Ha, ha! That is good, indeed. So you come here to try to persuade me that you are married, do you?"

"It is true; and if you contradict me again, I will send your head through that wall. Answer me that which I ask of you. I want none of your comments. Is it true that you have uttered threats against my wife?"

"Yes: and what then?"

"Why, then, you shall retract them, and upon your knees you shall take a solemn oath (I know that you are superstitious) that you will never raise hand to do her harm. That is my errand here, and I will fulfil it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Lucy. I thought you knew enough of me to be aware that I was a man likely to keep my word, even in so small an affair as this."

The girl looked at him for a few moments in silence, and then, in a deep, solemn tone, she said—

"Will you swear to me, by all your hopes here and hereafter, that you are really married?"

"I will. But I think my word ought to have amply sufficed. Yet I most solemnly swear it."

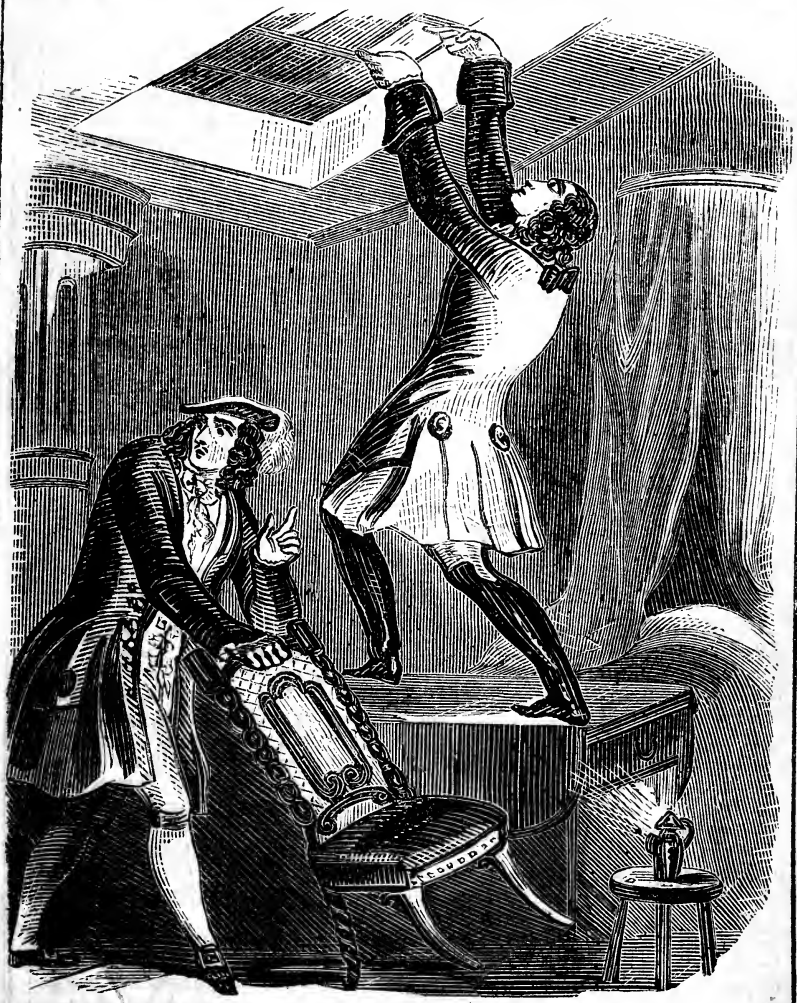
She shook as if moved by some strong convulsions, and then in a high croaked tone she spoke—

"Claude Duval, there was a time when you affected to love me—when you told me that no eyes were so bright as mine—when you cajoled me to be yours by the promise that our union, although it was not ratified by the ceremony of the church, should be eternal. There was a time when I was to you everything—when at my request you would come and go, and be as kind as a summer's day was long."

"Well?"

"Can you hear me talk in such a strain, Claude Duval, and say nothing but 'Well' in reply to me? Can you sit and look upon my ruined face, and look the while so calm, when you know you made me what I am?"

"Lucy, you know that that is false; I did not make you what you are. Do



CLAUDE AND JACK MAKE THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE GLOVER'S.

not attribute it to me. You know well that I lifted you from much misery and degradation to make you my companion. That you did not continue to be such, was owing wholly to your own stormy passions. But this is a profitless discussion, and one that it is folly for us to engage in. I came for another purpose."

"Then I tell you, Duval, that you will not accomplish that other purpose."

"So you say?"

"Ay, and so it will be. I have sworn that I would be revenged upon her who has taken you from me, and I will be so revenged. But for her the time would have come when I might again have been with you; but your marriage places all that aside, and I know that it may not be. Therefore it is, that as I am wretched, you shall be wretched."

"Miserable woman, can you possibly find any sort of gratification in such insensate raving?"

"It is not raving. It is the truth."

"You know that it is not. You know well that I am not one to be trifled with, and that if I for one moment really thought there was any danger to her whom I love to be apprehended from you, I would take such measures as would thoroughly prevent you from being such an enemy to yourself, as to carry out your foolish threats. Well you know all that, and now I say to you, Lucy, make me the solemn promise that you will bear no such malicious thoughts about with you."

"I will not."

"Reflect again, foolish girl. Reflect that by my coming to ask you so much I show you that I have still some esteem left for you. Reflect, I say, before it be too late, upon my words."

"I have reflected until my brain has been on fire. I have thought until thought, too, became madness; and I tell you, Claude Duval, that if I live I must have my revenge. You can kill me if you like to do so. I do not deny your power to kill a weak girl; but my death shall sit far heavier upon your soul than my present threats."

"I give you another moment for thought."

"It is useless; had I an age for thought, the result would be the same; I could not—I would not alter my determination. It is made, and it is fixed as though it held to my heart with iron grappling-hooks. I will have revenge!"

CHAPTER CLXXXIV.

CLAUDE FINDS HOUNSLOW-HEATH TO BE WELL PEOPLED.

Up to this point, it would almost seem that Claude had had some faint hopes of being able to turn the infuriated girl from her purpose; but now he looked upon that hope as gone; and he could not but see that she was madly wedded to it. The idea of taking her life, or of doing her the least bodily mischief, never came into his imagination for a moment, but he had concocted a plan of operations as regarded her, if he found her in the temper that he did, which, however, reluctant under ordinary circumstances he would be to carry out, he yet felt was his only resource. He knew that there was not far from the high-road of Hammersmith a private mad-house, the keeper of which was unscrupulous enough to detain every one who was well paid for, without being particular either as to the amount of madness, or the nature of the authority under which he held them; and it was to that establishment that Claude thought himself authorised to take Lucy; provided he found her in such a state of mind as would be decidedly inimical to the safety of Cicely.

It would seem, however, as if the poor creature had seen by the expression of his eye, that he intended something that would be prejudicial to her life or liberty, for suddenly starting up before he could move from his seat, she darted from the cottage, saying, as she went, something in the gipsy tongue, which to Claude was perfectly incomprehensible.

The man came out from his place of retreat behind the curtain, and said at once—

"Go, Claude, from her. Make speed and insure your safety. There is upon the Heath a large party of gipsies, and if she gets them to side with her, they are capable of committing any act of desperation or of blood!"

"I will not leave her thus."

"Nay, what more can you say or do now, than you have said and done already? Leave her to me, Claude Duval, and I may find perhaps some opportunity of speaking to her, when she is calmer. Besides, you should always reflect that an angry woman says much more than she means."

"I have reflected upon that. But this girl is mad, I can see she is, or why at such a time as this, when all sort of connection with me has long since been forgotten, should she become so furious?"

As Claude spoke there came upon the night air a strange low moaning sound, and he looked at the man for an explanation of it.

"It is the gathering of the gipsies," he said. "I know their habits and feelings well, for I have lived with several of the largest tribes. Heaven only knows what that maddened girl may say to them, to stir their hatred against you. I tell you, Duval, you are anything but safe here."

"And yet I shall remain."

"It is madness."

"No, not so. I have friends within call whom I can summon to my side. When I begin an adventure I like to go through with it, and this one is anything but satisfactorily settled as yet. I am not without hope of getting Lucy to a better disposition."

"You do not know her then so well as I do. As well might you attempt to make the stoutest oak of the forest bow before your breath, as get that girl to listen to reason, when her passion tells her to be unreasonable."

"She is changed, but yet she is human."

"Hark! The moaning sound continues. It is the peculiar sound made by the gipsies, when they are meeting under the impulse of some strong excitement. Again I urge you to seek safety in flight. Come this way. I can take you out by another way from the hut, and you can seek your friends."

"Urge me no more. I cannot think there is much danger. Surely the lawless people who live such a life of wandering and defiance of the rest of the community cannot feel much more than sympathy with one of my profession, and they have sense enough, I should fancy, not to pay much attention to the ravings of a jealous girl. I should scarcely forgive myself, my friend, if I were to fly from such a danger as this. Compose yourself and trust to me, that so far as regards my personal safety, all will be well; at the same time, let me thank you for your kind solicitude and assure you that I feel it deeply."

"It is so much my doing your being here at all, that I should feel myself almost like your murderer should anything disastrous happen to you. But since you will stay, remember that I will stand or fall by you, and that you may depend upon me, let the emergency be what it may."

"I know it, and will do so. They come."

A strange half-suppressed kind of shout now arose in the night air from the outside of the hut, and through the chinks, which were sufficiently numerous, in the walls, there came the red glare of torches. Claude took care to keep as near the centre of the place as possible, so that he might not be taken by surprise by any one, for the walls were quite frail enough to enable anybody who might wish to get into the wretched building in that way to push right through at any part. It did not at the moment occur to Claude that the roof might be in worse condition still, and he was at the moment rather startled to hear a sudden crash accompanied by a rushing noise, and to find a man alight close to him from the old thatch.

The gipsy's features, the long black dishevelled air, and the sparkling eyes, at once told Claude that it was one of the lawless race that stood before him with a knife in his hand.

"Die!" cried the gipsy. "Die, enemy of the child of our race."

Claude sprang upon him in a moment.

"My friend," he said, "you mistook the roof for the door, and I never allow

any one to come in where I am, without knocking first. Pray tell your friends outside as much, if you please."

As he spoke, Claude made one of those tremendous efforts of strength, which at times only, and under extraordinary circumstances, he thought proper to exert. He lifted the gipsy to the height of some six feet from the floor, and then dashed him like a shot head-foremost through the little casement of the hut, and the force with which he went was so great that it had all the appearance as though he had been projected by some powerful mechanical means.

The gipsy raised a loud shriek as he went thus unceremoniously out of the hut, that he thought he had so very cleverly got into.

"You have killed him!" said the man.

"Possibly, but those fellows take a deal of killing. I very much doubt if he is other than a little hurt by the broken glass of the window, and you may depend that he alighted on his feet. Gipsies and cats always do—begging the pardon of cats for the association."

"You are a strange man, Claude; but look to your arms."

"All's right, I have a couple of pairs of pistols that I know I can depend upon. How are you provided in that particular?"

"Very well indeed. But you spoke of your friends; are they far off, or can you summon them at a moment or two's notice?"

"They are close at hand. At the first pistol shot that is fired by either party they will make their appearance; I shall not fire it unless urged by some uncommon necessity so to do, and I beg that you will be as feeling as you can."

"I will—I will!"

The low shout of the gipsies again came upon their ears, and in the course of a few moments some one tapped at the door of the hut. The man was about to answer it, but Claude said, "Permit me," and then in a clear unembarrassed voice he cried—

"Who is there?"

"One who demands admission," said a voice.

"Take it then. The door is on the latch. What hinders you, except fear? The fear that always besets men upon a bad errand. Why do you not come in?"

The door was opened, and a tall dusky-looking man in a tattered cloak appeared upon the threshold.

"Claude Duval," he said, "we know you."

"Then you have the advantage of me," said Claude, "and I do not at all envy you it, for I am not by any means solicitous for your acquaintance."

"Peace," said the tall gipsy. "This trifling as ill becomes me as it does you. I come with a demand."

"Make it then."

"You must repudiate her whom you call your wife, and you must take again to your home and to your affections, by such ceremonies as we may think proper, her whom you have discarded, and who is one of our people. That is the sentence of our tribe; and if you refuse, the bitter consequences must fall upon your own head."

"And pray what may those consequences be?" said Claude.

"Death!"

"Then my dingy-looking friend, I differ very much from you; and if you are the ambassador of your tribe, you can go back to it, and say that I am married already, and that if I were not, I should at once and most unhesitatingly decline any of their ceremonies or any of their people. If, as I suspect, you are all allowing yourselves to be stirred up to this folly by a girl who calls herself Lucy, I can only say, that you don't any of you know her half so well as she is known upon the pave of London; and the very best and most creditable thing you can all do concerning her, is to disown the connection, for it will bring upon you all nothing but disgrace and trouble."

"False wretch!" cried a female voice, and an old woman with long matted

hair and a tattered red cloak about her, rushed into the hut. "False villain! she whom you speak of is my child, and she is as virtuous as she is beautiful. It is you only, who have led her into the paths of vice; and repugnant as we are to an union with a stranger, you shall, according to our forms, wed her."

"Madam," said Claude, "the less we say of the virtue of your daughter, the better. The subject is a very ticklish one, and I sincerely advise you to drop it."

"You shall wed her! She has decided that she will be satisfied if you repudiate your wife, as you call her, and wed her. You will then be pardoned your many iniquities towards her, and from time to time we will receive you as one of us. So, rejoice—rejoice—rejoice!"

Claude could hardly help laughing at the inflated manner of the old woman; and when she told him, with the air of some ancient priestess, striking a grand attitude at the same time, to rejoice, she certainly got the better of his gravity altogether, and he laughed outright.

The old gipsy woman gave a perfect yell of rage at this, but Claude raised his hand, and cried in a clear voice—

"Silence, woman! Your ridiculous denunciations and absurd inflation of language, may go down very well in some hovel, but permit me to say that I am rather a matter-of-fact personage, and that consequently, your raving has by no means the effect upon me that no doubt you wish it to have. If the foolish young woman, Lucy, is your daughter, the best advice you can possibly, as a mother, give her, is, to be quiet, and to do her best now to quell the tumult that she has been the absurd cause of raising."

"He dies! he dies!" cried the old woman. "His death shall be upon his own head! He dies! he dies!"

"Yes," said Claude, "when my time comes I shall certainly die; but not yet, I think I have a well-grounded expectation of living some time, yet. And now, in all seriousness, I warn you, and your tribe of ragamuffins, that I am a man fond of a joke in its way, but I do not like it to be carried too far, and when I begin to be serious, it is rather apt to be a serious thing for other people. This man who is with me can tell you as much of me; so I warn you, and it will be well for you and all your tribe, Lucy included, if the warning be taken in good time."

CHAPTER CLXXXV.

CLAUDE CAPTURES LUCY, AND TAKES HER TO THE ASYLUM.

The manner of Claude Duval during this most perilous adventure, probably had more effect upon the gipsies than anything he said or did. They were perfectly astounded to find, for the first time in their lives, a man who, alone, laughed at their practitional appetite for revenge; and in replying to their high-flown threats, only treated them to a little common-sense, such as they well knew the truth of, but most certainly were not in the habit of hearing.

And all that he said, too, was said in such a calm, quiet, confident air, as if their power against him was really nothing, while his against them, one would have thought was infinite.

The woman, in particular, who had thought to bear him down by hard words, and an assumption of the stage-priestess style, was evidently cowed, and if she had but had the candour to say so, she would have admitted that for once, if it were only for once, she had met her match, in meeting with one who knew how to treat with cool contempt those empty threats which only borrowed a little force from the lofty language in which they were couched.

Claude Duval knew much more of the gipsies, and of their strange habits and traditions, than they were aware of; and among other things that he knew of them, he well knew that they dreaded nothing so much as a collision with the law. It was

quite a principle with them to put up with a general injury done to them, rather than provoke the regard of public opinion, and of public persons; for leading the strange vagabond life that they did, they lived in constant dread in so highly civilized and carefully cultivated a country as England, of being put down, if we may be allowed the expression.

The old gipsy women, however, although it was quite clear that she trembled before Claude, made yet another effort to obtain the mastery over him, and so accomplish her object, which was now to get rid of him as quickly as possible.

Throwing herself into an attitude as though she were quite an inspired personage, she cried—

"Ah! the spirits of another world speak to me. The dim future, like the course of some mighty river, seen from the mountain top, unfurls itself before me. My children, we will spare this man."

A yell of disappointment from the dark throng of gipsies at the door of the hut was the response to this announcement.

"Yes," added the old woman. "It must be so. Go in peace, stranger, from our people. Go in peace, I say, and never let us look upon your shadow again. Never—never!"

"No, no," cried the gipsies. "Down with him! kill him, kill him! Down with him. He has done a deed to bring shame upon our tribe. Down with him! kill him, kill him!"

"No," cried the old woman, "I say no!"

"You need not contend about me," said Claude, calmly. "I have come here for an especial purpose, and I will perform my mission."

"Fool!" cried Lucy, suddenly springing towards him, from the open door of the hut, and clutching him by the arm. "How many lives have you that you can afford to play with them thus? Let me ask you that, idiot that you are."

"Upon my word, Lucy," said Claude, "you are very complimentary; but permit me to say, that I look upon you as the fool, for you are the author of a disturbance here, that in the end these worthy people will not thank you for stirring up."

"They are my people," said Lucy, making a very faint effort indeed to imitate the manner of the old woman.

"They may," added Claude, "or they may not be your people. You may have gipsy blood in you veins, for all I know; and this anything but respectable-looking, old lady may be your mother, upon the principle that as unquestionably you had a mother, she may as well fill that situation regarding you as any other person. But I have yet to learn what all that has to do with my object here?"

"Your object is defeated," said Lucy. "This is my mother, and those whom you see and hear are my tribe. Your object, I say, is defeated. It was to threaten me—it was to frighten me from my revenge; but I will not be frightened from it. I will have revenge upon her whom you have taken to you heart, after once placing me there!"

Claude smiled.

"You laugh? A knife—a knife! I will kill him myself! He laughs at my seared and broken heart. A knife, I say! I will myself kill the man who has made me what I am, and who now scorns the gipsy's child; will no one give me the means of present vengeance? Is there no brother of my tribe who will give it to me?"

A long glittering knife was thrown on to the floor of the hut, within a few paces of where Lucy stood. With one stride Claude put his foot upon it, as he said in a loud clear voice—

"If the man who threw this knife will come here, I will throttle him for his pains."

No one come, and the dark throng of persons at the door of the miserable little place rather drew back than otherwise.

"Give me the knife," said Lucy.

"Pho! girl," cried Claude, "you are a fool; you overact your part."

He seized her by one wrist, and, although he by no means held her with any painful pressure, yet she found it as impossible to escape from that grasp as if it had been one of iron.

"He holds me!" she cried. "He wants to kill me!"

"Not at all, Lucy," said Claude, "for if such a foolish idea had ever entered my brain, I could and would have done it long ago. But I will, now that I have got you, hold you fast."

"Help! help!"

"Oh, you may shout for help as much as you please. I will take care that you shall come to no more harm, at all events, than your own obstinacy may bring upon you; but if any of your dark-skinned relations interfere with me, let them look to it, for I shall not be very particular how I retaliate."

"Mother! mother!" cried Lucy.

"Let her go," said the gipsy-woman. "We will bury the past in deep oblivion. You shall be adopted into our tribe, and Lucy, according to the mystic rites and ceremonies of our ancient race, shall be you wife."

"I decline the honour," said Claude.

"You decline?"

"Yes; I am already married, according to what probably you would call the mystic rites and ceremonies of my own people; and if I were at all inclined for a plurality of wives, I should not come here for the second one; so, with a great appreciation of the honour, I despise it."

"He contemns us!" cried the old woman.

"Vengeance! vengeance!" cried those without the hut.

"Hark, you," said Claude; "if this girl will, even now, in the presence of yourself and of her people, which she calls the savages outside, retract her mad threats against one, whom it is my inclination as much as it is my duty to protect, and will make a solemn oath that, by word or deed, she will not seek to injure her, I will depart in peace."

"No—no!" cried Lucy.

The old woman spoke, in the patois of the gipsies, to some of those who were upon the threshold of the door, and turning to Claude, she said—

"It is done—it is done. Now go."

"What is done?"

"You may go in peace, with an assurance that nothing will be attempted against the person of whom you speak."

"Is this so, Lucy?" said Claude.

"No!" cried the girl, with vehemence. "If my lips were to utter as much my heart would not. I call upon my people to avenge me upon you, and I will avenge myself upon her who stands between you and me."

"That is quite enough," said Claude.

"She knows not what she says," cried the old woman. "Passion is in her heart and brain. In a calmer hour she will think differently; I will in the meantime be answerable for her, you can take my word."

"I wish I thought I could," said Claude, "but I have always found that I could take any one's word for mischief much sooner than I could take it for good. If Lucy herself had acceded to my conditions, I would have left her, for I should have felt that I had no right to ask more; but as she has not, I hold her as my prisoner."

"Your prisoner?"

"Yes; my prisoner. Do I not speak plainly? I say, I hold her as my prisoner, and I will not let her be at liberty to carry out her threats, in the smallest particular. My determination is to take her now away with me, dead or alive!"

"Save me! save me!" cried Lucy.

"There will be murder done," whispered the footpad to Claude; "for [illegible] sake, let her go now."

"No—not while I have life to hold her.—I give every one fair warning. If any of you interfere with me I will blow your brains out. I am well armed, and

I will do it. My mind is wound up to my object, and I will carry it out, so help me Heaven!"

The tone of voice in which Duval uttered these words for a few moments struck absolute terror into the hearts of all who heard him. Even Lucy, nerved as she was by strong passions, shook again. The old woman stamped with rage, and advanced two steps, crying—

"You would drag my child to a prison?"

"No," said Claude. "But I will take care of her. If she is so very fond of me as she pretends, why all this fuss about going with me?"

"You do not take her in affection."

"Certainly not."

"Then she shall not go. My children—brave spirits of our ancient tribes! I let loose your wrath against this man. I withdraw all interdiction. I no longer say to you, spare him. But I tell you to kill—kill—kill!"

A loud howl of delight came from those on the outside, and one dark figure darted into the hut and made an attempt to cast himself at Claude's feet, and seize him by the ancles, which, if he had succeeded in doing, would have embarrassed Claude very much, and indeed, in all probability would have defeated him; but Duval was well aware that that mode of fighting was practised by the gipsies, and he was prepared to resist it in the only manner in which it can and ought to be resisted.

With one of the heavy riding boots that he had on, he gave the gipsy who tried the cunning manœuvre, such a frightful kick in the face, that with a yell of pain, he rolled right out of the hut, among his companions.

"Come on," cried Claude, "I am quite prepared for that species of attack Come on, cowards—come on!"

It was all very well for Claude to say "come on," but after the reception that their comrade had met with, the gipsies did not exactly see the amusement of coming on. The old woman suddenly said a something in a loud voice, and then rushing from the hut, she slammed the door of it shut.

"What are they going to be about now?" said Claude to the footpad.

"I cannot imagine. I don't know what the old gipsy said. Their language is only very slightly known to me. What do you mean to do, Claude, with the girl?"

"Take her with me, of course. She has fainted. Excess of passion has got the better of her at last, and before she recovers I shall, I hope, have her in a place of safety. We must manage to leave the hut, my friend, as quickly as possible."

"They are barricading the door."

"Indeed! What can that be for?"

"Hush! hush! Ah, now I guess."

"You guess what?"

"That they are going to burn us out. Hark, the old woman is raving away at a great rate. I think they are about to do something that she disapproves of. The fact is, they care nothing for this girl, for they do not at all acknowledge her as one of them; but the old woman has a certain amount of authority among them, which they allowed her to exercise until their own passions got the upper-hand of them."

"Now, then, you think it is merely an affair of private vengeance against me, do you?"

"Yes, the manner in which you have treated two of them has made them almost mad, and they will think nothing of sacrificing Lucy, if, with her, they can sacrifice you."

"Do you really think so?"

"I am sure of it. They keep repeating the word 'fire' in their own tongue, and I believe that they will set light to the thatch of the hut."

"Ah, there is very little doubt but what that will be their game. Now you mention it, I can easily imagine that it is just the sort of thing that would sug-

gest itself to them; and the old woman opposes it on account of Lucy, no doubt."

"She does."

"Put out the light, my friend. Without it we shall be better able to judge of what they are about. The turf upon the hearth will give us sufficient light to



DICK TURPIN VISITED BY CLAUDE AND JACK.

prevent us being taken by surprise through the roof, or by any other extemporaneous modes of entrance."

The footpad put out the light, and then, as Claude had said, there was a dim twilight throughout the little hut from the glowing turfs on the hearth. A very strange and unnatural stillness was without, and as Claude felt no doubt of the genuineness of the faint of Lucy, he placed her upon two chairs and waited the

result of the gipsies' proceedings, with a most admirable coolness and self-possession, that was much envied by the footpad.

"Are you sure," he said, "that the girl is not playing you a trick?"

"Quite. You mean, do I think she has really fainted?"

"Yes; that is it. She has played me so many games and tricks, that I am suspicious of her."

"I know her well, my friend. But you don't seem very much cut up at the idea of parting from her?"

"I cut up?—oh, no. Quite the reverse. Her temper was tolerably violent before, but now, I expect, after all this, if she were to stay with me, I should never have one moment's peace; so I beg that you will take her, and let me get rid of her in any way. I should go in fear of my very life."

"I should not wonder. But go to the window, my friend, and both look and listen. You know something of the dialect of the gipsies, and I do not. If you can come to any correct information as to what they are about, I shall be glad to hear it."

"I will, Claude. You keep an eye on the girl, and likewise keep both ears and eyes open to be on the alert in case of those rascals trying any of their tricks. They are quite as artful as so many savages."

"I know it. I will be careful."

The footpad listened at the window, and in a few moments he came to Claude, and said, in a low tone—

"I am certain some one of them is on the roof."

"I was thinking the same thing," said Claude.

"You have heard him then?"

"I have; but you look to the general safety while I adopt a mode of meeting the fellow. Where is my hat?—oh, I have it. That will do. Have you a stick?"

"Yes. Here is one."

"Very good. Do not say a word now."

All was profoundly still, and Daval took one of the glowing red hot turfs and placed it upon the crown of his hat, taking the precaution previously to place a cold turf under it, so that it should not in a moment, as it otherwise would have done, burn through the crown. He then placed the stick in the hat, and held it behind his back, and waited under the large hole that was in the roof for the gipsy.

CHAPTER CLXXXVI.

CLAUDE HEARS OF DICK TURPIN'S ARREST, AND DETERMINES TO SAVE HIM.

As he stood in the hut under the hole in the little miserable thatched roof, through which it will be recollected that one of the gipsies had made an attempt to come down upon Claude, and been so summarily ejected again, he could just see some portion of the night sky and one star.

That star would rapidly, no doubt, have passed over his plane of vision, but he kept his eyes fixed upon it, and in the course of about half a minute it was suddenly obscured by something black being thrust before it.

Claude did not doubt for one moment but that that something was the face of a gipsy on the roof, and it was for such a contingency that he had the little piece of apparatus ready that we have noticed at the conclusion of our last chapter.

The turf was glowing hot, and in one instant, by the aid of the stick in the hat, Claude thrust it up with sharp and sudden vehemence into the face of the gipsy. A yell of pain and rage, and a shower of red hot sparks from the turf on to the floor of the hut, testified amply to the success of the plan. Then there

was a rolling sound over the roof, and the unmistakable indication of a heavy fall outside.

"I rather think," said Claude, "that I have singed that gentleman's whiskers, if he had any to singe."

"You must, indeed," said the footpad, "have punished him severely."

"Serves him right. He had no business there."

"None in the least. But I should not have thought of such a plan, if I had puzzled my brain for twelve months upon the subject. Of a truth, Claude Duval, you have a most fertile imagination."

"One needs it, my friend, when one has to deal with such a set of demi-savages as these gipsies."

"They are quite savages when they are enraged; for then they forget that they are in a civilised country, and encompassed by the restraints of the law."

"Ah, they begin now."

"By Heaven! they do. They have fired the thatch, and the old hut will soon be about our ears. What on earth is to be done now, Claude Duval?"

"Don't be alarmed," said Claude; "all will be well yet."

"Think you so?"

"I feel assured it will. The walls of this hut are not very strong, my friend. Perhaps you know the weakest part. Break through it, and then we will leave the place. No doubt, it is the door that is most looked to by the gipsies."

"Yes; but they are all round the hut."

"Never mind that. All will be well. They are people who deal in threats, but nothing else."

"I will soon open a way to the heath," said the footpad. "Nothing is much easier to do than that, Claude, in such a place as this."

"Quick, then,"

The footpad set about opening a hole in the wall at the back of the hut, and by the rattling of the falling rubbish of which the wall was composed, Claude could hear that he was being speedily successful.

And now the hut presented both from without and from within, a very strange appearance indeed. The thatch was all on fire, and blazed up rather freely, while the inside was tolerably cool and comfortable, for the artificial current produced by the flames brought in at every crevice, as well as by the broken window, a strong draught of cold air; and no doubt, from without, the appearance was that the whole place was in one blaze.

Claude picked up Lucy, and flung her over his right shoulder, as he said, in a low tone—

"Are you ready?"

"Quite," said the footpad.

"Very good. Follow me, if you wish to get away; or, possibly, you would rather remain, since it is not against you that the rage of the gipsies is invoked?"

"No. It is not against me specially, but yet I feel that this is no place for me now. When you are gone, they will want some one to be revenged upon, and they may just as well light upon me as not. I will go with you, Claude, if you will permit me."

"Certainly. Come on."

The opening that the footpad had made in the wall was just wide enough to admit of one person only to pass out of the hut by it; and Claude took the lead. In his breast he had placed a pair of pistols in such readiness that he could avail himself of their services at a moment's notice, and in his right hand he held the powerful stick—which was more like a hedge stake than anything else—which he had used to thrust the hat, upon which was the lighted turf, into the gipsy's face.

Claude did not run, or make any undue haste, but he coolly and boldly sallied out into the night air.

The footpad was right enough in saying that the gipsies encompassed the hut, for the moment Claude made his appearance he was seen by the light of the blazing thatch, and a dozen voices cried—

"Down with him! Down with him!"

"My child! my child! Where is my child?" shouted the old woman. "He will kill her!"

"I have him!" said a man, darting forward; but in a moment he lay prostrate upon the heath with one blow of the stick that Claude carried.

"Take that," said a voice; and the sharp report of a pistol immediately sounded. The ball went through Claude's hat about a couple of inches only clear of his forehead. He saw by the flash the gipsy who fired it, and in an instant he returned the shot; and after a spring into the air, and a shriek, down went the gipsy dead upon the heath!

The wild yell that upon this arose from every throat was really something awful to hear, and might have appalled many a stout heart; but Claude kept the gipsies yet at bay, although, now that matters had got so serious, he did not attempt to advance. He well knew that the pistol shots would have the effect of bringing his friends to the spot, and he was, therefore, content to wait until they should arrive before he attempted anything else.

The footpad was close behind him, and he whispered—

"Blood has been shed now, and they will murder us!"

"Oh, no—no. Not at all."

"They will—indeed they will. Why do you not try to rush through them? Throw down the girl, and make one bold push for your own safety, Claude—I implore you to do so."

"All is well. Do you hear that?"

The footpad listened, and the sound of horses' hoofs came plainly upon his ears, patting the heath with a rapidity of sound that showed they were rapidly approaching the spot of the contest.

"Ah," he said, "I had forgot that you told me you had friends at hand. Why did you not summon them sooner?"

"Blood! blood!" cried the gipsies; and by the light of the now nearly expiring thatch, Duval could see that almost every one of them was armed with a knife. They were evidently collecting in a strong body, with the intention of making a rush at Claude and the footpad.

On came the horsemen, and they were close at hand before the gipsies, in the state of excitement in which they were, heard anything of their approach; and when they did, a momentary feeling of consternation induced them to pause. That moment was everything to Claude, for during it Jack and Brereton and the young farmer rode up.

"Where are you?" cried Jack. "Is all right?"

"Yes, all right," said Claude; "only these gentlemen think of murdering me, that's all."

"We will be in at the death," cried Jack, "at any rate, I rather think, Claude."

In an instant the three horsemen dashed through the throng of gipsies, and reached the side of Claude, having upset some half dozen of the more violent of the gang in their way.

"My horse?" cried Claude. "Is he with you?"

"Yes. Here," said Jack; "I have him by the bridle."

"That's right, Jack. Will you take care of this young lady? she is an old acquaintance of yours."

"Who is it—Lucy?"

"Yes."

"Give her to me," said Jack; "I'll hold her tight enough. I have a lively recollection that she used to have some little peculiarities of disposition that she called a temper."

"And she has them still, Jack. But she has fainted, so will give you no trouble. All's right now. Ah, pop away!"

As Claude mounted, another pistol was fired at the party; but although the bullet must have come right among them, it did not seem to have done any damage to them.

"Now," said Claude, "one charge with vigour will carry us through this mob of desperadoes, and you must not be at all particular where your horses tread, or whose toes come under their hoofs, for they will use their knives against the animals if they can."

"And what's to become of me?" said a doleful voice.

"Really, my friend," said Claude, "I hope you will forgive me for forgetting you for a moment. Get up behind me. My horse will carry double fare as far as we want to go, at any rate."

The footpad was thankful enough to scramble up behind Claude Duval, and then the whole party was ready; and what had been said and done during the time that they were getting ready had not occupied one quarter of the time that we have been compelled to take in the telling of it.

"Charge!" cried Claude.

Every one put his horse to a gallop, and as they each had rather heavy riding-whips, and Claude still retained possession of the hedge stake, they did not make much of the foe that only made a straggling attempt to oppose them. In the course of half-a-dozen seconds they were quite through the throng of gipsies, leaving some half-dozen of them sprawling upon the heath.

"On—on," cried Claude. "Follow me."

He took the lead, and rather to the surprise of the friends who were with him, he did not take his way to the farm-house, whither they had naturally enough concluded he would go first; but he galloped across the common in quite an opposite direction, keeping on at such a pace that none of them could ask him a question as to were he was going to.

He did not continue this speed for long though, and then Jack called out to him—

"Claude, where are you going? This is not the route to the farm."

"No," said Claude, "but that is the last place to which I should think of taking this girl to, Jack. Our friends there have quite enough trouble upon our account as it is."

"Do not think of that as a reason," cried the young farmer. "We never think anything a trouble, Claude, that we do for you; so that is of no sort of consequence. If you think proper to bring her to the farm, do so."

"No," said Claude; "it is certainly impossible that you could be always on the watch to prevent her from escaping from you, or perpetrating some mischief that would be worse still. I propose placing her in a private Lunatic Asylum, of which I know something, and where they will take her if they are well paid, and ask no questions."

"But she may talk?"

"Oh, yes, and they may listen, but what she says will have about as much effect upon those who will listen to her, as though she talked to the trees, or to the grass in the meadows. Has she moved, Jack?"

"No."

"Indeed! I begin to feel a little uneasy about this long swoon that she has fallen into. Can any of you get a light?"

"Yes, I can," said the young farmer; "and I have a small lantern hanging by my saddle, if it has not been knocked away in that squabble with the gipsies. No, here it is."

"Let us pause a moment by these trees," said Claude, "and see, if we can, what is the matter with her. I have half a suspicion now that she is only shamming a faint, for these sort of insensibilities seldom last so long as this."

They were tolerably clear of the heath, and upon the verge of a rather dense cluster of tall trees, among which they now quietly walked their horses, and Duval and the young farmer alighted. The latter, after some trouble, succeeded in lighting his lantern, which was a small hand one, with a powerful magnifying-glass, and a good reflector.

"Now," said Claude, "we will see what is the matter with this rather violent piece of goods."

As he spoke he lifted Lucy off Jack's horse, and kneeling upon one knee, he supported her upon the other.

"Bring the lantern close," he said.

"Here it is," said the young farmer. "Won't she open her eyes?"

"Good God!" said Claude.

"What is it—what is it?" they all cried.

"Poor girl, she will never open her eyes again. A pistol-bullet has gone through the very centre of her forehead, and she is stone-dead!"

CHAPTER CLXXXVII.

LUCY IS BURIED AMONG THE TREES, AND CLAUDE HEARS NEWS OF TURPIN.

NOTWITHSTANDING all that had happened to deprive the little party among the trees of much sympathy with such a personage as Lucy, they could not help feeling something of a shock upon finding that she was really dead.

For some few moments not one word was uttered by any one, and as they all, by the light of the little lantern that the young farmer had with him, gazed upon the lifeless face, no doubt each was busy with his own peculiar reflections upon the scene.

"Thank God," said Claude, breaking the silence, "that no one here present is answerable for this death."

"No one," said Jack.

The footpad stepped forward, and with his hands clasped, he looked down at the corpse. One tear fell from his eyes, and with a deep sigh, he said—

"So this is the end. Poor girl, I don't know now if all thy passion about Duval was real or affected; but whichever it was, you have paid the penalty of it. You are gone now."

"Yes," said Claude, "and let all her faults go with her. Let us, if we say anything of her now, poor girl, say that she was wrong-headed but not wrong-hearted. It matters not now if she were only playing a part, or if she really felt all that she said and did. She is gone."

"Yes gone," added the footpad. "Peace go with her. I never thought until this moment——"

"What?" said Claude.

"That I cared for her a jot!"

As he said these words, so few, and yet so expressive of his feeling for the dead, he turned sadly away. Claude walked after him, and touching him lightly on the shoulder, he said—"Stop."

The footpad turned round hastily.

"There is something yet to be done, my friend," said Claude.

"What? Can you restore her to life again?"

"No, but we can pay proper respect to the dead. Here, in the open country, far away from the feted soil of the crowded churchyard, let us lay her to rest. We will burry her, my friend."

The footpad grasped Claude's hand, but he said nothing. That pressure was sufficient, and they then walked back slowly together to the spot where Lucy lay, with Jack and the young farmer looking at her.

"We must bury her," said Claude. "At least, at our hands her remains want so much attention. Here amid the trees, where the free air of Heaven will blow over her grave, we will bury her."

"Yes," said Jack. "That is a job I will help at, with all my heart, Claude. Poor girl, she has my pity, and yet she has come to a quieter end than probably ny of us will. Only look at her face, Claude; she just seems sleeping calmly nd pleasantly."

"It is so, Jack."

"How is it possible," said the young farmer, "that we can bury her? We cannot dig a grave with our nails."

"That is indeed an obstacle," said Jack.

"And yet," said the footpad "buried she must be, poor thing. If it take me a whole day to scoop a grave for her with a hedge-stake, I will do it. It is my duty not to desert even her corpse, whatever you may all think proper to do."

He spoke in a tone of voice that was harsh with hardly suppressed g·. Claude laid his hand upon his arm, and spoke gently,

"Hush, my friend, hush. If we speak of difficulties, it is only that we may devise means to overcome them. Do not fancy that we are going to abandon our object. It will be done, let the difficulties be what they may."

"Forgive me for a brief impatience."

"It needs no excuse, Jack; can you think of any mode of operation in this emergency?"

"Yes," said Jack. "I think I can go to our friend's farm here, in less than half an hour, and bring back a couple of spades."

"Ah!" said the young farmer, "I did not think of that; I will go, and as I know exactly where to lay my hands upon what I want, I shall be able to do it quicker, and likewise to give no alarm to the family. Shall I go at once on this errand, Claude?"

"You will please me much, my friend, by doing so."

The young farmer did not wait another moment, but availing himself of the loan of Jack's horse, which was accustomed to a sharp run now and then, he set off across the fields at a pace that promised very soon to bring him to his destination.

Nothing of any moment passed during the absence of the young farmer, and he returned in much less time than any one could have supposed it possible for him to do. He brought with him two staved spades, and as he dismounted, he said—

"I got the spades from an outhouse we have in the garden, and so had no occasion to go near the house."

"Then no one knows you have been there?" suggested Claude.

"No one."

Claude nodded as though he would have said—

"I am glad of that," and then in a clear voice, he said—

"At this juncture, my friends, let me ask if any of you feel any repugnance to promising to keep this affair a profound secret?"

"None," said the footpad. "I feel, Duval, that this is a question that is solely addressed to me, and I promise that not one word of to-night's proceedings will ever pass my lips."

"I thank you," said Claude, "and I tell you frankly my reason for being pleased at such a promise. It would much vex Cicely, my wife, to hear of it."

"No doubt. It shall be kept secret."

The young farmer took one of the spades, and the footpad took the other; but Claude, throwing off his coat, took it from him, saying—

"No, my friend, let me do this last service for the poor girl. You can be a spectator and a mourner, and should not be asked to work at this sad task."

The footpad surrendered the spade. Indeed his hands shook so, that if he had attempted to persevere in the use of it, it was quite clear that he would have made but very small progress indeed with it, while Claude, with his strength and perseverance, was able, effectually, to aid the young farmer, who had already systematically begun the work.

They chose a spot beneath a large sycamore tree, whose spreading branches stretched far and wide on all sides, and particularly to the south, and then they marked out the grave of the wayward spirit that had brought death upon itself.

As they worked, the gray light of the dawn began slowly to make its appearance, and they extinguished the little lantern, by the aid of which they had first

begun their labours. The moment they put that out, the coming daylight was much more perceptible to them all, and they paused a moment to look at it.

"We must get our work over soon," said Claude, "or the daylight will surprise us."

"Yes," said Jack, "it is coming fast. There—there is a sudden gleam of light from the east. Do you see it among the trees?"

"Yes, and the grave is finished," said Claude.

They had dug about five feet into the earth, and now the young farmer and Claude having got out of the grave, they all carefully and slowly lifted the body and placed it in its last resting place.

"My large cloak, Jack," said Claude.

"Yes, it is here," said Jack.

Claude took it and laid it four times doubled over the corpse, and then they replaced the mould, and as the young farmer had carefully laid aside the turf from the surface, he relaid it again, so that but very slight traces of any interference with the ground was left. The spare mould they scattered far and wide among the trees; but before the work was quite finished the farmer approached the footpad, and taking a little volume from his pocket, he said—

"I brought you this. Would you like to use it?"

It was a book of Common Prayer, and, of course, contained the service for the dead.

"Yes—yes," he said, eagerly; "yes. I thank you for this. Indeed, I thank you for this."

He advanced to the side of the grave, and holding the book so that the best rays of the gray light that was irradiating the east fell upon it, he read the service of the dead in a solemn and affecting voice. All present stood uncovered, and listening to it with quiet composure; and when the last words were spoken, and the book was closed, it dropped from the hands of the footpad.

"I shall leave England now," he said.

"Do you think you will be happier elsewhere?" said Claude.

"Yes, I am sure I shall. Besides, I—"

What the footpad was going to add, was suddenly drowned in the echoes of a loud yell, that came from some unseen persons in the immediate vicinity among the trees.

So entirely unexpected, and so startling was this sudden outcry, that even Claude, with all his presence of mind, and few could equal him in that grand particular, was startled. He recovered, however, in a moment, and cried out—

"The horses, Jack! See to the safety of the horses!"

"The gipsies are upon us!" said the footpad.

The words had scarcely escaped his lips, when the old hag, who claimed, probably upon rather dubious grounds, to be the mother of Lucy, rushed forward from among the trees, with a knife in her hand. She made directly towards Claude, exclaiming—

"Thus am I avenged!"

Had she made a similar demonstration against any other one of the party, it is likely enough she might have succeeded in doing what she wished; but Claude stood as firm as a rock, and when she darted towards him, he caught the wrist of the arm she had raised against him, and with the other hand flung her some distance off, and she rolled right over the newly covered up grave of Lucy.

"Let her be," cried Claude. "She is mad, I do think."

It would appear that the gipsies had relied upon the old hag being successful in taking the life of Claude; for they had not followed up this sudden yell, or war cry, by any attack. No doubt, that was merely for the purpose of petrifying the little party with sudden fright, so that the old woman might, before the sudden surprise had ceased, plunge the knife into Claude's heart.

If this had succeeded, it is very probable that the rest of the party would have found it difficult to resist an impetuous attack from the gipsies; but the failure of the hag made all the difference.

There was quite sufficient daylight now for the gipsies to see perfectly well what had happened, and how completely the hay had failed in her murderous intent. They just hesitated long enough to enable those whom they came to attack, to get thoroughly upon their guard.

"Do not run," cried Claude. "Stay and face them. They are arrant cowards at the best of times. I know them well."



CLAUDE AND JACK WATCHING THE LANDLORD OF THE INN IN HIS SLEEP.

The most available weapon he could use in a close encounter with the gipsies, so as to ward off their knives, which were really dangerous, was the spade with which he had assisted the young farmer to dig Lucy's grave; and that in the hands of such a man as Claude Duval was, in truth, a most formidable implement of offence as well as of defence.

The young farmer had the other spade. Jack held a very heavily loaded riding

whip in both hands, one blow from which he well knew was enough to knock down any man. Mark Brereton had a sword by his side, which he now drew and put himself upon the defensive; so that our party, although small, was well prepared.

They had not, however, very long to wait, before, with a wild scream of rage, about thirty of the most desperate-looking fellows of the gipsy race that could well be conceived, made their appearance from among the trees, and tried, by one sudden rush, to overcome all opposition, and crush their foes.

This was not so easily done, however. Our friends stood shoulder to shoulder in a small half circle, and well they sustained the sudden shock of the gipsies' assault. Claude, with his spade, knocked no less than four of them prostrate in the course of as many moments. Two others fell before the young farmer, and the heavy riding whip wielded by Jack, did great execution.

One athletic fellow, who made a dash at Mr. Brereton, was run right through the body in a moment, and Brereton had to put up his foot to throw him off his sword.

This reception certainly staggered the gipsy crew; and seeing more than a third of their number put *hors de combat* in about a minute and a half, they wavered. One voice then cried out—

"Forward! kill them—they are exhausted now—kill them all! They have murdered the girl! Blood for blood!"

The sound of that voice seemed to animate the gipsies; and collecting all their strength and all their ferocity, they made another dash at the little party; but as our friends had not received any injury whatever worth the mentioning, and none at all that they felt at the moment, they stood firm, and the result of this second attack of the gipsy crew was something very similar to the first. Some half-dozen more fell to the ground, either dead or totally insensible from serious hurts.

CHAPTER CLXXXVIII.

CLAUDE TAKES A HASTY RIDE TO OXFORD.

After this second check, the gipsies were by far too much reduced in number to hazard a third attack. With a yell of rage and disappointment, they set off in full retreat among the trees; and in the space of a moment or two not one was to be seen, except such as lay upon the ground at the feet of their victors.

"This is pleasant!" cried Claude.

"Very," said Jack.

"Is anybody hurt of us?"

"All right," cried the young farmer and Mark Brereton.

In a moment, then, the footpad answered—

"A slight scratch," he said, as he appeared stanching the blood that flowed from a knife-wound in his arm. "A slight scratch, that is all."

"How did you get it?" said Claude.

"Why, I saw that you all had enough to do in front, so, knowing well what the gipsies are, I kept an eye on one man, and was rewarded by seeing a fellow stealing along, with a knife in his hand, to attack you all behind. I closed with him, and he gave me this bit of a scratch, that's all."

"And where is he?"

"Lying over there. It strikes me his head had two or three hard knocks against that bit of root of the chesnut there, that sticks out of the ground so singularly, and is as hard as iron."

"It strikes me so too," said Jack, who stepped for a moment over to where the man was lying. "Nobody can deny that the fellow had some brains."

"How do you mean, Jack?" said Claude.

"Why, they are lying principally on the ground by his side."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder," said the footpad. "He would be rather troublesome, so I was forced, in a manner of speaking, to do the best I could with him."

"Where is the old woman?" said Claude.

"Dead, I think," said Brereton, as he wiped his sword in the grass. "She is lying on the grave here, quite gone; I think."

"Nobody hurt her," said Claude. "I was careful only to throw her; and a fall upon the green sod here could not kill her. If she be dead, passion has more to do with it than violence."

As he spoke, he approached the grave upon which the old hag lay, in exactly the attitude she had fallen in when Claude cast her from him. He stooped slightly over her, saying—

"Foolish woman, we have no animosity against you. If you live, go and join your people in peace, so far as we are concerned."

The old woman moved slightly.

"Oh, she is all right," cried Claude.

"You will let me go?" she said, faintly.

"Certainly. Get up and be off with you. I can assure you we are none of us solicitous of your very agreeable company."

"Be careful of her, Claude," cried the footpad, who, with the assistance of Jack, was binding a handkerchief round his wounded arm. "Be careful of her. She has as many tricks as an old fox."

"Thank you," said Claude.

He only slightly turned his head towards the footpad to say these two words, and on the moment, seeing her opportunity, the hag was on her knees in a moment and made a stab at his breast with the knife which she had, despite her tumble, retained, and cunningly hidden.

"Now I am avenged!" she cried.

The knife broke off short by the hilt against Claude's breast, as though it had been made of iron. In another moment Mark Brereton had seized the old woman round the waist, and held her tight.

"How is this, Claude?" he said. "Do you wear armour?"

"Armour?"

"Yes. The knife broke off your breast as it would off a good cuirass. It has saved you."

"But I have no cuirass. I never thought of such a thing."

He hastily tore open his vest as he spoke, and then, in a moment, it was seen what had saved him. The point of the knife had happened to come precisely against a rather massive gold watch that Claude had in his pocket, and so he had been effectually saved. There was a clear indentation in the outside case of the watch; and as he held it up, he said—

"This is a lucky escape, indeed, my friends. This watch has saved my life, and I will never part with it."

"You ought not," said Brereton; "but, in the meantime, pray tell me what I am to do with this mad old woman."

"I'll soon relieve you of her!" cried Jack.

Taking from his pocket a stout cord, Jack now, after some little difficulty, tied the old woman's wrists together.

"Now," he said, "I shall have the pleasure, madam, of effectually preventing you from being mischievous for some time to come, by making you fast to one of these trees."

"My bitterest malediction light upon you all!" cried the hag, while her eyes flashed with passion.

"Rave away," said Jack, "we like to hear it. Besides, it will keep you out of more mischief. Only remember, that your cursing us has just about as much effect as if, by your maledictions, you strove to uproot one of these old trees."

"Revenge!—I will have my revenge!"

"Doubtless you will, when you can."

Despite all her struggles—and, at times, they were rather furious—Jack tied her fast to a tree, and there he left her to rave or swear at her leisure.

"What is to be done?" said Brereton to Claude.

"Nothing, that I know of," he said; "but as a matter of choice, now, to leave this place. All that has happened here, disagreeable as it is, has only been a matter of force with us. We did not choose it, and so we cannot help it. Let us all go to the farm, and from there we can separate as our different routes and inclinations may lead us. Jack and I are for the road again."

"And so am I," said the footpad, "until, by some lucky chance, I can get hold of enough to take me from England."

Jack shook his head.

"You won't go, my friend," he said. "We tried it once. There is a destiny in these things."

"Think you so?"

"I am sure of it. But help me with the horses here. It is something more than a lucky thing that the gipsies did not find out where we had stowed them, or we should have had to walk, for a certainty, from this place."

"Yes," said the footpad. "I know them well. They would have gloried in slaughtering them."

Fortunately, as Jack said, the cattle had been, while the grave was being dug, placed in a secure position among the trees; and now they were brought out quite fresh and ready for a good start.

"I shall never forget this place as long as I live," said Claude. "This affair will make a pretty noise when it comes to be known."

"I don't think," said the footpad, "it will ever be known. Of course, the dead bodies will be found; but as they are all gipsies, it will be considered that they have had some fracas among themselves, and so a number of them have come by death, and everybody with a poultry yard will rejoice accordingly."

"Then," said Claude, as they all rode off, "you think they will not themselves—I mean these who escaped—say anything about it?"

"Not one word."

"It is better that they should not."

"But you, Claude, and all of us, will be marked men by the gipsy tribe; and if ever they have an opportunity of being revenged upon us, you may depend that they will."

"Naturally enough," said Claude.

"Do you hear," said Jack, "what a racket that old woman makes, swearing and cursing us at such a rate?"

"Yes," said Claude, "I hear her. She ought to be less dangerous upon that account some other time."

"Not a whit," said the footpad. "If she don't follow you up, Claude Duval, and yet try to place a knife-blade in your heart, it will be simply because her failures will take a superstitious hold of her, and she will fancy that you are supernaturally protected—that is the only feeling that will keep her quiet."

"And do you think it a likely one to come over her?"

"I do."

"Well, I must say, I sincerely hope it may. A man I really don't mind how many tussles I have with, but with such an antagonist as a viperous old woman, it is one of the most difficult things in the world to know what to do."

More than once they at intervals paused to glance behind them, to see if they could notice any appearance of the gipsies; but all was quiet, and they soon reached the outskirts of the farm.

Claude rode up to the young farmer, and said—

"You are pretty certain that no one knew of your visit to the farm for the two spades?"

"My brother only saw me, and him I cautioned to say nothing. While I was getting the spades, he fetched me the prayer-book, which, it appeared, your friend was well pleased to have."

"Just so. I would not have the mind and the peace of Cicely disturbed by this adventure on any account."

"There is no occasion."

"Not the least; and I am extremely obliged to you, for the discretion you have showed in the matter.

"Do not mention that. If I or any of my family can, by any possible means, do you a service, you know what great pleasure it gives us."

"Yes, I do know it, and I feel grateful accordingly; but here we are at home. I always call this house home, for such is the character of the feeling that comes over me when I reach its threshold."

"And there is Cicely!"

"Cicely! So early up?"

"Ah! yes, Duval. She, doubtless, has been a little alarmed at your protracted absence. I warrant she left her chamber as soon as daylight enabled her to see her way."

"I should not wonder. Cicely—Cicely!"

Cicely ran across the farm-yard to the little gate at which they had all halted.

"Ah, you are safe?" she said.

"Safe!" said Claude, quietly. "Yes, to be sure, Cicely. How could we be otherwise? We have not been in more than common danger."

"What do you call common danger, Claude?"

"Why, have you not heard that?"

"'Tis dangerous to eat, to drink, to sleep,
To walk?"

"Yes, Claude; but your dangers, I am assured, are generally of a much more stringent character."

"And who assures you, Cicely, of that?"

"My own heart, Claude."

This little dialogue took place between Claude and Cicely as they walked up the avenue together of the garden towards the house, for they had left the farm-yard, and had taken a slight round to the homestead.

"You will now remain for a time?" said Cicely.

"Yes, for a time."

"How long, Claude? I like not the tone in which you say 'for a time.' You will stay all day?"

"Nay, dear Cicely, that I cannot. I can but breakfast, and then be off; but if it be at all possible for me to return by about midnight, I will do so. Do not, however, construe this hope of mine into a positive promise."

"I must."

"Nay, do not; for I cannot tell what may detain me. You do not know what adventures befal me at times; and were I to tell you all——"

"Why do you pause?"

"Because I was going to say, were I to tell you all, you would not be able to sleep so soundly a-nights, as, in truth, I hope you do, and wish you to do. Besides, if I were to make positive promises about being here at certain hours, without leaving myself the smallest latitude of action, if anything occurred that I came not, you would picture to yourself the worst that could happen, when, perhaps, it was very far, indeed, from the truth."

"You are right in that, Claude."

"I feel that I am. Let me then go without a promise, and come when I can."

Cicely's reason told her, that this was by far the best arrangement that could be made; and after a few moments, she acquiesced in it completely. They all sat down to an ample breakfast at the farm-house, and at its conclusion, Claude and Jack again sought their steeds, and mounting, took to the road.

They struck off to the high road to Guilford at a gentle trot across the meadows.

CHAPTER CLXXXIX.

THE LAWYER'S CLERK FROM OXFORD, DETAILS TURPIN'S PERIL.

"JACK," said Claude. "How do you feel after all this affair of Lucy's?"

"Will you let me answer your question by another, Claude?"

"It is an Irish way of answering a question Jack; but say on. Let us have it."

"Then, what is your reason for asking me?"

"Why, Jack, you are turning a complete Jesuit. What reason could I possibly have, my friend, for asking you, but to obtain information?"

"Then, Claude, I am quite satisfied; I know that her death hangs heavily at your heart; but I do not think it ought to do so. You had literally nothing to do with it; and although she had threatened abundance of harm to Cicely, you never for one moment dreamt of any to her."

"That is strictly true, Jack."

"Well, she, in the frenzy of her evil passions, called up the gipsies to her aid, and she herself fell a victim to the evil spirit she had summoned to do her service, as you will generally find most people do."

"Yes," said Claude, mournfully, "the pistol-shot which killed her, certainly came from one of the gipsies."

"And it was aimed at you, Claude."

"That there can be no doubt of. Well, Jack, we cannot recall the past, and I will endeavour to forget the fate of that poor creature. Ill-directed passion brought her to her end, and I cannot help thinking that she had some evil adviser who urged her on to her destruction."

"I have thought so myself," said Jack, "for at times, when she seemed to be most violent, her passion did not seem to me to be so natural as it might have been."

"The same idea crossed me, Jack, more than once during the fray. But hush! I hear the rapid sound of a horse's hoofs. Some one approaches in a hurry."

"They do indeed; and yet it is, by the sound, a straggling bad sort of gallop."

"Where are we?" said Claude, glancing around him.

"What, Claude, don't you recognise the road? It is the old Oxford-road, and we are about eight miles from London. Don't you know it now?"

"Oh, yes, most assuredly I do. But I should like to stop this fellow who is coming along at such a rate, and know what puts him to speed. Wait where you are a moment, Jack, and I will take the middle of the road. I don't like people to go by me in a great hurry, and I know nothing about it."

Jack laughed, and Claude rode out into the centre of the thoroughfare, which was, just at that spot, not very wide, so that when the horseman came up, he found it would have been rather a difficult thing to pass on.

"Out of my way, sir," he cried; "I am at speed."

"Hold!" shouted Claude. "As an officer of police, I insist upon knowing who you are and where you are going? They say that the celebrated Gentleman Jack the highwayman is upon this road, and how do I know but you may be he?"

Upon this the horseman pulled up at once,

"Bless your heart," he said, "me a highwayman? Only look at me, and then ask yourself if I have any resemblance to one."

"I don't know that. What do you make yourself out to be, my friend, and where are you going?"

"My name, sir, is Brown. I am clerk to a respectable solicitor in Oxford, and I am going to Bow-street."

"Humph! what about?"

"Why, you must know that the notorious Dick Turpin has been apprehended at the Pig and Tinder-Box in Oxford, while he was in bed, and we think of hanging him for a highway-robbery, outside that city, committed only three days ago. The Oxford Assizes are on, only it was thought as he was such a notorious

criminal, the Attorney-general might come down by order of the Treasury to conduct the prosecution."

"Oh, indeed."

"Yes, sir. And now you know all about it. Of course, I very sincerely hope he will be hung, as no doubt you do; so I beg that you will not impede me any longer, sir."

"Certainly not—go on. Good day."

"Good day, sir. You are a very active officer, indeed, and about the stupidest fellow I ever met with," added the lawyer's clerk to himself as he rode on, for he had quite mistaken Claude's look of concern, when he heard of Dick Turpin's peril, to stupidity and a difficulty of comprehension.

The moment the clerk was out of sight, Claude rode to where Jack was waiting, and told him what had passed.

"Why didn't you stop him?" said Jack.

"Because it would have done no good. We should not have liked killing him, and if we had dismounted him, and started off his horse, he could have walked to London in a couple of hours. I did think of stopping him, but upon consideration I did not see that it would do the smallest good to Dick Turpin; so I abandoned the idea of it."

"You are right, Claude."

"But I am not going to abandon Dick, for all that. What say you to a trot to Oxford, Jack?"

"With all my heart, if you think you can do any good; and if you dont't think so, we may as well go, as something may turn up when we get there."

"Jack, I thank you for those words; they show a proper spirit. So let us be off at once. Our horses are fully equal to the job; and we shall be there in six hours from hence, I think, or thereabouts."

"Easy," said Jack.

They did not pause another moment, but turning their horses' heads in the required direction, off they went at a good pace, although not a distressing one, for knowing the distance that lay before them, they were too judicious to tax their steeds for the first twenty miles, to the peril of seeing them perform the rest of the journey with difficulty.

"How are you off for money, Claude?" said Jack, when they were in a lonely part of the road, after having riden about twelve miles or so.

"Pretty well. I think I have somewhere about eighty pounds by me."

"And I have more."

"More Jack?'

"Yes; you forget that you frequently lend me sums of money, saying, 'Take this, Jack,' or 'Mind this for a rainy day, Jack,' or something of that sort; but I take care of it all; so if cash will do Dick any good, I think we shall have plenty. I speak because we should not allow ourselves to lose any time by crying 'stand and deliver!' to anyone upon the road."

"No, Jack, we will let the world go free for once in a way. Oxford is our destination, and we will not turn out of our route or stay upon it longer than will be necessary to give our horses bait a little, on any account."

"Very good, Claude, I think that is the right course."

"After completing the first twenty miles, they halted for a whole hour, during which they refreshed themselves and their horses, letting the latter have a careful grooming, and a light feed, after which they were nearly as fresh as when they had first started in the morning.

"I want to do all the rest of the distance now," said Claude, "without a halt of more than ten minutes or so, once or twice."

"That we can do, easily. I should advise that after the next five miles we give the horses a pot of old ale each, and then I don't think they will flag if we were to ride right through Oxford."

"It shall be done, Jack."

They halted at a pretty little road-side inn, to give the horses the ale, and just

as they had finished drinking it, a corpulent man came to the door of the inn with an immense bell-shaped barrelled blunderbuss in his hands, and pointing it full upon Claude, he called out—

"Stop, both of you—I know you. You stopped me once when I was in my gig, and took away one hundred and twenty pounds from me. You know you did. You are Duval, and the other rogue I don't know."

"Well," said Claude, "I'll tell you. They call him Blaze-away, and that's what I'm waiting for you to do, you stupid old pump. What's the use of that blunderbuss to you?"

"I'll soon let you know what use it is of, if you don't stop. Quick, Jem! Bob! Get a couple of ropes to tie up these two highwaymen with. I will take them both to London."

"Well," said Claude, "I'm sorry that I have not a blunderbuss to meet you with. If I had, we could make a regular duel with them both; but here is a little pop-gun in the shape of a pistol which will do."

The moment Claude produced a pistol, the corpulent man cried—

"All right, only I like to have first fire; so here goes."

As he spoke, he pulled the trigger of the blunderbuss, when, instead of discharging itself in the proper manner, it burst with a stunning report; and the last Claude and Jack saw of the corpulent man, were his heels in the air, as he lay upon his back in the passage of the inn.

"Come on, Jack," said Claude, "I expected some such an end to this adventure. Those old blunderbusses are really never to be depended upon."

"Really, Claude, you take things remarkably easy. What if it had gone off all right and riddled you with bullets?"

"I don't think, Jack, that it's my fate to be popped off in such a way. I have stood fire so often and never come to much hurt, that I seem now to have a blind confidence in my good fortune. It may fail me some day, though, for all that, and when it does, I shall not complain. Push on, Jack."

They went on at a good pace, and the effect of the ale they had given to their horses was tolerably manifest, for they did not draw rein again until they reached an inn not above three quarters of a mile from Oxford.

"We will put up here, Jack," said Claude, "and no doubt we shall get all the news if we ask our landlord to join us in a bottle of wine."

"It's more than likely," said Jack.

The horses were put up and well attended to—Claude asked for a private room, and then desired that a couple of bottles of wine should be brought him, and the two best beds kept for them. An order, too, for supper was given, of quite an *ad libitum* character, so that the landlord thought two such guests were well worth waiting on himself.

We should have premised that Jack had doffed his groom's costume and wore rather a dashing suit of brown cloth. Claude still retained about his costume a rather clerical look, and it became him very well indeed.

After the wine was on the table, the landlord came into the room with many bows and smirks.

"I hope, gentlemen," he said, "the wine is to your liking?"

"Very good," said Claude. "Pray sit down and take a glass of it with us, landlord."

"Oh sir, you really do me too much honour."

The landlord, notwithstanding it was too much honour, drew a chair and sat down with his very kind and urbane guests, and after a few glasses of wine had been partaken of, Claude said in an easy off-handed manner—

"Is there any news stirring in Oxford?"

"Why, sir," said the landlord, "at assize time we have lots of news of some sort or other; but everything is now taken up with the capture of Dick Turpin the highwayman."

"What, the celebrated Turpin?"

"The very same, sir."

"Why you amaze me! I always thought that he was so very bold and determined a fellow, that he would hardly have been taken alive."

"So did I," said Jack.

"Very likely, gentlemen, very likely," said the landlord. "Perhaps he would not, if they had not caught him in bed."



THE JEW CONCOCTING PLANS FOR THE RESCUE OF DICK TURPIN.

"Oh, that was it, was it?"

"Yes, they caught him in bed, gentlemen. But I hope you like this wine?"

"Very well, indeed. I think among us we may manage another bottle of it when these two are done; and in the meantime you will oblige us very much, landlord, by telling us how Turpin was captured, and by whom."

CHAPTER CXC.

TURPIN IS CAST FOR DEATH, BUT DOES NOT DESPAIR.

THE landlord smiled his best smile, for it was not every day that such good customers came to his house.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I can tell you the whole particulars."

"And we should like to know, too," added Jack, "what specific offence they are going to try him for."

"That I can tell you likewise, gentlemen, as well as any man. It is for robbing the Provost of Magdalen College on this very road, and not two hundred yards from this house."

"Indeed?" said Jack.

"What assurance," said Claude.

"Worse than assurance," added the landlord, "for of course gentlemen, you are aware, that the Provost is a Doctor of Divinity."

"Exactly."

"Well, then, gentlemen, the Provost has a quiet little nag that he likes a ride upon every afternoon, and about four days ago he passed this door on his nag, but he did not come home on it."

"How so?"

"Why it appears that after he had got some distance past this house, he met Turpin on his horse, although, of course, the Provost did not know him from Adam. Up rides Turpin to him and says—

"'Sir, can you tell me the exact time?'

"Well, the Provost did not much like his looks, but he took out his watch and told him.

"'Does that watch keep good time?' said Turpin.

"'Sir,' said the Provost, who was rather proud of his watch, which was worth a hundred guineas, 'sir, it keeps better time than the clock of Magdalen College.'

"'Oh, then,' said Turpin, 'I will trouble you for it, as I often want to know the exact time. You see, sir, I am a highwayman, and have, in consequence, what people call a bad character. Now in this country, if you give a dog a bad name you had better hang him, and as I am often accused of crimes at places I never saw, your correct watch will be a very handy thing when I want to prove an *alibi*.'"

"How cool," said Jack.

"Very," said Claude.

"You may well say that, gentlemen. Well, upon this, he took the watch from the Provost, and besides that, he made him give up his purse containing twenty pounds, and then he forced him to dismount from his nag and started it off down the London Road, and because he did not dismount quick enough, Turpin threw the reverend doctar's hat and wig into a ditch."

"Upon my word," said Claude, "that was too bad."

"Very much too bad," said Jack.

"You may well say that, gentleman. The poor Provost had to come here to this house on foot, and send for a chaise to Oxford, to take him home; and when he got to the college, he offered a hundred pounds reward to any one who would apprehend the highwayman who had robbed him, and he gave a good description of him, so that the police of Oxford all said it could be no other than Dick Turpin. But still he would have got clear off if he had only chosen to ride away, but instead of that he came into Oxford and put up at the Three Kings inn, and the landlord of it gave notice to the officers, and they caught him in bed and had him handcuffed before he was very well awake to what was going on."

"Ah," said Claude, "I understand how it was then. You may depend that if he had not been caught napping in such a way, Dick Turpin would have given them some trouble."

"Not a doubt of it, sir."

"And is he to be tried?"

"Why, yes, sir. The assizes were on, so he was committed at once, and as there is always a second gaol delivery during the assizes, he will no doubt be comfortably hung, for they say that the big-wigs, meaning the judges, sir, are quite resolved to get rid of him."

"But they will give him a fair trial?"

"Oh, yes, gentlemen. Everything will be regular enough; but you see it's a very clear case, indeed; and there aint the shadow of a chance for him. He will be hung, and between you and me, gentlemen, he will be a good riddance, for those sort of gentry make the roads unsafe, and do the Inns a deal of harm. Now there's another something like him; I mean Claude Duval. They tell me that on the London side of Uxbridge, he does just what he likes."

"Is that possible?"

"It is, indeed, sir. I am credibly informed of it, I assure you, on the most competent authority."

"Well," said Jack, "if Duval ever stops me, he shall find out that he has made a mistake."

"Oh, but, sir, he has another ruffian with him."

"Has he?" said Claude. "Then if that other ruffian ever stops me, he shall find out that it shall not be for nothing."

"Well, gentlemen, I only wish you two could meet them both."

"I fear that is not likely," said Claude. "But where is Dick Turpin confined now, landlord?"

"In the gaol, and he is tolerably safe. They had him in the spinning house for a time, but they did not think that safe enough. He won't get away, you may depend upon it."

"That's a comfort," said Claude, "at all events. We are very much obliged to you, landlord, for these particulars. We will leave our horses here and take a walk into the city, and then come back to rest, for we are rather tired."

"Very good—very good gentlemen. The best beds shall be at your service, and better I am sure are not to be found in the whole county, to say nothing of the city."

"Thank you," said Jack. "We shall no doubt be very well satisfied."

They then rose, having made a highly favourable impression upon the Innkeeper, and on foot they walked into Oxford. They soon found upon reaching that place that the sole topic of conversation was of the apprehension of Dick Turpin; and after a consultation between themselves, Claude said—

"There is one thing, Jack, that we must make up our minds to, let the risks be what they may; that is, to save Dick. I am quite resolved to encounter any difficulty rather than let him perish."

"And I likewise," said Jack.

"Very good. From all we can hear of the old jail, it is a crazy enough structure, and if Dick were not heavily ironed, I have not the least doubt but that he would make his escape from it."

"To be sure he would, Claude. But cannot we, who are not ironed at all, contrive to get at him in some sort of way?"

"You have anticipated my idea, Jack. There are two things, however, necessary to do before we could, with any chance of success, attempt Dick's rescue from the jail. One of them is to procure a plan of the prison, and the other is to ascertain in what part of it he is placed."

"Both rather difficult," said Jack.

"Probably so, but not impossible. There is an old work on the antiquities of Oxford, in which I know there is a plan of this jail, and what can be a more likely place to find such a work in, than in Oxford itself."

"Let's come then," said Jack, "to the best bookseller's in this place, and see if we can get it.'

We need not particularise the interview of Claude and Jack with a smiling

Oxford bookseller; suffice it to say, that without any difficulty they got the book they wanted, for which they had to pay two guineas, and then they both repaired to a private room in an hotel, and studied well the plan of the jail. They found that the cells of any strength were only six in number, and that they were numbered in regular order, and in a part of the prison called 'The Inner Keep.'

"That will do," said Jack.

"Yes, so far, Jack; and now we must find out some house of entertainment to which the officials of the prison are in the habit of going. There is always some such place near to every jail."

This latter object was much easier accomplished than even the former, and Jack and Claude were soon seated in the parlour of a public-house near the prison, with a glass of brandy-and-water before each of them. They trusted to their own natural acuteness in finding out the sort of person they wanted.

In the course of ten minutes a burly looking man came into the parlour and sat down next to Claude. He got Claude over any little difficulty in opening the conversation with him, by saying, as he rubbed his hands together—

"A nice day, sir, out of doors."

Those three words "out of doors" were quite sufficient to convince Claude that the man was one of the prison officials, and he said in a cool assured tone, "Oh, yes, my friend. You are off duty, now, I suppose?"

"You mean at the jug? Oh, yes, I get half an hour three times a day, when I ain't on the outer lock."

Claude pushed his glass of brandy-and-water towards him, as he added—

"I hope you will keep Dick Turpin safe now you have got him."

The man took a long draught at the hot steaming liquid, before he answered, and then, with what he thought was a very knowing wink, he said—

"I believe you; catch weasels asleep? We have got him safe enough."

"But he is a desperate fellow."

"Let him be."

"And he will break out of prison if you don't mind."

"But we will mind. We have got him in number six, and if he gets out of that, I will give him leave."

"Number six?"

"Yes. In course, you don't know, but number six is in the inner-keep, and there he is as safe as ninepence; and besides, he's got half-a-hundred weight of irons on him, so you needn't be afeerd of his getting away. Ha! ha!"

"Well, that's satisfactory," said Claude, giving Jack a sly kick under the table.

"Very," said Jack.

"It's to be hoped they will hang him," added Claude, as he again pushed the glass to the man, and then as before, the turnkey took his drink before he replied; placing the empty glass upon the table, he said, as he drew a long breath—

"Hang him? of course. That's settled."

"But he ain't tried."

"No matter, it's settled. Thank you, for me, sir; I must be off now, my time is just upon up. If you stay in Oxford a few days longer, for I take it you are only visitors, you will see Dick Turpin tucked up."

"We shall certainly stay. Good evening to you."

"Good evening, and your servant, gentlemen."

The official personage who had made the revelation regarding Dick being in number six in the inner-keep, then took himself off, much to the relief of Jack and Claude, who now waited to consult with each other, as to what was to be done immediately regarding the preparation for attempting the rescue of Dick from the old prison.

CHAPTER CXCI.

A PERILOUS NIGHT ADVENTURE IN OXFORD.

From the experience that our readers have had of Claude and his friend and companion Jack, it may be well supposed that in their cogitations concerning what was to be done for the rescue of Dick, they did not throw aside any possible plan that might suggest itself, on account of any dangers that might surround it.

On the contrary, it is highly probable that to those most adventurous spirits, danger was a kind of excitement, that was now in a manner essential to their existence, and there was one thing they felt convinced of, namely, that the most dangerous path was generally the most direct to any object.

"Well, Jack," said Claude. "What is your conclusion?"

"In good faith," said Jack, "I cannot come to one; but if I mistake not very much, Claude, you have."

"You are right."

"Then let me hear it, Claude, not that I may in any shape or way criticise it, but that I may be prepared to carry it out as far as my powers will let me. You are far more more fertile in expedients than I am."

"I don't know that, Jack. But you must have observed that next door to the jail in which Dick is confined there is a glover's shop."

"Yes, Claude."

"Well, then, Jack, it strikes me that we must get admittance to the prison in some way through that house, after its inhabitants have all retired to rest. It is rather something new to break into a prison, especially when such as you and I, Jack, are concerned in the affair; but I really think, for once in a way, we can manage it."

"No doubt of it, Claude."

"Then you do not think that there is anything extravagant in my proposal, Jack?"

"Very far from it. When one of our profession breaks out of a prison, he of course labours under every possible disadvantage, and such tools and implements as he requires for the purpose he has to get in with much risk and difficulty; but we being upon the outside, and perfectly free to possess ourselves of what means and appliances we like, may surely break in."

"I am glad, indeed, Jack, that you view it in that spirit. We will, from the plan of the prison we have got, make a careful sketch of our route to Dick's cell, and at midnight we will come into Oxford, and commence our enterprise."

"Good," said Jack. "I am willing. What shall we need in the way of tools and implements?"

"A couple of the best ropes we can get, each forty feet in length, some strong grappling hooks, and your picklocks, which you know how to use as well, Jack, as any man breathing, and I will take with me a small crow-bar of iron. Our pistols we will, of course, keep prepared, so that, I think, we may defy any accidents."

"I hope so, Claude."

"Then come along, and let us make our purchases, and after that we will go to our inn, and get our supper, and, then, if possible, we will get back to the town without our host knowing that we have left the inn at all."

"That, too, may be managed, Claude."

They both now left the public-house, where they had been so signally successful in getting the information they sought, and sallied into the principal street of Oxford to purchase the various articles they wanted.

In such a place as Onford they did not find much difficulty in suiting themselves with the ropes and the hooks. At a cutler's, too, Claude purchased two capitally-made small crow-bars, so that they repaired to the inn capitally pro-

vided, although, even under Jack's great coat, the rope was rather a bulky article.

They found that the landlord had got the supper for them that they had so liberally ordered, and having, to their great satisfaction, discussed it, they, under the plea of fatigue, retired very early to rest, or rather to their bed-rooms, where they were supposed to be going to rest, but where rest they did not.

"It's all right," said Jack. "My window looks into the garden of the inn, and there is only a slight paling to cross to get into a lane that runs parallel with the High-street."

"That will do, Jack."

It was nearly eleven o'clock, and all sounds had for the last half hour ceased in the inn, when Claude and Jack prepared themselves for their enterprise. They dressed themselves as compactly as they could, so as to leave as little straggling portions of apparel about them as possible, that might impede them in flight, or in climbing; and each winding round him one of the pieces of rope, to which they had firmly attached the grapples they had bought, they cautiously opened the window of Jack's bed-room.

"You have not forgotten your pick-locks, Jack?" whispered Claude.

"Oh, no—no. You have the crow-bars?"

"All right: and I think you looked to the priming of your pistols, and you have the file with you?"

"A couple of as sharp-biting files, Claude, as ever made war against fetters, I have about me. If I can only lay one of these across Dick's chains, they won't hold him long."

"Good. This little balcony is not above eight feet from the ground, so we can easily drop it. I think the moon is getting up, Jack."

"I hope not, Claude."

"So do I, for no doubt we shall do better without it; but it can't be helped. What a cold air is blowing."

Jack took off his hat, and held his face up to the night clouds for a few moments, and then he said—

"We shall have rain."

"Think you so?"

"I am sure of it. I have been so much in the open air at all times, and in all seasons, that I cannot doubt it for a moment; the signs and tokens of the coming weather are all familiar now to me. Look how the dark clouds hang over that light part of the sky, where the moon would be if she could only find an opening through which to show her fair face."

"You are right Jack. Come on."

They both sprang from the window into the garden, and then they paused for a few moments to listen, and make sure that they had given no alarm to any one. All was as still as the very grave, and in cautious whispers, Jack said—

"This way, Claude. This is the way to the little fence. There, do you not feel the rain upon your face now?"

"I do."

The night grew very black indeed, as Claude followed Jack across the garden of the inn. They both vaulted over the little fence Jack had spoken of, and found themselves in a straggling lane. It took them two or three minutes observation there, to be certain of the route, and then off they went at a good pace for Oxford.

When they got some distance from the inn, they conversed a little more freely together, for the road was perfectly quiet, and there did not seem to be a soul stirring in it but themselves.

"Well Jack," said Claude. "We will take our success so far, as a good omen of completing our enterprise."

"I hope we may, Claude."

"To determine to succeed is one half-the battle. I only hope that no one, by any foolish opposition to us, will force us to use our pistols."

"It would be a pity, Claude; but we have what we believe to be our duty to do as well as they have theirs; and so no more than they will, must we hesitate."

"You are right, Jack; and it gives me no small pleasure to find you are in such a spirit."

Jack's prediction about the rain was now most abundantly verified, for it began to come down in a thick small shower, and with a steadiness, too, that pretty well showed it had set in for the night. Such a state of the weather was considered by both Jack and Claude as highly favourable to their enterprise, for they knew that upon such a night all persons would be indisposed to active watching, and that the interior yards of the prison would, in all probability, be deserted.

In all the distance from the inn to Oxford, they only met two persons; and the rain was falling so thickly and so steadily when they got into the streets, that they traversed several and only met one watchman, and he was snugly ensconced in his box, and merely mumbled a "Good-night," as they passed him.

Jack answered him.

They then passed a house in which some Collegians, who were staying out in defiance of all college rules, were carousing, and singing tipsy choruses.

"That," said Claude. "is how our great legislators and statesmen get their wisdom."

"Humph!" said Jack, "I rather think that they got it from the rent rolls of their estates"

Claude laughed, but as they were now near the prison, they no longer spoke upon any indifferent subject, and their whole thoughts and inquiries become concentrated upon the object they had in view.

The glover's shop was closely shut up, and from top to bottom of the house there was not a vestige of a light visible.

"All's right," whispered Jack.

"Yes, I think so. Look well about you, Jack, and see that no one is lurking in the neighbourhood."

They both walked about the street for a few moments, but no one was near, and then they dived into the doorway of the glover's house, which happened to be a very deep and old-fashioned one, with quaintly carved door-posts.

Jack tried the lock with his skeleton keys.

"How goes it?" whispered Claude.

"All's right. There's only one bolt, and that's below. Give me one of the jemmies, and I will soon loosen it."

There was a creaking noise for a moment or two, and then a rather sharp crack.

"Done?" said Claude.

"Yes. I have cracked this crib, at all events. Come in, Claude. All's right. Nobody is stirring. I wish we knew what family there was in the house."

"So do I. Perhaps we shall find out, Jack, before we get out of it again?"

"We may."

They closed the shop-door now again, and in case any officious watchman, in his rounds, should take it into his head to try it, Jack shot the top bolt into its socket, advising Claude that he had done so, in case they should have to make a hasty escape, and he (Claude) should chance to reach the door first and find it fast, contrary to his expectation.

"Hush, Jack!"

"Did you hear anything, Claude?"

"At the moment I thought I did. It sounded like the sudden closing of a door or a window somewhere in the upper part of the house."

"The deuce it did."

They were both now profoundly silent for the space of about five minutes, during which they listened intently, but not the smallest sound met their ears, so that they came to the conclusion that either Claude had been mistaken altogethe

in the noise he had supposed he heard, or that it was some accidental sound in the house, which was no indication of any one really being up and stirring.

"It's all right enough, I think, Claude," whispered Jack.

"Yes, I think so, too. Come on."

"We must see our way, first."

Jack ignited a very small piece of wax-taper, and shielding it with his hands, they both looked about them for some mode of getting from the shop into the house. A small door, with a little muslin-blind, presented itself to their observation, and they immediately opened it. It led into a parlour, in which lay the remains of a supper. From this parlour a door opened to a staircase and a passage.

"We are right enough now," said Jack. "If we can only find some unoccupied room at the top of the house, we will soon be upon the roof, for if it has not a trap-door to it, I don't think it will take us very long to make one."

A cat got up from the hearth, upon which she had been sleeping, and looked at them.

"Poor pussey," said Claude.

"Fuff!" said the cat.

"Oh, very well," added Claude, "don't be friends then, if you don't feel inclined. I'm sure I don't want to force my acquaintance upon you. You had better lie down again and fancy it's all right."

"Come on," said Jack. "There is not a sound in the house; I have been listening on the staircase. Kill that cat."

"No, Jack. Not if the success of all our enterprise was at stake."

CHAPTER CXCII.

DICK TURPIN SURPRISED BY A RATHER LATE VISIT.

Jack looked at Claude for a moment, and then he said—

"I forgot that these creatures were great favourites of yours, Claude."

"All creatures are, Jack."

"I know it. I spoke inconsiderately, and I should have been the last to like to carry out my own suggestion, Claude. Come on, all is profoundly still. It will not be prudent to carry even this faint light up the staircase, as it may flash under the door of some one's chamber, and betray us."

"The socks, Jack."

"Ah, true, I had forgotten."

From his pocket, then, Jack produced two pairs of stout worsted-socks, and he and Claude drew them on over their boots, so that their tread was completely muffled, and unless the stairs should happen to creak under their actual weight, they could now ascend them without the slightest noise.

"Keep close to the wall, Claude," whispered Jack. "Very few stairs make any sound, if you tread there."

"Yes—yes. I will."

Out went the little wax taper, and then they commenced their passage up the stairs, holding by the wall as they went, and treading as carefully as it was possible to tread. Luckily for them, the house was old and substantial, the timbers being of solid oak, so that the staircase made none of the complaints that modern ones are in the habit of doing upon any one ascending them. The whole building was only one story above the shop, but from the outside they had seen, that if they could only gain the roof they would be very nearly on a level with the outer wall of the prison.

Twenty five steps took them to the top of the staircase.

Jack touched Claude upon the arm, and whispered—

"I feel a room door. What do you think will be best to do?"

"Open it carefully."

"Very well. I can tell in a moment if any one is there by the feel of the air. That was an old trick that was taught me by a friend who is now no more. There is a warmth and a closeness in the air of a bed-room that you may know in a moment."



CLAUDE PRESENTING THE LETTER TO THE SHERIFF.

"Not a doubt. Proceed, Jack."

Jack found the handle of the door, and began very gently to turn it, but he found it had a slight propensity to squeak, and with such handles he knew that the safest plan was rapidity of action. In an instant he turned it, and it made no noise. The door yielded, and Jack put his head into the room. All was dark, but in a moment a female voice said—

"John! John! John!"

"What the deuce now," growled some one half asleep.

"I'm very uneasy, John."

"You always are!"

"Yes, but I'm certain I heard something down stairs, and it's really too bad of Maria not to have come home. John, do you hear?"

"Oh dear yes. Go to sleep."

"But, what, suppose there's thieves, John?"

"Oh, bother!"

"Do you want to have your throat cut? Would you like that, John? Tell me that."

"I tell you that I ain't afraid. I don't believe thieves now-a-days come anywhere at a mere venture; and if they have any information they know deuced well that there is nothing to be got here."

Jack and Claude stepped away from the door of the room very carefully. They did not dare to shut it while the glover and his wife were wide awake, but in their hearts they thought the glover a very sensible man, and wished his wife anywhere but where she was.

"Another door-handle," whispered Jack.

"Open it then," said Claude.

"Hush. You really speak incautiously loud."

The glover's wife kept on talking, which was so fortunate that it covered any slight noise that Jack might make in opening the door of the other room which he had found. Fearing the lock might have the same peculiarity as the other one, he turned it sharply as he had done the first, and then he opened the door. The cold air of that room in a moment convinced him that it was empty.

"All's right," he whispered to Claude.

"How do you mean?"

"That no one is here. Come in—come in. Pass me, and I will shut the door. Hush! what a odd noise."

"It is the rain upon the glass," whispered Claude, after a moment or two's silence.

"Ah, so it is, and as I live there is a skylight in this room, which may do us good service. We must have a light now, Claude. Close the door as softly as you can before I set a match in a flame."

Claude closed the door carefully so as not to produce the smallest sound, and in a moment afterwards, Jack had lit a phosphorus match, and a faint blue light shot over the apartment. He then set light to the little bit of taper, and they both stood profoundly still for a few moments, while Jack held it above his head and glanced around the apartment.

It was rather a mean looking bed-chamber; one of those smothering machines called tent-bedsteads stood against a wall; and the appointments altogether were such as showed that nobody of any importance slept in that room.

The rain, too, was in a monotonous manner, at intervals of about half a minute, dropping from the sky-light on to the floor of the room.

"Not a very splendid chamber," said Claude.

"No; but just the thing for us. I only hope whoever is the tenant of it that they will not trouble it to-night. Now, Claude, can you give me a hoist up to the skylight?"

"Certainly."

By the assistance of Claude, Jack got up to the skylight, which was slanting, and about the size of a smallish door. He found that it would open outwards, and then he got down.

"We can manage nicely," he said. "That table, and a chair upon it, will make it an easy enough job to get out and in; and the only thing now we have to dread is, some one coming to this room. But it is no use now stopping for trifles."

"Not a bit, Jack; so here's the table, and here's the chair."

By judiciously placing the table and chair, they found that they could obtain a perfect command over the glass trap-door. Claude opened it, and then the rain come in in a thick mist, dashing against his face, and at once extinguishing the little light.

"Can you get out, Claude?"

"Oh, yes, easily. We must feel our way when we do get out through it, for no light will live on such a night as this."

"Be careful, Claude."

"Depend upon that, Jack. Follow me as closely as you can."

They both got out on to the roof of the glover's house, and so intensely dark was the night that, when they were there, they were for several minutes afraid to move. This was not the fear of cowardice though, for there was neither glory nor profit to be got by being dashed to pieces by a fall from a house-top.

"It would not have been amiss after all," whispered Jack, "if the night had been a little finer."

"Never mind," replied Claude. "Only wait a little, and we shall get accustomed to the very dim light that comes from the night sky. Already, objects are beginning to show me their outlines more distinctly. Do you not see something very black just before us?"

"Yes; it is a stack of chimneys."

"Then, upon the other side is the wall of the prison."

"You are right, Claude; and, as you say, objects are now getting each moment more and more distinct. We shall be able after all, I think, to see our way tolerably well.'

"Hark!"

A clock, belonging to one of the Universities, struck two.

"I had no idea it was so late," said Claude. "We really must lose no time, Jack. Let us creep round the chimney shaft, and have a look at the wall of the jail."

Cautiously, Claude crept over, and Jack followed him. A tile got loose and rolled along the roof, and then fell into the street, with a sudden crash. They both paused for a few moments, but as no notice was taken of the noise, they concluded it had given no alarm, and they proceeded as before.

It was not a difficult matter to get round the chimney; and when they were upon the other side of it, they found that, rising to the slope of the roof, the wall of the prison was not far short of ten feet above them. Still, that height was not so great but that assisting each other, they could climb it. The great difficulty now consisted in the fact that there was some jagged iron work on the top of the wall.

"We must be careful," said Claude, "of those spikes."

"I think it would be better to remove them with the crow-bar," said Jack. "They have most probably been up since the jail was built; and so, in all likelihood, are as rotten as possible, being exposed for so long a time to all weathers. If you will give me a hoist up, Claude, I think I can bring them down."

Claude was quite strong enough to support Jack kneeling upon his shoulders; and so Jack could easily reach the iron work, which he found to be even more thin and rotten than he had supposed, for a large space of it came away with very little force, indeed; and Jack handed it down to Claude to place gently against the chimney shaft. By this process, about four feet of the prison wall was left perfectly clear for them to get upon; and the next thing they had to think of was the mode of fastening the ropes, so as to descend in safety on the other side, and so as likewise to leave them in such a state that they could make a rapid escape.

Their eighty feet of rope gave them plenty to spare; so after a very brief consultation, they resolved to fasten one end right round the chimney shaft, and then carrying the other over the wall and down into the prison-yard beneath, where it would easily reach.

This was no sooner decided upon, than it was done; and in such experienced

hands, it was done well too. In the course of three or four minutes, Jack had slid down the rope into the prison-yard, and Claude followed him.

The darkness in that yard was very great, surrounded as it was by high walls and buildings, and the rain had reduced it to a most wofully sloppy state, unequally paved as it was; but those little disagreeables were of small consequence. The great thing was to meet with no prison official, which most probably would have been the case, had the night been not the boisterous and inclement one that it was.

As it happened, not a soul was to be seen. They stood close to the wall for a few moments, crouching down and listening intently, and watching the various windows of the jail. In only one was there the faint vestige of a light.

"All's right," said Jack. "Have you the plan of the prison well in your mind, Claude?"

"Yes; so well, that I can lead you direct to Dick's cell; but we shall have a couple of doors to open."

"I don't think they will be very serious obstacles."

"I hope not. Come on."

Claude crossed the paved yard; and after feeling along the wall of the building, he stopped at a small door, near which was a pump that they could just dimly see standing up before them.

"This," he said, "is the door we seek. See about the opening it, Jack."

While Claude kept watch, Jack carefully examined the fastenings of the door, and found that they were all outside; as from the paved yard, it was never expected any attempt upon it would be made. There were two bolts and a large lock. The latter took some time to pick, for it happened to be unusually good; but, at length, Jack succeeded, and as he had already drawn back the bolts, the door yielded.

"Come in," he whispered. "We are safer out of the yard."

"Wonderfully safer," said Claude: "and not a little more comfortable, for the rain is coming down faster than ever, Jack."

They both passed through the door-way, and Jack closed the massive door again. The darkness in which they found themselves now was truly of the most profound character. Claude could not see the smallest vestige of his hand before his face; and as they felt pretty certain none of the officials of the prison were there, Jack began to procure a light.

In a few moments he had ignited the little taper, and they began then to look about them.

CHAPTER CXCIII.

THE ALARM, AND THE RE-CAPTURE OF DICK TURPIN.

The place in which our adventurers now found themselves was anything but an inviting one. It was one of the long, damp, dismal passages of the prison, narrow and inconvenient; and even in the day time, when the sun was brightly shining, it was a place of gloom; but in the eyes of Claude and Jack, it had a special recommendation; for it was the route they sought, and which they knew, by their plan of the prison, would lead them to Turpin's cell.

"This will do," said Claude.

"Hush! Do not speak so loud. We don't know who may occupy one of the neighbouring cells, and some prisoner might think it no bad way of carrying favour with the magistracy, to give an alarm, that something unusual was going on.'

"You are right, Jack,"

"This is the way," added Jack, in the same cautious whisper in which he spoke. "This is the way, right on, and then an abrupt turn to the left."

"Yes, I recollect," replied Claude. "So says our plan, and, no doubt, that can be relied upon."

"Oh, most implicitly, I should say."

Jack's little taper light was of immense assistance to them; and while its flame was so small, that it was not at all likely to send a wandering ray through every key-hole, or under any door, yet it sufficiently enlightened them how to act, and how to proceed.

They found that the passage in which they were was no less than forty paces in length before they came to the abrupt turn to the left, which the plan indicated to them. But when they reached that turning they knew that they were in the very passage from which the cell of their friend Turpin's opened.

"Here are the little doors," said Jack. "There ought to be eight of them; and it is quite a mercy that that officer at the public-house was so loquacious as to let us know in which Dick is."

"Yes, and here is the number."

They both paused now opposite to the cell door, and Claude placed his ear against it to listen if he could hear any one stirring within it; but all was as still as the very grave itself.

"Do you hear anything?" said Jack.

"Not a sound."

"What if they have removed him to some other part of the prison?"

"Then our trouble is all for nothing, and we can only get back as quickly as we can the way we came. I don't feel disposed to give it up quite so easily, though."

With this, Duval placed his mouth to the key-hole of the door, and in a prolonged whisper, he said—

"Dick Turpin—Dick, Dick—It is I—Claude Duval."

They heard a stir in the cell as if some one had fallen to the floor of it, and then a voice said—

"Confound it, what have I been dreaming about to fall off this shelf that they call a bed, in this den? I wonder what the time is?"

"Rather late," said Claude through the key-hole.

"Ah—what? Who is that?"

"Hush!—not so loud. Don't you know my voice?"

A sudden rush was made against the inside of the cell door that made it shake again, and Turpin said, in a much louder voice than caution would have dictated—

"Who is there? Speak again—speak again, I say, if it be not after all a mere dream."

"Hush, Dick."

"Ah, again I hear you. Who are you?"

"Hush, Dick; if you speak so loud you will ruin all. It is I, Claude, and Jack. We will get you out of this fix it we can. Be quiet until we get the door open, and then we will tell you all."

Not a sound came from the interior of the cell, and while Claude held the light, Jack began upon its fastenings. They consisted of a strong, long, and an iron bar, that went right across the door, and fitted into a kind of looped socket, to which was appended a massive padlock.

"Can you manage it?" said Claude.

"Oh, yes, I think so. All this fuss, after all, only takes up two locks, and I hope to be able to pick them both."

"Do so, then, as quickly as you can."

The actual lock of the cell door did not present any very serious obstacle to Jack; he soon forced back its bolt into the lock again, but the padlock was of some very primitive construction, and none of his false keys would touch it.

"We must appeal to the saws, Claude," he said.

"Will not the crowbar do?"

"I think not; I will try one of them. Ah, there it goes snap in too. I thought

as much; it's not the fault of the jemmy, but the real fact is, we asked it to do too much, and getting beyond its strength, it broke. Now for the saw."

Jack produced a small saw, that did not look as if it could cope with an iron bar, but it did so, and it was truly astonishing with what celerity it cut into the metal, passing through it in the course of about five minutes, and without making any more than a slight grating noise.

"All's right," said Jack, "now the door ought to open. Why don't it, Claude, I wonder."

"It seems as tight as ever, Jack."

"It only sticks, I am convinced. Tell Turpin to push it on the inside; you you see, we cannot get any good hold of it, or we should soon enough have it open."

"Push the door, Dick," whispered Claude, through the key-hole.

The push that Dick Turpin gave the door upon this intimation, was enough to drive it down from its hinges; as it was, it flew open with such a force, that Turpin rolled out into the passage nearly upsetting both Claude and Jack.

"Hilloa!" said Jack, "not quite so fast."

"Where are you going, Dick?" said Claude.

Turpin was upon his feet again in a moment, notwithstanding he was grievously encumbered by his fetters, and holding out both his manacled hands, he said—

"Good gracious, Claude and Jack, how in the name of all that's wonderful came you both here? I can't yet persuade myself that I am in my senses. This must surely be some too vivid dream merely. Speak to me."

"It is real, Dick."

"Quite real," said Jack, "and we hope to get you out of this stone jug by the same route that we came into it. You don't suppose that we can have any other errand here?"

"And is it possible that you two have broken into the jail to rescue me? Can I believe as much?"

"It is tolerably possible, Dick," said Claude. "The impossibility would have been in our at all deserting you under such circumstances, while anything remained to be done with a chance to your rescue. But every minute is of value to us. Jack, relieve him of his fetters, and then we will be off directly."

"Oh, my friends," said Turpin, clasping his hands. "What can I, what ought I to say?"

"Nothing at all, just now, Dick" added Claude. "We shall, I hope, have plenty of time to talk, when we are outside of the walls of this not very inviting abode."

Jack at once busied himself with the fetters. They were revitted on to Dick so that it was only by the help of the exquisite steel saws that he had with him that he, Jack, could succeed in freeing Dick from the heavy shackles in which he was confined.

"I shall feel something like myself," said Dick, "when all this infernal ironmongery is off my limbs. Nothing depresses a man so much as putting him in fetters. They have such an effect upon me, that they almost stop me from thinking, and I almost doubt if I should have had the courage to make an attempt at escape from this place while I wore them."

"There they go," said Jack, as he sawed through the last of the rings and freed Dick from them.

"I feel myself already free," said Dick.

"Don't let us cry out," said Claude, "before we are out of the wood. I hope and expect that nothing very material will come in our way, but still unexpected events do happen, and all I have to say to you, Dick, is, to do nothing rashly."

"I will be guided by you."

"Very well, then, let us come on. Ten minutes ought to place us in safety now, if we meet with no obstruction."

"Hush!" said Jack.

"What's the matter?"

"Don't you hear the bell ringing violently?—Come this way."

They all went to the corner which they had to turn to get into the long passage, and when there, they distinctly heard the violent ringing of a bell, but from the manner in which it was rung and from the time of night at which it sounded, it was tolerably clear that it portended something being rather amiss within the prison.

"Come on," said Claude. "Boldness may save us now. But I feel assured that we have no time to lose. That bell may concern us, and indeed I don't know how we can translate it otherwise, just now; I will lead the way. Put out the light, Jack, the moment we get to the end of the long passage."

"I will," said Jack.

Off went Claude at a race down the passage, and he was closely followed by Dick Turpin and Jack. The little light would not stand any such violent progress through the cold air, and the consequence was, that out it went before Jack had taken half-a-dozen steps. They all went on, however, through the intense darkness as well as they could, and as the passage was tolerably straight and very narrow they could not go far wrong, although they did, by making accidental deviations to the right or to the left, bump themselves occasionally against the walls.

By holding out his hands before him, Claude prevented himself from coming with any great concussion against the door at the end of the passage, and opening it quickly he passed out into the court-yard.

The rain was falling quickly.

"On, on," he cried.

They followed him quickly, and then a gun went off somewhere in the prison with a loud report. It was not fired in that court-yard at all, so the only way they could account for it was, that it was a signal that something was amiss and that the turnkeys and warders were all to be on duty and on the alert.

The distance from the doorway through which our adventurers issued to the court and then to the place where the ropes hung from the wall top, was by no means very great, and through the dashing rain Claude went at great speed. He felt now that rapidity of action was a safer thing to look to than quietness, so he did not hesitate to cross that court-yard at a scamper.

By a little feeling on the wall, he soon touched the rope, and turning to Dick, he said—

"You can climb?"

"Like a cat, they say."

"Very good. Go up this rope, and when you cross the wall you will find a good enough footing on a house-top, and there wait for us. I hope we shall be soon with you."

"No," said Dick. "If a thousand deaths were behind me I would not go first. The danger is great to the last one, and I will be that last. That is my determination."

"Up, Dick—up."

"No, Claude! I cannot. Remember what time is lost by trying in vain to change my fixed resolve."

"By Heaven! that is true!" said Claude. "Follow me, Jack, as quick as you can."

Claude seized the rope, and by an exertion of great strength in the arms, he began to ascend it with rapidity. When he had got about six feet up, Jack followed, and the moment that he did so, the trampling of feet was heard in the court-yard, and through the murky sloppy night air come the flash of a lantern. A loud voice called out,—

"This way! this way! They must be close by here."

Neither Claude, Jack, nor Dick now spoke, but the former, by making gigantic efforts, reached the top of the wall; and there he paused, hanging over it and peering down into the court-yard to see what was going on. Jack was

very near the top of the rope, but Dick was not many feet from the ground, when with a loud shout, the armed party in the court-yard rushed to the spot, and holding up their lanterns, at once exhibited the whole scene that was enacting.

CHAPTER CXCIV.

TURPIN IS TRIED AND CONDEMNED TO DEATH.

The situation of Turpin was now most critical, as was indeed that of Jack likewise. It was an agony to Claude to see the peril of his friends, to feel that from where he was he could render them no assistance, and that he was compelled to be a mere spectator of what was going on.

There might be unknown perils behind him. The glover's house, for all he knew to the contrary, might be full by that time of foes; but he had ears for nothing and eyes for nothing, but the proceedings in that dismal court-yard into which the rain was pelting with such fury.

He called aloud for Turpin.

"Dick! Dick! Be quick! I pray you. Make an effort, and you are safe! Get six feet higher! I will shoot the first man who dares to molest you!"

"Oh, will you really?" said a voice from among the officers. "There, my lads, you see that man on the wall! Can none of you take a good enough aim to pick him off?"

In a moment, thus licensed to do so, for it was the governor of the jail who spoke, a couple of pistols were fired at Claude, and the bullets of both hit the wall some three or four feet below where he was.

A rush was made to the end of the rope, and it was quite impossible, shaken violently as it was, for Turpin to do more than cling to it; Jack got hold of Claude's hand and was drawn up, despite another shot that was fired at him.

"Where's Dick?" was Jack's first question, for he had only heard a tumult behind him, as by incredible exertions he ascended the rope and reached the parapet.

"Look below," said Claude.

The whole scene was now quite clearly to be seen in the court-yard. The rope was still shaken so violently by a couple of turnkeys that Dick could only hold on; he might, to be sure, have slid down, and doubtless that was what they wanted him to do; but he would not, and in a few moments the same voice that urged the turnkeys to use their pistols upon Claude, called out:—

"Turpin, if you don't come down this moment and surrender yourself, you will be shot. I will myself put an end to this suspense by taking your life."

"Fire away," cried Dick.

"He is lost," said Jack.

"I fear so," said Claude, who had a pistol in his hand pointed to the throng of persons in the court-yard, and quite ready to use if any urgent occasion should arise for it.

The lantern showed a tolerably bright light upon what was going on, and now Claude and Jack saw a man run from the group of prison officials and in a few seconds return with a ladder of about twenty feet long. He was a strong tall man; and unwieldly as that ladder was, he managed to move it with tolerable care and facility. To the indignation of both Claude and Jack, the man with the ladder struck Dick Turpin with it so severely that he fell from the rope heavily to the pavement of the court-yard, where he lay apparently insensible from the sudden blow and the fall combined.

"Did you see that?" said Jack.

"I did," said Claude, and at the same instant he fired his pistol, and the man with the ladder fell with a loud cry, and rolled over twice, ladder and all, on the pavement. "Did you see that, Jack?"

"Yes, Claude, and I never saw a shot that pleased me better. But we do no good by remaining here; Dick is among the Philistines, and we cannot help him now. We may be able to do so by taking care of ourselves."

"You are right, Jack. Come on."

Claude took the lead, and Jack followed him closely, over the slippery and un-



THE PRISON SMITH KNOCKING OFF DICK TURPIN'S FETTERS.

certain tiles of the glover's house. They reached with some difficulty the skylight, by which they had got out of the attic; and it was a great satisfaction, even in the midst of all this disappointment, to find that it was in the same state as when they had left it; the table and the chairs still remained in their places, so that the descent into the room was easily enough managed.

"Come on, Jack," said Claude, "it's all clear; it's a good thing that whoever sleeps in this bed has not come home yet,"

"Yes; but we will yet think of something to aid Dick, Claude."

"We will aid him, Jack."

"You will be a little nearer to him than you think presently," cried a voice; a man precipitated himself upon Claude at the same time that another seized Jack by the legs before he could get off the table that was under the skylight.

Duval, under these trying circumstances, preserved his admirable presence of mind, and made no immediate resistance beyond keeping his arms free from the other's gripe.

"Help," cried Jack.

"All's right," said Claude. "Pray, my friend, who are you when you are at home, that has got hold of my throat?"

"An officer, and one who is determined to take you to jail, my fine fellow, be you who you may."

Claude in a moment slipped his body down to the waist of the man, and by an effort he flung him right over upon his head with a tremendous bounce on the floor of the room. The door at that moment opened, and a man with a light appeared, saying:—

"Have you caught the rogues, Mr. Tomkins?"

"Oh, yes, old boy," cried Claude, and then, observing Jack's rather awkward position, he with one blow of his fist knocked him down over his already prostrate companion. Another officer was in the room, but he only stood up against the wall with a little gilt staff in his hand, crying—

"Come, come, this won't do, you know; come, come, come."

"What's the matter with you?" said Claude.

"Come, come, come."

Claude snatched the staff out of his hand, and flinging it at the man with the candle, who was standing open-mouthed at the door of the room, and who was no other than the glover himself, who had risen and found his skylight open, and so had gone next door to the prison, and given the information that had produced the failure of the whole enterprise.

Believing that now he was all but a murdered man, he dropped the candle, and going backwards he forgot that the staircase was behind him, and away he went from the top to the bottom of it.

The candle did not go out by its fall, and Claude picked it up, saying—

"Come along, Jack, I don't think we have any more work to do here, and we may as well be lighted down stairs, as go tumbling along in the dark."

"Are you hurt at all, Claude?"

"Not a bit. Come on, all's right, now, I think, with us, if it be not so with poor Dick."

They hastily descended the stairs, and upon the first landing they came to, they found a young girl of about eighteen or twenty years of age, with only her night-clothes on, and a small bed-room taper in her hand, looking the picture of fright. She certainly mistook Claude and Jack for the officers, seeing them coming down very composedly with a light.

"Oh, gentlemen," she said, "have you caught the horrid wretches?"

"Yes, my dear, and all we want in return, is a kiss from those rosy lips."

"A what, sir?"

"A kiss," added Claude, as without further ceremony he took one, and Jack then followed his example, after which they descended the remainder of the stairs, and finding the street-door open, they both at once sallied out into the street.

"Well," said the girl, as she ascended the stairs to the upper rooms, "I had no idea the officers were such nice men. I wonder where uncle is, to be sure. Uncle! uncle!"

The rain was still falling in perfect torrents, when Jack and Claude, after all their dangers and really hair-breadth escapes, rushed out of the glover's house into the streets of Oxford. They kept well together, and hurried down the first turning they come to, so as to get as far from the jail as possible, and for the space of about five minutes neither of them spoke. The speed they went at,

however, attracted the attention of a watchman, who in his mortal stupidity thought that two powerful men would of course allow themselves to be taken into custody by him. Stepping out of his box on to the pavement, he cried—

"Hilloa! stop!"

"Well?" said Claude,.

"Come, come, I can't allow anybody to go on at this rate. You look suspicious people, and that is quite enough for me."

"Well?" said Claude again, for he knew if he only hurried on, that the watchman would alarm the whole city with his rattle that hung by his girdle.

"But I say it isn't well," cried the watchman.

"Oh, he says he ain't well. Jack," said Claude. "What a pity it is, that a guardian of the night should not be well. We are learned doctors, I assure you, my friend, and I have no doubt we shall be able to do you a world of good."

"Do me good? Come, come, I shall take you both into custody, and march you off to the round-house. You are just the sort of characters we take up in Oxford."

"And you," said Claude, "are just the sort of character that we always knock down anywhere."

As he spoke, Claude made a dash at the watchman and caught him by the throat.

"Throw away his rattle, Jack," he said.

"It's gone," said Jack, as he broke it from the hold of the officious guardian of the night, and cast it down a neighbouring area. "It's gone, Claude."

"That will do."

Claude held the watchman so tightly by the throat that so far from his being able to cry out, it was only with the greatest difficulty imaginable he could draw breath enough to support life, and then with one thrust he flung him into the watch-box, and shutting it all up upon him, he cried—

"Give it a hoist, Jack. Once, twice—that will do."

Down went the watch-box upon its face with a crash upon the pavement, and the unfortunate guardian of the night found himself fairly imprisoned and as firmly fixed, as though he had been entombed alive.

The first person that passed that way fell sprawling over the watch-box, but by that time Claude and Jack had got quite out of the city, and were hastening, despite the rain that still fell in torrents, towards the Inn where their horses were waiting for them.

Before they reached that place Claude paused, and spoke to Jack, saying—

"By the morning this affair will have got wind on Oxford, with such additions and embellishments as such a story is pretty sure to carry with it, and as you and I will be tolerably well described, it will not at all do for us to linger here."

"Of course not," said Jack. "I think the best way will be to go to the stable-yard and get out our cattle ourselves, and be off."

"Where to, Jack?"

"Heaven only knows. If I thought there was the smallest chance of doing any good to Dick, I should say, let us remain in Oxford; but I am afraid that is now all gone and past."

"I don't feel quite sure of that, Jack."

"Indeed, Claude?"

"No, and I don't like to leave Oxford while there is life in our friend."

"Do not then. I am as willing to stay as possible. From our vallises we can easily get the means of making such alteration in our appearance as would puzzle a conjuror, and as the trial will be to-morrow, or rather we may say to-day, now, we shall not have long to wait."

"That is my thought, Jack. Something may arise yet, to enable us to be of use to Dick."

"I don't deny the possibility, Claude."

"But you think the probability small?"

"I own I do, and you must think so too; but in our time we have seen such improbable things come to pass, that I am willing to hope and expect something even against all my convictions."

"And I, too; so let us get our horses and then we can go right through the city and put up at some house at the end of it, where I dare say for a few days we shall be all safe and right enough."

By this time they had reached the fence at the back of the Inn garden, which they had crossed before so well.

CHAPTER CXCV.

AN UNEXPECTED SCENE AT AN EXECUTION NEAR OXFORD.

CLAUDE felt that this was the only course to pursue, and he and Jack in a very few moments were in the large stable-yard of the Inn, and creeping along in search of the door of the stable in which Jack had seen their steeds put up for the night.

"Are you sure you know it, Jack?" whispered Claude.

"Quite. What a pool of rain this yard is to be sure. Come on. This way, Claude—this way. Ah, here is the door, and it is not locked—all's right."

"I will keep watch, Jack, while you go in and saddle the horses as quickly as you can. Be careful about the girths, for who knows but we may have a gallop yet to-night."

"I will, Claude."

Jack disappeared into the stable, and Claude stood quite close to the door, in order that if any one should be accidentally looking from the Inn, they should not detect his figure against the night sky. Jack was compelled no procure a light in order to saddle the two horses, and the faint gleam of it came through a large chink in the ill-fitting door of the stable.

Suddenly, then, as Claude looked up at the Inn windows, he saw a light cross one of them, evidently from the inside, and then suddenly disappeared. He felt certain by that that some one was stirring in the Inn, and he whispered to Jack,—

"Quick! everybody don't sleep sound to-night."

"Ah! is it so?"

"Yes. But we may have time yet."

"Plenty. Here's your horse, Claude. Mount him at once, and I will get mine ready. We must and will be off if all the world should say no to it. In another hour hence, we don't know what may happen in this disagreeable town."

"As quick as you can with your horse, Jack."

"You be off, Claude."

"No, no! You know better than that while you say it. When did I be off, and leave you in any danger?"

"Never," said Jack, from the stable, while he was busy putting on the saddle on his own horse; but let a person be as quick as he may, such an operation as saddling two horses will occupy some few minutes; and although few, if any, could surpass Jack in the speed of such an operation, yet the person who was up in the old Inn had time to come down into the yard. Claude was not a little surprised to see a man in his night-dress, carrying a lighted candle, suddenly appear at a door that opened into the stable yard.

The moment that he did so, out went his light, which the wind and the rain were not at all likely to permit to exist many moments; but this circumstance did not seem to have the least effect upon the man, who, still holding the candle and candlestick exactly as if the former were in a state of ignition and doing him a deal of good in showing him his way, walked slowly and calmly into the stable yard

"What on earth can be the meaning of all this?" thought Claude. "Whoever

that is he takes it remarkably easy. Jack, are you quite ready now? Here's some one coming, or else a ghost."

"A ghost?" said Jack, as he appeared at the stable door with his horse, already for the road. "A ghost! did you say, Claude?"

"Yes, I did. Only look where that figure in white glides along by the wall there. Do you not see it?"

"I do, indeed. Who is it?"

"Perhaps if you were to say, 'what is it?' you would be nearer the mark for surely it cannot be a living man."

"Let us mount, and be off," said Jack, as he sprang into his saddle. "I don't half like these kind of sights. Mount, Claude, mount at once, and let us get into the meadows."

Claude mounted, but yet he lingered.

"Stay a bit, Jack," he said. "This is too curious not to make one wish to stay and see the end of it. I pray you to stop a bit."

"If you wish it, Claude."

"I do, indeed, Jack. Only look where the mysterious figure comes. You can see how he holds the candlestick, and he believes that it lights him on his way. Only see how he steps over the puddles. By all that's good, ghost or no ghost, you will have a wet skin on such a night as this."

"I don't half like it, Claude. It looks ominous."

"Pho! pho! You hold the bridle of my horse. If we go away without finding out what all this means, we shall be puzzling ourselves about it at other times when we may be better employed. Hold the horse, Jack."

"What would you do Claude?"

"Go and meet the figure. If it be mortal, I should like to let him see that we are not afraid of him; and if anything else come to warn us of anything, I am determined it shall not have any excuse for leaving the warning in obscurity, for I will speak to it."

"Claude! Claude! you are fool-hardy, indeed you are. I beg that you will not go; it is much better to let these kind of sights be. Do not seek to make it more frightful than it is."

"Upon my word, Jack," said Claude as he dismounted, "I did not think you were so superstitious. I never yet saw anything worse than myself, and I don't think, do you know, that I ever shall; so whatever you do, don't let the horse stray. I will be back to you in a few moments."

Jack saw Claude stride across the yard in the direction of the figure with evident misgivings; but yet he took the bridle of the horse, and strung it round his arm so that it should not be startled into flight by whatever might happen. Claude did not for a moment pause in his progress towards the curious figure all in white, nor did that figure in any manner shrink from or avoid him, so that it was quite a curious thing to see them by the dim morning light and in the rain, gradually approaching each other.

It chilled Jack to look on at such a scene, for it was beyond his imagination to guess how it could possibly end; and now he saw Claude pause and step aside, and the white figure passed him without the remotest notice, and come on as though there had been no such person in its immediate vicinity.

"By Heaven!" said Jack, "it's to me it is coming! It won't speak to Claude. It's some visitor to me only, that is quite clear, and if it get's me to wait for it, I'm a Dutchman; flesh and blood is one thing, but ghosts in white are another, and I don't care how little I have to do with them."

With this, Jack did not wait another moment for Claude, but turning the horses' heads towards the slight fence that divided the Inn yard from the meadows, he made them both clear it at a bound. He had no intention of doing more than place the fence between him and the spectre, and when he had done so, he faced about again to look for Claude. He soon saw him running across the yard.

"Come!" said Jack; "come, Claude! quick! I cannot stay here. He is coming to me."

"And what then?" said Claude, as he placed his hands on the top of the little fence to vault over. At the moment that Claude made his spring, bang went some fire-arms from one of the windows of the Inn, and Jack thought he was hit, for Claude rolled on to the green sward on the meadow side of the fence, instead of alighting on his feet.

Jack saw the window from which the flash of the gun came, and drawing a pistol from his saddle, he at once fired at it, and from the crash of broken glass he was quite satisfied that he had hit his mark.

"All's right," said Claude, as he bounded to his feet and sprang to his saddle.

"You are not hurt, Claude?"

"Not a bit. The sudden noise startled me, and I slipped in taking my leap, that was all."

"Thank the fates for that. But look at the figure. It has turned again."

"It's only the landlord walking in his sleep, Jack."

"Walking in his sleep?"

"Yes. Did you never hear of that sort of thing before?"

"Oh, yes, often, and seen it too. I only wonder that it did not at once strike me as a solution of the mystery. But that gun or pistol shot was not fired by any one in their sleep, Claude."

"Not a bit of it. We have enemies now on the foot, Jack. My impression is that we are traced in some sort of way from Oxford. Ah, here they come. Now we shall see what they mean by it, and what force they are in."

The private back door of the Inn was suddenly now opened, and several persons with lanterns issued forth. A group of men immediately behind them appeared, and running across the yard, one cried,—

"Get us out some cattle as quick as you can, ostler. Take anybody's. It's on public service, and it will be all right. Stop! you villains! Surrender this instant, or it will be worse for you. You have shot Mr. Wolf."

"You don't say so?" said Claude. "And pray who is Mr. Wolf when he is at home?"

"The chief constable of Oxford, you villains! Oh, you will swing for this as sure as eggs are eggs. You had better give in at once, for there are eight of us, and we are determined fellows.

"Come on, Jack," said Claude. "That will do. We will leave these eight determined fellows to mount at their leisure."

Jack and Claude turned their horses' heads, but the moment they did so, bang, bang, bang, went no less than three pistols at them. In a moment Claude turned, and drawing one of his own pistols, he fired, crying,—"It was cowardly to keep your fire till our backs were to you. Now blaze away!"

With a shriek, one of the officers fell into the arms of his comrade, and everybody there was by far too busy to think of firing again at Claude and Jack, who once more tried to retreat; but they had not got many paces before a rattling volley of pistol-shots was sent after them, and one bullet struck Claude on the heel of his boot.

"A little higher," said Claude, "and it might have spoilt my dancing. Come on, Jack. I have no idea of being made an animated target of by a parcel of blundering police-officers, who might knock one over by chance."

"Not at all pleasant," said Jack.

They gave their horses their heads, and off they went over the meadows at a quick pace. The rain still came down, but not so heavily as it had, and the ground was disagreeably heavy; but still it was amazing the speed they made by going lightly over it, and finally coming to a privet hedge, they leaped it, and found themselves in a road that was tolerably hard and good.

"I don't want a race with those officers," said Claude. "We have other fish to fry."

"Certainly," replied Jack. "Let us trot along this road. We may come to some shelter for ought we know to the contrary."

"Very good. I shall not be very particular as to what it is if we can only give them the double in any way."

With this view, they trotted on, Claude taking slightly the lead; and as the dawn had now made considerable progress, they could see about them very well. In the course of a few moments they came to the lodge gates of some estate, and Claude at once drew up, saying, "Jack, this is the very place;" and then, without waiting for the smallest reply from Jack, he rung a smart peal at a bell, the handle of which hung close at hand.

"Who is there?" said a voice from one of the lodge windows.

"I," said Claude, in a voice of authority. "How dare you ask who is there? Open the gates directly."

"Yes, sir;—beg pardon, sir;—coming, sir," said the voice.

"So much for the power of impudence," said Claude to Jack. "Now, that fool thinks I am some one of great authority, although he cannot know me from Adam. You will see how obsequious he will be when he opens the gate."

"But he will find out his mistake, Claude."

"Not a bit of it. Do you think after the sample that he has of my temper, he will venture to ask me a question? Not he. Take my word for it, Jack, impudence in this world, which may be anybody's capital, if they know how to use it, goes a very long way indeed."

CHAPTER CXCVI.

TURPIN'S FATE APPEARS TO BE FIXED, BUT IS NOT SO.

Jack had hardly so much faith as Claude in the power of assurance; but he had to have his infidelity in that particular corrected, for in a few moments, the lodge-keeper, half dressed, rushed out of his little residence, and flung the gates wide open, saying as he did,—

"I am sorry, sir, I was not up. Hope you will excuse it, sir."

"Hold your noise!" said Claude.

The gate-keeper only bowed. "Of course," he thought to himself, "this must be some very great man, indeed, or he never could speak in such a tone to any one." Claude, followed by Jack, rode into the open space in front of the lodge, and then glancing about, he, seeing a little enclosed paddock of about a quarter of an acre close at hand, he said, sharply, "There are none of them up at the house yet, I suppose?"

"No, sir, if you please," said the gate-keeper.

"Ah! so I thought; I won't disturb them though. Quite time enough to put them all out of their way, and give them no end of trouble, and then the fidgets, for fear everything should not be just as I like, when they do get up. Here, turn the two horses into that paddock. Don't touch their gear—I and my friend will sit down in your little room here for a time."

"Yes, sir, of course, sir. I will set light to the fire. The family are early risers, sir, at the hall, and in an hour now, I daresay, the old gentleman will be stirring."

"Oh, will he! How is he looking now?"

"Pretty well, sir; but his lame leg will never let him be what he was."

"What! Ain't that any better?"

"No, sir, they say not."

Claude and Jack walked into the lodge, and they had hardly been there two minutes when, like a whirlwind, by swept some half dozen mounted men, no doubt from the Inn. Claude went to the little latticed window of the lodge, which commanded a tolerable view of the road, and he had the satisfaction to see the officers disappear, they, no doubt, having the full impression that they were in full cry after the two highwaymen. Claude thought it advisable to wait a few moments longer; and then, looking at his superb watch—the diamonds round the rim of which dazzled the eyes of the gate-keeper—he turned to Jack, and said—

"General, what say you to a canter, and then for us to come back here? By that time they will be up and stirring."

Jack, of course, understood Claude's aim, so he replied in a tone of well-assumed deference—

"As your Grace pleases."

When the gate-keeper heard that one of his guests was a general and the other a "Grace," they might both have wiped their boots on his back, if they had been so inclined, for the poor creature had been so accustomed all his life to look upon the possessors of titles as some superior creation that he had never the remotest idea that they were but poor frail mortals like himself.

"The horses to the gate," said Claude, with a sharpness that made the man jump as though a pistol had gone off close to his ear.

"Oh, yes—yes my lord—that your grace. Yes, directly."

"What an idiot," said Jack, when he left the little room to obey Claude's imperious orders.

"One of many, Jack."

"No doubt of it. But what a humiliating thing it is to think of, that one of God's creatures, with some brains in his head, should make himself such a crawling sycophant to another."

"It is, Jack. But you will find that it is the slave that always makes the tyrant, and not the tyrant the slave."

"I believe you are right, Claude."

This little highly philosophical conversation was put a stop to, by the gate-keeper crawling into the room to say that the horses were ready, upon which out strode Claude and Jack, and without so much as a "thank you," or one word of civility, they mounted their steeds and rode off, the gate-keeper keeping his body bent quite at a right angle until they were out of sight.

"Ah," he said, as he closed the gate. "There's real gentlemen for you. Don't come for nobody at all, and gives as much trouble as possible, and ready to snap your head off for nothing. That's how you may always know a real gentleman from the sham ones. A duke, no doubt, and some general. I'll run up to the house and see if anybody's up, and tell 'em they will have visitors to breakfast soon."

Claude and Jack took precisely the other direction to that which the officers took, and soon placed a couple of miles between them and the Inn which had so nearly been the scene of a serious misadventure to them. They then came out upon a much broader road than the one they were upon, and they saw a finger-post, upon which the words "To Oxford" let them know in which direction to go.

"You don't wish me to abandon Dick?" said Claude. "You have no disinclination, I hope, to return to Oxford, Jack, even after what has taken place?"

"None in the least, Claude."

"I am glad of that. I don't like like to do anything against your judgment, Jack, but in good truth I know that both you and I are such adepts in disguises that I feel assured if we once get an opportunity of changing our apparel, we shall do remarkably well. Who is this coming along the road?"

"A Jew," said Jack, "I think.—Yes—look at his bag."

"You are right. I wonder if he resides at Oxford. If so, I should not be at all disinclined to trust him to some extent. A confidant would be invaluable to us just now, Jack; and it is highly probable he might be bought for a hundred pounds or so, which would be no great object to us, as we could make somebody in Oxford pay it in all likelihood before we left."

"Easily," said Jack. "Shall we speak to him and sound him a little upon the matter?"

"Yes—yes, do it."

By this time the Jew, who was rather a poor looking man, and to all appearance old, and a little lame, had got close up to them, and then he paused, and shading his eyes from the light which came strongly in that direction, he said—

"Yes, it's all right. Claude Duval, my dear, how are you? and, Jack, my boy, I hope you are well?"

"Why, how is this, sir?" said Claude; "you know us?"

"Yes, surely, haven't I been looking for you and trudging about the roads for the last four hours, ever since that shindy at the stone jug? To be sure I have".

"But I am certain I never saw you before," said Claude.



CLAUDE AND JACK RESCUING TURPIN FROM THE SCAFFOLD.

"Nor I," said Jack.

"But I have seen you both in London. At the White Bear in Oxford Street I saw you twice, and I don't forget people in your line of business. Be so good as to read that."

With these words the Jew took from his pocket a common horn snuff-box, and

after unscrewing the lid with a squeak that set all Claude's and Jack's teeth on edge, he handed the former a little scrap of paper, upon which was written:

"Trust Zadoc. Dick Turpin."

"Oh, then, you are a friend of Dick's?"

"I am in the business and a friend of all customers. I have a little place in the town and a little place out of it; and between the two I pick up a crust. Dick, who is in the jug, knows me, and gave me that, in case I wanted to do a little business with any friend of his. I heard all about what happened at the jail, and I at once knew that when the nabs mentioned you they were right. But they don't know Jack."

"Then how did you know me?" said Jack.

"Oh, I knew you and Claude were together, so I guessed it was you; but all the roads will be too hot to hold you in another hour. The beaks and the judges will take a little trouble, and they are going to swear in a hundred special constables on purpose for you, so that they are determined to have you if they can. The only safe thing for you is, off and away."

"And that I do not like," said Claude.

"Not like?" said the Jew, "Not like?"

"No, Zadoc! I have made up my mind, and so has Jack made up his, to stay and see the last of Dick if we cannot save him. I hope that something will yet turn up to enable us to do him a good turn; but go we will not until the breath is fairly out of his body."

The Jew considered for a few moments, and then he said:—

"Well, well! wilful men must have their way. Follow me, if you wish to be free from the grabs for the rest of to-day. Come this way, and I will take you to where you will have time to think without being feared to look about you."

"I thank you," said Claude; "but of course this is a matter of business."

"Quite."

"Then you will allow us to convince you that you will not be badly paid; take this fifty-pound-note as an earnest of our bargain together, and half-a-dozen such shall not stand in the way of Dick's release from limbo."

The Jew held the note up between his eyes and the sky for a few moments, and then with a nod of approbation he rolled it up into a little ball and put it in his pocket.

"Good," he said.

"I hope so," said Claude.

"Excuse me," said Zadoc, "I did not allude to the note; I meant that we were quite agreed that everything was to be done that could be done for Dick. I have often heard, Claude Duval, that you were more than liberal, and this proves it. It is a sound policy to pay men like me well. You will find that out in the long run."

"I have found it out long ago," said Claude, "so now lead on, Master Zadoc, to this place of safety that you talk of, where we may have the privilege of thinking without the necessity of keeping our eyes on the stretch for enemies."

"That I will do," said Zadoc. "Come on."

He went to the side of the road and opened a large white gate, which looked as if it led into some orchard, but Claude was not one who ever hesitated. He trusted, or he did not; and if he did, he trusted implicitly; so, without a moment's hesitation he followed the Jew through the white gate, and Jack followed Claude.

Zadoc closed the gate again, and locked it. Then he took a small silver whistle from his pocket and blew a wailing kind of note upon it that at the moment, if no one had seen how it was produced, might have puzzled them to say whether it was the call of some wild bird or a mere artificial sound.

In the course of two or three minutes then, during which, Zadoc conversed in a low tone with Claude, an old man and a boy came round some large laurel bushes and bowed to the party. Zadoc spoke to the old man and boy in a language unknown to Claude, and then turning to him, he said—

"If you will let him take your horses they will be well cared for, and whether I am here or not he will deliver them to you. He will not forget you, and to summon him you have only to whistle with as prolonged a note as possible, as he is not very bright in hearing, and his little grandson is not always here."

Claude and Jack at once dismounted, and gave their steeds to the old man and the boy.

"I have a whistle," said Jack, "which I always carry with me in case Claude and I should be separated by any accident, so that I shall easily be able to give him the signal."

"That is all right," said the Jew; "but I don't expect that there will be any hurry or emergency, or that you will have occasion to come here without me; but it is as well to be provided against any possible emergency."

"You are quite right," said Claude. "This is your country place then, I suppose, in which you transact business?"

"Yes, but I don't let all my customers come here. It is only such as yourselves that I let into this secret. Follow me to the house. It is but a cottage, and yet you will find yourselves more secure in it than in many a palace."

"There is not a doubt of that," said Claude. "I have no great faith in the security of palaces."

CHAPTER CXCVII.

SOMETHING ENERGETIC IS DONE FOR DICK TURPIN.

CLAUDE was specially well pleased at their meeting with the Jew; and following his established rule in such cases, he trusted him implicity. The reader will not fail to recollect how frequently Claude has insisted upon this rule of confindence as being one well worth the following.

Jack could not feel so fully and fearlessly, as Claude, a confidence in any one, and the consequence was that he followed with much more of a look of doubt the footsteps of Zadoc.

The distance to the Jew's cottage was sufficient to remove it from the high-road, so that it was completely out of ear-shot of any chance passenger.

"You will always find this, if you please to avail yourself of it," said Zadoc, "a place of refuge. All I ask of you or Jack is what I think I have a right to ask."

"And what may that be?" said Claude.

"Simply, that you will never come to it or leave it when, to your knowledge, any one can observe you, for if once the police set an eye of suspicion upon this little place, its usefulness will be gone at once, and for ever."

"That is a condition that we shall not forget," said Claude. "You hear it, Jack, and of course subscribe to it?"

"Certainly," replied Jack. "It would, indeed be a monstrous thing to avail oneself of the hospitality of any place, and then for ever afterwards invest it with such a suspicion, that it shall be of no use to any one else. I would die at the gate of this place, rather than I would enter while to my knowlede a human eye was upon me."

"I thank you both," said the Jew. "Your promises are quite sufficient for me, and here then you may find yourselves quite at home, and I daresay you have no sort of objection to such a breakfast as we can find for you."

The door of the house yielded to Zadoc's touch, and he slipped on one side to allow his visitors to enter the place. They did so fearlessly, and found themselves in a pleasant enough cottage-like residence, amply, and indeed handsomely, provided with every requisite for comfort. The Jew closed the door after them, and then in the style of an Eastern monarch summoning his slaves, he clapped his hands thrice together, upon which an old woman made her appearance, and

with great demonstrations of respect, awaited the commands of Zadoc, who she evidently looked upon as some very superior being.

"Ester," said Zadoc, "may we trespass upon your larder for a breakfast this morning? These are friends of mine."

The old woman made no reply in words, but by a very low and reverential obeisance, she signified with what perfect submission she received the order, and how willing she was to execute it. She then went hastily away again through the door she had arrived by.

"You have a willing servant," said Claude.

"She is a member of my own family," replied Zadoc.

"I beg your pardon then, for naming her in connexion with anything like servitude."

"Do not fancy that it is any offence. Esther and I belong to the same race. She serves me for love, and I am but too happy to be able to make her old age comfortable. Step this way, and you will soon see, unless I am very much mistaken, and we have happened to take Esther more than unusually at unawares, that she can manage to get up an extemporaneous breakfast that need not be despised."

Jack and Claude followed the Jew into a very pretty apartment of the cottage, and as they did so, they could but exchange looks of surprise, for since crossing his own threshold the whole manner of Zadoc had altered, and there was an elevation of style and manner about him, such as they could hardly have expected.

Claude knew, however, quite enough of the singular and highly interesting people to whom Zadoc belonged, scarcely to wonder at any strange transformation of character that took place with them in their own houses in distinction to their appearance abroad among the Gentiles.

The room in which they now were was a pretty one, with long windows opening into a small, but charmingly kept conservatory, where the orange tree presented its tempting-looking fruit, and where the fig sent forth its broad leaves in abundance. Numerous flowers, too, graced that little place; and as a view from the room, it was enough to make any one believe, that he had been transported suddenly by the wand of an enchanter to some much more favoured clime, than our bleak and somewhat inhospitable one.

"Where I you," said Claude, "I should spend many an hour here."

"I do," replied Zadoc, "as many as I can. Yon greenhouse has in it many shrubs and plants from that land, which all of my people regard with veneration."

"And which you all hope to see again?"

"It is more than a hope," said the Jew, quietly. "It is a certainty. They have been promised it by one who performs all promises, and we know that the time will come, when we shall be great in the land of our fathers, and when, as a mighty nation, we shall raise again from the ashes of our ancient glory."

The Jew's eyes flashed with enthusiasm as he spoke, and Claude, as he looked at him, could not but feel how likely it was that such a conviction would maintain, as it had maintained, this scattered people through all difficulties and under all privations.

The entrance of Esther, with a tray containing some of the materials for breakfast, put a stop to a conversation that was evidently becoming by far too exciting for the Jew. In the course of a few minutes a marvellously well-laid table was laid out, and Claude and Jack partook of as hearty a breakfast as ever they had enjoyed in all their lives. When Zadoc saw that they had quite satisfied themselves, he rose, saying,—

"Now, then, to business."

"With all my heart," said Claude.

"Follow me, then, and we will consult together in the garden about what is best to be done, and leave Esther at her own good leisure to remove the remains of our repast."

Claude and Jack followed Zadoc through the conservatory into the garden

beyond, which was completely protected from observation by close growing trees, and between them a complete labyrinth of interlacing evergreens. It was, in truth, a charming spot.

"It is settled, then," said Zadoc, "that you will do something for Turpin?"

"Quite."

"Well, all that remains for us to conclude is that that something shall be as likely of success as possible, and as little hazardous."

"Precisely."

"He will be tried to-day, and ordered for execution—for that he will be found guilty will not once permit of a doubt."

"This is Friday!"

"Yes, and he will be hanged on Monday morning, unless something in the meantime can be done. After the failure at the jail last night, there is no chance of anything being accomplished in that quarter. Turpin will be taken in a cart to the common, outside the town, and there executed, and his body will be hung in chains, no doubt. Now, with a knowledge of all these circumstances, what, in your calm, cool, deliberate judgment can be done?"

Claude was silent.

"Can you take him from the prison? No! Can you wrest him from the court, in the presence of the judges and all the ministers of the law? No! Can you rescue him on the way to execution? No! Can you save him on the scaffold? Yes!"

Claude and Jack both started at this sudden transition to all the Jew's negatives.

"What mean you? Are you serious?" said Claude.

"I am to the full as serious as such a subject ought to make me. If you don't mind five hundred pounds I think it may be done."

"Not a straw! Double the sum, if you like."

"Very good. We will say one thousand pounds?"

Jack plucked Claude by the sleeve, and he understood it as a friendly admonition to put some bounds to his prodigality.

"My friend," said Zadoc, "when one of my people offers you anything for five hundred pounds, never offer him one thousand pounds, for that is then his price."

"I will not draw back from my offer," said Claude. "I have said one thousand pounds, and it shall be that amount if Turpin is free."

"Five hundred pounds," said Zadoc, "for the attempt, and another five hundred if it be successful. Will that do?"

"Perfectly well; and now tell me by what wonderful means you will accomplish this undertaking. It seems to me at this present moment as though you would require more than mortal means to carry out what you propose. I am all impatience."

"Draw nearer both of you, and you shall hear."

Claude stood close to the Jew on one side, and Jack upon the other, and then he spoke in a clear voice, saying—

"We may take for granted all the facts, namely: that Turpin will be tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death on the common on Monday morning next; and we may take for granted that any attempt between this time and that to do anything will be perfectly futile, and indeed only recoil on our own heads."

Claude nodded.

"Well, on Monday morning at seven o'clock it will be found out that the hangman is very ill and cannot rise from his bed to perform his duties. But he will recommend a man of whom he knows a little to officiate, and the sheriff will be delighted to snatch at any one in the emergency."

"But—but——"

"Nay, hear me out."

"I will. Excuse the interruption. I will not say another word until you have concluded your plans."

"Well, that hangman's substitute will ride in the cart with Turpin to the place of execution, after promising him the clergyman of the jail will likewise be with them. Then that hangman's deputy will seize a sharp knife from his girdle, with which he will be well prepared, and in a moment cut the cords that bind the prisoner, and he can so manage, that only one on each side will have to be cut at all; and having as they ride along told Turpin what to do, he will jump from the cart to where a man is mounted on a fleet horse, and holding another by the bridle, he will mount the led horse and be off. The hangman's deputy will, then, if he have the opportunity, affect to pursue them, and make his way here, where he will find his own gallant and well-trained steed waiting for him."

"Waiting for him here?" cried Claude.

"His steed?" said Jack. "The duputy hangman's gallant steed?"

"Precisely."

"But how will you get that man to play his part so well?" said Claude.

"Don't you think you could do it?"

"I?"

"Yes. Who else could be depended upon in such a case? Who but you must play the executioner's substitute? and who but Jack must wait with the led horse close to the scaffold? Whose steed but yours do you think I would have here waiting?"

"By all that's good," said Claude, as he drew a long breath, "it will do; and whether it will or not, it is the only plan at all likely of success. What say you, Jack, to it? Will you undertake it?"

"If you will, Claude, yes."

"Assuredly I will; and we must have a first-rate horse for Turpin."

"I have his own brave mare Bess, as he calls her, in my stable," said the Jew, quietly.

"You have? Then if once he gets on her back he is as safe and free as the wind!"

"I think so likewise. 'Tis in good truth a noble creature. We will take care to give her some white blemishes by Monday morning to prevent her recognition by any eye that may be curious in horse-flesh, and more than usually knowing about Turpin's steed."

"Yes, that can easily be done. But how will you secure the regular hangman's co-operation in this affair?"

"He is human."

"Are you certain of him?"

"I am."

"Then, for the life of me, I do not see why the plan should not succeed. All that it requires are good disguises, and boldness and address. Don't you think well of the scheme, Jack?"

"I think better of it the more I get familiarised with it."

"That is a good sign," said the Jew. "A plan which loses no attraction, upon a closer scrutiny, is likely to wear well. But if we determine upon this, we must be up and doing. Is it agreed upon, without doubt and without reservation, by both of you?"

"By me, yes," said Claude.

"And by me," said Jack.

"Very well; then no doubt you would like to be present at the trial, which will be on in another hour, at the court house. Come into the cottage, and I shall be able to provide you with complete disguises, so that you may walk into Oxford, and no one will be a bit the wiser as to whom you may be. I will conduct the affair with the executioner entirely myself. Come in. In truth, I do think you will save him."

CHAPTER CXCVIII.

TURPIN'S RESCUE.—A SCENE OF EXCITEMENT ON THE COMMON.

In the course of half an hour more, Claude and Jack were deliberately walking into Oxford, in the disguise of a couple of graziers; and so capitally was their costume arranged and put on, that those who knew them the most intimately could never have suspected who they were.

Claude represented a man past the prime of life. He was stuffed out to look three times his real size, and the grizzly whiskers that the Jew put him, in truth, most effectually disguised him. A light-coloured wig transformed Jack into a much younger looking man than he really was; and so, with a perfect confidence in the excellence of their disguises, they fully intended to be present at Dick Turpin's trial.

The information of the Jew regarding the coming on of the trial on that morning was perfectly correct, and it will be seen that his information upon other points was equally to the purpose. At that time, hanging for highway robbery was quite a common thing, and it was very usual to execute the culprit upon or very near to the spot upon which the offence for which he specifically suffered was committed; and when the party apprehended was so well known and widely circulated a knight of the road as Dick Turpin, it was very charitably supposed that a very small amount of evidence sufficed, both with judge and jury, to convict him.

The court was very much crowded, so much so that the conscientious doorkeepers adopted the London practice, and began not to find room for any one unless they were paid; but that was no object to Claude and Jack, and they had no ambition to draw upon themselves any sort of attention by carping at anything; so they soon found themselves, by virtue of one shilling each, in the court. It was with difficulty they got standing room in rather an obscure corner.

Dick Turpin had only just been placed at the dock, and from his pale face, and the marks of several scars upon it, it was quite evident that he had suffered considerably on the previous night in the prison-yard, upon the occasion of the bold attempt to escape.

He was placed upon his trial directly, and the counsel for the prosecution very unfairly made a long exodium about the attempted escape from the prison; in which he ought to have been stopped by the court, for it had really nothing to do with the case. From this, however, both Claude and Jack learned that it was no other than the Governor of the jail that the former had shot, and that he was dead.

"Serve him right," said a voice near Claude.

Jack felt at the moment a great disposition to say something; but a slight sign from Claude warned him to be silent. Zadoc had particularly cautioned them both to make no acquaintance in the town or in the court.

Dick Turpin pleaded not guilty to the charge made against him; but he did so with the listless air of a man who feels that his fate is determined upon, and that nothing can save him.

With the proceedings of the trial the readers of this narrative need not be troubled, inasmuch as it was one of the most ordinary description, and indeed it was hurried over with a most unseemly haste, as though judge and jury had been fully agreed in the propriety of hanging Dick Turpin, but felt it to be just necessary to go through a certain formula beforehand in the matter.

"Guilty," said the foreman of the jury, almost before the question was well out of the lips of the proper officer.

"Very good," said the judge. "Richard Turpin, you have been convicted by a careful, conscientious, and intelligent jury of your fellow countrymen, of the offence laid to your charge. Have you anything to say why the sentence of the law should not be passed upon you in due form?"

"It is needless," said Dick, "to say anything. I know very well I am to be shuffled out of the world because of my reputation. Well, be it so. It was the

end I looked to, and now my last words are—'Thanks to the two kind friends who, last night, did all they could for me.'"

"You ought to be thinking of other things," said the judge, "you unhappy man, than thinking of two reprobates, who will soon be in the hands of offended justice."

"There I differ with you," said Dick. "You have not caught them yet. I know by what you say, that you have not, and therefore I feel very confident you will not catch them at all. It is a wonderful comfort to me at such a time as this, to feel that they who risked so much for me have not suffered by that amount of gallant friendship. God bless them both!"

"This is indeed terrible," said the judge, "to find a criminal over the brink of eternity with so little consciousness of his situation."

"Perhaps, my lord," said Dick, "you will hardly think it right to hang a man who is in such an imperfect state of mind?"

"I can really," said the judge, who found that question a very difficult one indeed to answer—"I can really listen to no more of this. It is too sad and afflicting."

He then, with all due solemnity, passed sentence of death upon Dick Turpin, concluding with the usual kind hope that the Almighty would have mercy upon him, as none would be shown him in this world.

"Farewell to you all!" cried Dick, "and if anybody here should happen to see Claude Duval or a friend of his whom I won't name, as he might not wish it, tell them what I said of them, and how they treated me up here at Oxford, for little or nothing, but because they had heard of the old proverb, that says—'Give a dog an ill name and hang him.'"

"Remove the prisoner," said the judge, shaking his head until the powder flew out of his wig. "Remove the prisoner!"

Dick was instantly laid hold of by the officials of the jail, and hurried from the dock.

"Come," whispered Claude to Jack, and they both made their way out of the court as quickly as they could.

"Well," said Claude, "what do you think of all that, Jack?"

"Think? I could hardly contain myself in court, I was half-maddened, Claude, at the whole scene; and when poor Dick spoke of us it was with difficulty I kept myself from calling out to him to be of good cheer, for we had not deserted him yet."

"It was well you did not, Jack."

"Yes, I feel that for any such exhibition of interest in the fate of the prisoner might have been fatal to our disguise. No, Claude, I had enough self-command left not to do it, although it certainly was rather a struggle to me."

"That I can well suppose."

"But ought we not now immediately to seek our friend, Zadoc? I did not notice him among the crowd, and yet he said he would be in the court during the trial."

"Amid such a sea of faces as that court presented, I can very easily imagine we may miss sight of any one in particular; but if he said he would be there I would wager anything that there he was."

"And here he is," said Jack, as the Jew suddenly stepped up to them.

"Ah, welcome!" said Claude; "all has gone in the court as you thought and said that it would, Zadoc."

"Yes, of course it has; I knew it was all settled before-heard. I have found a lodging for you until Monday, for it will not be safe for you to be at my house, as it is known that I do not take in strangers, and your presence with me might awaken suspicion. I allude to my house in the town, for as regards the cottage it should only be gone to upon an emergency, and never to remain in it for a longer period than the emergency may last. Follow me."

"In all things as regards this affair," said Claude, "we, of course, yield implicitly to your guidance."

They now followed Zadoc past one of the college gates; and in a small but pretty street of houses, Zadoc stopped and tapped at the little parlour window of one of them. The door was immediately opened by a young woman.

'Here are your lodgers," said the Jew. "You will find them quiet enough, andi f you don't interfere with them, they won't interfere with you."



THE THREE ADVENTURERS RECEIVE AN INVITATION TO A CHRISTENING.

"Oh, surely not," replied the woman. "Walk in, gentlemen, walk in! Here's the room, and tl e bed-rooms are both above."

"That will do very well," said Claude. And when the young woman had left them alone with Zadoc, the latter said:—

"I would by no means advise you to keep yourselves prisoners here. The impression in this house is, that you have some business connected with the assizes.

Go out and about as much as you like, but take care always to be at home between nine and ten—three and four—eight and nine,—for it will be during some of those hours that I will call upon you. And as regards all the minor arrangements we were to do, you may make your minds perfectly easy. They will all go on smoothly enough, so that if the plan succeed it will fairly do so upon its own merits; if it fail, it will not be from any hitch in the machinery."

"It is pleasant to hear you say all that," replied Claude. "There is only one thing else that, if it could be by any possibility managed, would give both myself and Jack great pleasure."

"What is it?"

"In letting Dick Turpin know by some means that he is not quite destitute, and may not give hope adieu."

"I have been thinking of that and will try it; it would give me great satisfaction, and, besides, it would keep up Dick's strength, for he will need it all; and when a man fancies there is no longer any hope for him in this world, he is apt to be careless enough of his food and drink. Now, as he is condemned to death, they will let him have, in a reasonable way, all that he likes."

"To be sure; and he might get himself well up to any excitement by Monday next," said Jack.

"Yes; and the new governor of the prison is quite amiably disposed towards him," added Zadoc, "since it has been all through him and his friends that the vacancy was made, that enabled him to slip into the situation. Therefore, you may depend that I will do what I can to let Dick know that he should take care of himself until Monday morning; if I cannot, I will let you know."

With this, the Jew left them; but Claude and Jack felt so dull in their lodging that they were glad enough to avail themselves of the advice of Zadoc, to go out. They took good care, however, to be in at the time he had named, and it was on Sunday morning that he came to them again.

"Dick knows something," he said. "I ascertained that they had placed him in a cell not very far removed from the outer wall of the prison, and last night I got a man to sing a ballad in such a stentorian style of voice that he could not but hear it. They have taken the man into custody, but I feel tolerably certain that Dick knows something will be attempted for him."

"What ballad was it?" said Jack.

"It's only a piece of doggrel, got up for the occasion. It ran thus,—

'We wish him to eat and to drink;
And Bess, she is well taken care of.
C— and J—, both are in town,
And they won't let the grabs hurt a hair of
His head, tol lol de rol lol!'

And there was much more to the same purpose, which, I feel assured, Dick was sharp-witted enough to understand in a moment; but I doubt if the police could make anything of it, and, even if they did, it will puzzle them, and they won't know what to do."

"I am of your opinion," said Claude; "and I shall sleep more comfortably to-night, when I think that Dick don't look forward to the dance upon nothing on Monday morning next."

"But, about the hangman," said Jack. "Have you succeeded in arranging anything with him?"

"Yes; and to-night, at eleven o'clock, I will take you both to his house, for it is necessary that he should know you; and once again, let me assure you that you may banish all idea of anything in the shape of trickery upon his part. He is to well paid by me in more ways than one, and he is much more my servant than he is the servant of the corporation."

"We shall be ready to the minute," said Claude.

We need not go through with the trivial events of that Sunday in Oxford. Suffice it to say, that it hung frightfully heavy upon the hands of Jack and Claude,

and that the incessant bell-ringing was enough to drive any reasonable persons right out of their wits. The hour, however, came at last for the very interesting interview with the executioner to take place.

Zadoc came to the lodging at about a quarter before the time appointed, and as both Claude and Jack had been ready for him some time, they immediately all sallied out together.

"Nothing new, I suppose?" said Claude.

"No; except a confirmation of my opinion, that Dick Turpin quite fully understood the song, for I hear that he demands nothing but mutton chops and port wine."

"And do they give them to him?"

"I shouldn't wonder but they do. It's an old custom to be liberal to any one condemned to death, and whom the authorities feel tolerably certain will not be reprieved; so we have nothing to fear from the idea of Dick being weak and out of condition to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER CXCIX.

THE COMMON NEAR OXFORD, AND THE TUMULT UPON IT.

The Oxford hangman's house was about half a mile on the outside of the town. It was a pretty enough place, surrounded by a little garden, so far as Claude and Jack could see of it at that hour of the night.

"What do you expect to find this man?" said Zadoc, as they rung at the gate-bell of the cottage belonging to the executioner.

"He should be," said Claude, "rather a burly ruffian."

"Yes," said Jack, "and with nothing but animal appetites, and about as small a share of intellect as may enable anybody to get through the ordinary course of everyday life."

"You really think so?"

"Such an idea of a hangman comes up to our notions of what he ought to be," said Claude; "but I have seen quite enough of life to know how our ideal notions of things, and of people, are often to be at striking variance with the fact."

"You are right there," said Zadoc; "you should always distrust what your imagination tells you. I never went to a strange place in my life but what it turned out to be as different as it possibly could from what my fancy had pictured it; and I never got into the company of a person that I had heard of, and formed an idea concerning, that I did not find him or her something widely different from all that I had previously, perhaps at great pains, pictured."

"From all which," said Jack, "we are to conclude that we are very wrong about the Oxford hangman?"

The Jew nodded.

"Well," said Claude, "so long as he does not play us false, and answers our purpose regarding poor Dick, he may be what he likes, and I shall consider him the pearl of executioners, and always shall have a friendly feeling for him. What say you, Jack?"

"I will strive to cultivate the same feeling," said Jack, very gently, "although it will be perhaps to me, Claude, a little more difficult than it can be by any means to you."

"Excuse me, Jack," whispered Claude, "if this is a subject upon which you do not like jesting. I did not think of you, and what you had gone through, at the moment."

"Don't mention it," said Jack, as he smiled faintly.

Poor Jack! He still could not forget the horrors he had passed through at his own execution, from which he had emerged into life again so very strangely, but to be only half the man he was.

While this little quiet bit of conversation was in an under tone going on between Claude and Jack, Zadoc had rung the bell at the garden gate of the hangman's house; and in a few moments, like a moving star in the darkness, a candle, in the custody of some one, came down to the gate, and a soft musical voice then said—

"Who is there?"

"I want your father, my dear," said the Jew; "you know me?"

"Oh, yes; you are our friend, Mr. Zadoc. Come in—come in. Father said that he expected you would come, and bring two gentlemen with you."

"Yes, and here they are."

The little girl—for such she was, and not above twelve years of age—held up the light, and curtseyed to Claude and Jack, as she held open the garden gate for them to enter by. The faint rays of the light fell upon her face, and Claude was astonished at her rare and exquisite beauty. As for Jack, he could hardly take his eyes off her, she was was really such a piece of miniature loveliness to look upon.

"Your father is quite alone, of course?" said the Jew.

"Oh yes, sir, quite; and he is expecting you."

The little girl led the way up a trimly kept narrow garden path, and the Jew said to her as he followed her—

"You are as fond of your garden as ever, Emma, I presume, by the way in which you keep it. I see it is as trim and carefully got up as ever; even now I can smell the perfume of the sweet flowers that you have in such rare abundance, and which do you so much credit in the rearing."

"Oh, yes," she replied. "You know, Mr. Zadoc, that next to Pa, I love the flowers and the little garden."

"Next to Pa!" whispered Jack to Claude, "she loves the——"

"Hush! hush!"

Jack did not complete his sentence, and then the little girl paused at the door of the little cottage, and holding it open she motioned them to enter. The door was so low, that both Claude and Jack had to pause and stoop at its threshold. The Jew was able to enter without that ceremony.

The little girl lighted them into the parlour of the cottage, and then herself retired to the kitchen. For a moment or two, neither Claude nor Jack saw that the parlour was tenanted, but a very small soft voice said suddenly—

"Gentlemen, you are welcome," and then from a couch there rose a short and very slimly made fair man, with a small portion of hair upon his head, and apparently cast in nature's weakest physical mould.

"Allow me," said Zadoc, "to introduce you both to him whom you seek."

"What," said Claude, "are you the——?"

"Hush," said Zadoc. "The word that was upon your lips is never, by any accident, mentioned in this house."

"It shall not then pass my lips," said Claude.

"Nor mine," said, Jack, with a shudder, for different as the Oxford hangman was from all his ideal notions of such a character, he could not but shake a little to find himself in the presence of one who filled that awful office, let him be in manner or appearance what he might.

The hangman very carefully closed the door of the room, and then he said—

"Gentlemen, Mr. Zadoc has said that a certain word is never by any accident mentioned in this house. It is true, and it is not that I myself so dread the word, but my little girl, Emma, is all the tie I have that binds me to the world. My wife is gone, and I have no children but her, and she knows not what her father is."

"You astonish me!" said Claude.

"And me," said Jack. "One would think it a thing of impossibility to keep such a secret from her."

"Doubtless," said the hangman, "the day will come, when some officious person will step between us, and kill her with the knowledge of what I am, and

by what means I have fed and clothed her, and brought her up to gentleness and truth; but as yet she knows it not, and I am happy to be able to come home to one who does not shrink from me."

"One would think," said Claude, "that her very playmates would tell her, children are such bad keepers of secrets."

"She has no playmates, sir. She lives here, the secluded life of a little nun. For five years she has never once crossed the threshold of the gate which she opened to admit you to the garden. All her delights, and she has many, are concentrated in this cottage and garden. She and I talk together, but never of the world without, and she has no desire to go from the precincts of this humble home, and I need not tell you we are not troubled with many visitors."

"This is indeed most singular," said Claude. "You must live though in constant dread of the secret oozing out through some channel."

He covered his face with his hands, and rocked to and fro.

"Come, come," said Zadoc, "I have not seen you like this for years, and you promised us you would get over all this kind of feeling; I think, too, that now of all times you ought to be able to do battle with it, for I know of nothing that can prevent your almost immediate departure for the new world."

"Yes, yes," said the hangman, "what a cheering thought that is. I will take my child with me, and thousands of miles from here, there will be no one to whisper the dreadful truth in her young ears, and turn her heart from me for ever."

"Yes," added Zadoc, "with the money which these gentlemen give me for you, and which you will earn by the service you will do them on Monday next, you will be able to go to America as soon as you like."

"Oh, yes, yes. What a cheering thought that is."

"It no doubt is, and ought to be," said Claude. "I will rejoice, indeed, that this transaction will not only, as I hope, save my friend, but likewise enable you to achieve so great a good. You can take to some other course of life in America, and no one need guess for a moment who or what you were in England."

"You think they will not suspect?"

"How can they?" said Zadoc. "You do not carry the insignia of your calling stamped upon your face."

"No. I think I do not."

"Quite the contrary," said Claude. "There is not a man breathing who from hundreds would pick you out as likely to be what you now are."

"It is cheering to me to here you all say that; and yet, do you know, at times I have possessed myself with the idea, that there is a something about my looks which proclaims the dreadful truth; and when I have least expected it, my child has shrunk from me with a shudder, as though nature, in some mysterious way, had let her know that my arms were to be avoided as a terror and a pollution."

"All that is imagination," said Zadoc.

"It can be nothing else," said Claude; and yet, even as he spoke, he could not but fancy that there was a strangeness about the eyes of the hangman, which he had not noticed upon first coming into the room. Jack, however, who had said the least, had noticed the peculiarilymore quickly than Claude had done, and had noticed it with a kind of inward shudder; that made him wish himself out of the cottage again, and in the open air.

But after all, perhaps, while Claude and Jack were accusiag the hangman of being the slave of his imaglnation to too great an extent, they were in reality giving the reins of their own fancy, and seeing things in him that had no real existence whatever; sr if nature had given him a little peculiarity about the eyes, no one who did not know his calling would probably hit upon the fact of his being a hangman in consequence.

"You will get rid of all these feelings and fanies," said Zadoc, "and before you have been one month out of Oxford."

"I hope so."

"That is pretty clear, But now let us decide upon what is to be done on the

Monday. All money matters will be settled with Mr. Zadoz. Now I hope that no obstacle occurs to your mind to the carrying out the plan of operation laid down."

"None whatever," said the hangman. "It has one good recommendation, and that is its boldness."

"I am glad you think that a recommendation, for it gives me a kind of assurance that you will not shrink from what you have to do, from any fears of the result."

"My good, sir, what I have to do is so little, that, let me shrink how I might, I cannot hurt your plot. As I understand it, all I have to do is to be so unwell at an early hour on Monday morning, as to feel that it is quite impossible I can attend to the execution, and then from fear that the sheriff should be left in an unpleasant dilemma, I send you as a substitute."

"That is it," said Zadoc.

"Precisely," said Claude. "After that all depends upon ourselves I am aware, and I only hope you will not be troubled about it."

"I have no apprehensions. What can they do? My story will be simple enough. You came to me, I will say, and I did not know who you were, and recommended you to the office from the well-known difficulty of getting any one to perform it, especially in an emergency, and only *pro tem.*"

"Exactly, and you may depend upon me, let the affair terminate how it may, making my story tally with yours.

"I thank you; and if you are taken and condemned for your own offences to die, they must seek another hangman, for I am determined that my indisposition shall continue until I leave Oxford, which will be now as soon as I can do so, without attracting the attention and suspicion of the authorities. I must not be at all precipitate in the matter."

"Then it is settled," said Zadoc, "that this gentleman comes at an early hour here on Monday morning?"

"Yes, quite. Take care to be dressed accordingly. A shabby suit of rather common clothes will be best; and I should say that you were a coffin maker by trade, and that I have instructed you how to officiate as my deputy upon the occasion required."

"Very good," said Claude; "call me what you please, I will take good care to dress the character. I fancy my best plan will be to make myself up to look like a dissipated idle mechanic."

"You may safely leave all that to me," said Zadoc.

"Not a doubt of that," said Claude. "And now we will leave you, and hope you will be happy enough in the new world."

"It is a hope," said the hangman.

Jack noticed that he never offered his hand to either of them, or spoke one word about any refreshments. No doubt the wretched man felt that he was too much repudiated by society even to take that liberty with a highwayman.

The little girl with her cheerful pretty face let them all out again, and bade them good night with a soft musical voice as she closed the garden gate upon them.

CHAPTER CC.

A RIOT AT AN EXECUTION.—THE RACE FROM OXFORD.

CLAUDE and Jack had now but little rest until the eventful Monday morning, as that was to decide whether this daring plan would suffice or not for the rescue of Dick Turpin.

At the hour of six in the morning, Zadoc called for them both, and took them to his cottage. By seven he had equipped Claude in the costume which he thought most likely to deceive the authorities with regard to his real character.

Claude upon this occasion wore a rusty ragged suit of clothes that might have been those of a mechanic that he kept for his Sunday suit in prosperous times, but which he had long taken recklessly into ordinary use, and subjected to all the wear and tear of a dissolute life. A dirty apron was twisted round his waist with a ragged corner of it hanging down, and the Jew, with amazing art, painted the face of Claude so that he looked a good ten years older than he really was.

When Duval looked at himself in a glass, he cried out—

"This disguise is perfect. What do you think of it, Jack?"

"That it could not be better. Now, Mr. Zadoc, what do you advise me to wear pon this interesting occasion?"

"I have tkought of that," said the Jew. "You will not only be mounted yourself, but you will have the care of Claude's horse, and of Dick Turpin's; so I shall put you in the custume of a common livery-stable helper, in order to give the affair the appearance as if you had been sent out with the two horses either to take them somewhere, or ordered as merely to give them a little exercise. It will then look very natural that passsing by the place of execution, you should stop to see what is going on, and get as close to the seaffold as you can."

"Yes," said Jack, "nothing could be better than that. Pray, Mr. Zadoc, be so good as to equipe me as quickly as you can in my stable costume, and you may safely trust me to act the character."

"Of that I have no doubt."

There was now but little time to lose, and with great alacrity Jack was got up in the costume that Zadoc had mentioned. He wore a pair of very voluminous shorts, with a good assortment of pearl buttons at the knees, and they were then fastened, after being given that peculiar twist that is so much affected by those who occupy a stable position. Below these he wore drab gaiters. All that he had upon his upper man was a very low-flapped waistcoat, with sleeves to it; and on his head he wore a seal-skin cap. Around his neck he had a pink spotted cravat; and when he was thus completed, and stood with the end of a long straw in his mouth, as though he had just come in a highly contemplative mood from some stable-yard, he looked quite picturesque.

"Upon my word, Jack," said Claude, "I don't think I should have known you myself; the transformation is, indeed, most complete."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said the Jew; "for, somehow or another, the authorities of Oxford have got a pretty good description of both your persons now."

"Have they, indeed?"

"Yes; and I suppose it has been from the Innkeeper where you put up, when first you arrived, before the hazardous attempt upon the prison."

"Not a doubt—not a doubt. Well, if they don't find us out now, I will forgive them for finding us upon that occasion; and this much I will say, that if I and Dick get mounted, they won't need to give themselves the trouble of coming after us, for it will be all in vain if they do. We shall go three miles to their two. If that don't quickly distance them, I don't know what will."

"Nor I, either," said Zadoc. "Are you both ready?"

"Quite! quite!"

"Then you, Jack, go to the stable, and get the horses ready; and you, Claude, come along with me, to the hangman's cottage, for he will be not a little impatient about this affair, I'll warrant, since you know what a great object he has in view regarding it."

"Yes; that was what tempted him, no doubt."

"It was."

"And you knew that it would tempt him?"

"Fortunately I did, or I should hardly have risked my position in the city, by tampering with him; I believe that I am the only friend he has in the whole of Oxford, and he has always been grateful to me, because I did not despise him, but at times passed an hour or so at his cottage along with him and his little girl."

"It is a capital thing for us, that you thought even of doing so, for, without

his connivance, this plan, which, the more I look at it, seems to me the more possible and likely of success, would have been but a piece of madness, resulting in the throwing away of our lives."

"Good-by, Claude," said Jack; "if anything happens amiss, let this be a farewell."

"No, Jack, we will not take leave of each other now. It looks like anticipating the future. I will not say good-by, but I will say good-day."

"Well," said Jack, "well, be it so; I will only say good-day.

They shook hands, and separated.

"Do you think," said Zadoc, "that he will be firm enough?"

"Yes, quite so; I never knew Jack to fail once in an enterprise yet, when it comes to the actual execution of it, whatever might be his feelings beforehand."

"I am glad to hear you say that; it gives one confidence."

They soon cleared the distance between the Jew's cottage and the hangman's little abode, and, as before, they were let in by the little girl, who had not the smallest recollection of Claude, and would evidently have gladly kept him outside, in consequence of his disreputable appearance, had it not been that Zadoc said to her,—

"It is all right, my dear; I know this person. He is going to do some work in the city, for your father."

Upon this, there was no further opposition on the part of the little girl, and Claude and Zadoc were in a few moments in the parlour where they had seen the executioner on the preceding evening.

By the open light of day, Claude was still more struck by his weakly and diminutive appearance than he had been overnight; but there was no time for any conversation now. The hangman merely handed Claude a letter, addressed to the sheriff, and then added,—

"I will go to bed at once the moment you leave, for it is just possible they may send an officer to know if I am really ill, and in that case I must of course be prepared to play m part; and even if they should send the jail surgeon, I think I can baffle him, for I will take some drug that will make me very sick in the course of a few minutes, if I have from my little girl notice of his coming; so now go, and success attend you. You have my best wishes; and until I hear from popular rumour that you have succeeded, I shall pass, shut up here, but a very miserable time of it, from my anxiety upon the matter."

"Come," said Zadoc. "You will see me this evening here, my friend."

"All's right upon that score. I am quite satisfied," said the hangman; "of course you will be sure to find me at home."

Claude guessed that these few words between them had reference to the money, and he paid no attention to them, for he did not think he ought to interfere with Zadoc's arrangements in that particular, so long as the hangman was satisfied.

They now set off, and when they got close to the town, Zadoc said,—"Now, my friend, I leave you to your own resources, and to play your part as best as you ma y. You will go direct to the jail with the letter, and, when they find it is addressed to the sheriff, they will let you into the lobby at once, and allow you to wait for an answer there. Of course, now, all depends upon your own address."

"I know it. You and I will meet again as agreed."

"That will do."

With a mutual nod merely, they separated, and Claude went upon certainly one of the most truly hazardous enterprises that in his life of strange adventures he had ever achieved or thought of achieving. Not only Dick's life but his own, and, in all likelihood, Jack's, hung upon the events of the next few hours; but yet he did not feel any degree of shrinking or even of nervousness. All he felt was deep anxiety for the result, and a determination that it should not fail to be a satisfactory one from any fault of his.

He walked rapidly and soon reached the jail.

Oh, if the authorities of Oxford could but for one moment have gussed who it was that appeared at the wicket-gate of the prison, with what glad rapidity they

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would have opened it, and welcomed him within its gloomy walls! Ay, welcomed him to the darkest cell they had, and the heaviest fetters they could place upon his limbs!

"What now?" said a rough voice, as Claude tapped at the wicket in the outer door of the prison.



THE SCUFFLE WITH THE OFFICER AND SERVANTS NEAR THE LODGE.

"A letter for the sheriff."

"Oh, is that it? Who is it from, eh?"

"The sheriff will find out that when he reads it, perhaps; and as it is not for you, it don't matter."

"Oh, indeed, that's the way you come it, is it, stupid?"

"Yes, idiot!" said Claude.

The man as he opened the wicket to admit him, looked as though he would uncommonly like to knock him down; but when he found that the stranger was about a head taller than himself, he thought it would be as well to let that part of his desire rest.

"The sheriff won't be here yet awhile," he growled.

"Oh, won't he, Jem!" said another man, who was sitting yawning upon a stone bench. "You forget that Dick Turpin is to be scragged this morning, and that he will be here early on that account."

"Do I forget it?' said the surly gate-keeper. "It would be no fault of yours if I remembered nothing else, for I do not think you have spoken of nothing else since the trial. What is to you, I wonder, about his being scragged, that you are so highly interested about it?"

"It's nothing to me personally," said the other turnkey, "only I'm sorry for the poor fellow, that's all."

"You are? And pray, why?"

"Because, to tell the honest truth, he hasn't had fair play, and that's a fact. They have hung the poor fellow, or are going to hang him, because he has a bad character, and not for what he has done, and that's what I don't like. It ain't English-like, and it won't stand the thinking of, in my opinion."

"In your opinion?" screamed the other. "Ha! ha!—In your opinion! That's a good idea; your opinion is of a vast deal of consequence, I daresay. Hilloa! here's the sheriff's carriage already. Look alive all of you. The sheriff!—The sheriff! Ring the Governor's bell at once, and tell him. It is time to look about us now, and the less you saw about your opinion, old chap, and about what you think is fair and what ain't, the better for you."

"I don't care," said the other, "who knows my opinion. What's fair is fair, and what ain't, ain't, and I sharn't say black's white to please anybody, no not if all the sheriffs in England were to be railing at me for it. They can but give a fellow the sack, and that I don't care a straw about."

A rattling knock at the door of the prison now announced that the sheriff's footman was determined his master's presence should be known with *eclat*, and according to custom.

The whole door was thrown open, and the sheriff, with his gold chain of office round his neck, made his appearance. He looked in a great fluster, did that sheriff, for he detested the job of being present at a hanging. It distracted his equanimity for the rest of the day.

"Come—come," he said. "Is everything ready now? Don't be behind-hand with anything. Let it be all done as soon as possible. A coldish raw kind of morning, too, it is. Come—come, be quick all of you."

"A letter for you, sir," said Claude, stepping forward and presenting the hangman's mission to the sheriff.

"Now really, my man, how can I be troubled with letters now? Here am I roused up in the cold upon a most disagreeable office, and people push letters into my hand the moment I get to the jail. Upon my word it is too bad—too bad, indeed. I really cannot attend to it."

"But, sir——"

"Poh! poh! Don't trouble me—go away. Leave the letter, or come to my office after the execution, for I cannot be troubled with such an affair just now really. Dear me, who is it from that they send to me at such a time as this, eh? Who is it from?"

"The executioner!" said Claude.

CHAPTER CCI.

THE EVENTFUL MORNING COMES TO AN END.

When Claude communicated the word, executioner, everybody looked rather aghast; and above all the others, the sheriff appeared to be rather staggered.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "What nonsense is this that you tell me

that the executioner has written a note when he has to be hear directly? and, indeed, bless me, he ought to be here now."

"Yes, sir," said a turnkey, "so he ought."

"And pray, sir," said the sheriff, who was quite prepared now to quarrel with everybody upon the smallest possible notice, "and pray, sir, who requested you to make a remark?"

"I beg pardon," said the turnkey.

"You beg pardon, sir? How dare you beg pardon, I should like to know?"

This the turnkey found to be rather unanswerable, and he got out of the way as quickly as possible.

"Ah!" continued the highly indignant sheriff. "A pretty thing, indeed, that I am to come here at such a time in the morning as this, upon the most troublesome and onerous duties, and then to be spoken to in such a way. Come, you fellow, are you quite sure this is from the executioner?"

"He gave it to me himself," said Claude.

"Bless me. Tut—tut! what can it be about?"

"He is very bad."

"Bad—bad? I know he is bad. What do you mean by that? You don't mean ill, do you?"

"Yes, sir. Confined to his bed. Dying, it is thought."

"The executioner dying! The devil! Pray, sir, what right as he to die until he has done his duty here to day? I ask you or any reasonable man, if you are a reasonable man, which you don't look like, what right a low person has to die, when he is wanted to do something that nobody else likes to do as is likely to like to do?"

To this question Claude made no reply, and the sheriff bustled off with the letter in his hand, crying—

"Where is the governor—where is the governor? I must speak to the governor. Gracious Providence, where is the governor? Here's a pretty to do. I shall have to hang Dick Turpin myself, I suppose. Goodness gracious!"

Claude had the greatest possible difficulty to keep his countenance while the sheriff made such an undignified appearance, and when he had left the vestibule of the prison and some of the turnkeys laughed, Claude could not help joining with them.

"Is Dennis really bad," said one to Claude.

"Yes," said Claude. Dennis, was the executioner's name. "Yes, he is so bad that you won't see him here to day."

Claude thought that it was just as well, since they were willing, that he should be on moderately civil terms with the turnkeys.

"That's a pretty kettle of fish then," said one of them, "for Dick Turpin must be hung to day, and the question will be who is to do the job? I heard the recorder say that if nobody else would, the sheriff was bound to tuck up the fellow."

"Yes, he will have to do it," said another.

"I think not," cried a third; and then pointing to Claude, he added—"I don't think you have brought Dennis's letter here for nothing, my friend. You have no objection to act as his substitute, this morning?"

"None in the least," said Claude.

In a moment the turnkeys drew back from the immediate vicinity of Claude. It was astonishing to see the look of loathing that came on even those coarse men, at the idea of anything like contact with a hangman.

"Yes," added Claude, "if the sheriff don't like the job, as poor Dennis is ill, I am willing enough to do it, as I am out of work, unless any of you have a decided wish for the little bit of occupation."

"Oh, no—no—no!"

"Very well. I only mentioned it because of course I should feel very sorry to interfere with any of you; but if none of you like it, why I'm willing to do it for a consideration."

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"You may depend upon it, my fine fellow," said one, "that there will be no great competition for the job, and you will have it, as far as we are concerned. I suppose Dennis will let you have all the perquisites? The clothes, and so on?"

"Oh, yes, so he said, and as I am rather indifferently clothed, I mean to put 'em all on when I get 'em."

"You do?"

"Yes. They tell me that Dick Turpin is somewhat about my size, and that he dresses well. I only hope he will put on his best suit this morning, and then when I go out of Oxford I shall look like a highwayman."

"Well, you certainly do take the matter about as coolly as anybody that I ever heard of. But here comes somebody. Now, Jack, what is it?"

A man rushed into the vestibule in haste, and said—

"The sheriff and the governor want to see the man that brought the note from Dennis."

"I'm the person," said Claude.

"Follow me, then."

"Ha! ha! all's right. I do begin to think now that I shall really get the job. Ha! ha!"

With this, snapping his fingers as though he were in great glee at the idea of getting the job of hanging a man and his clothes to put on afterwards, Claude followed the man, who was called Jack, through some dreary windings of the prison until they reached the door of an apartment of a semi-official character, in which the governor, the sheriff, and the chaplain, were engaged in earnest converse.

Jack tapped at the door, and the voice of the sheriff, evidently in great trepidation, cried—

"Come in!"

Jack opened the door and ushered in Claude, who made a clumsy sort of half insolent bow. The governor and the chaplain regarded him alternately, but the sheriff was in too fussy a condition to take much notice of him.

"Well, my friend," said the governor, "of course you know the errand you came here upon?"

"Yes, of course I do, and I made up my mind to it, or else I should not have come; but I don't much care about it, and if you have any objection, only say so and there's no harm done."

"Oh, no—no," cried the sheriff. "No objection, quite the reverse, my good fellow; don't think of going."

"Pray," said the governor, "who, and what are you?"

"That's a wide question," said Claude, "and I answer by saying I am a bad character."

"A bad character?" said the chaplain; "oh, dear me!"

"Sir," said Claude, "do you think that any man of a good character, and who cared much about his fellow-men, and who had any character or standing to lose, would come here and be a deputy hangman? I don't want the job, if you are particular about me. Find some one with a good character to do it. Here I am, a man, who for what he can get by it, and I hope you will be liberal, consents to be a hangman. Don't bother me with any questions. Let me get through the job, and then go about my business: or else say you don't mean it, and good morning to you."

"Oh, no—no," cried the sheriff. "Stop him! stop him! It's all right; of course I will be liberal. You shall do it, my fine fellow, and be asked no questions at all; and I will give you an extra guinea out of my own pocket, and put it down to the county—a-hem! Mr. Governor, we will not ask this highly interesting young man any questions, for, as he truly says, it is not everybody who might like the little job that he comes about."

"As you please, sir," said the governor; "of course, sir, you have the decision in the matter."

"Well, well, it's all right, I dare say. A man will do for a hangman without

a character, I rather think. Now, Mr. Chaplain, how is your prisoner this morning?"

"I am very sorry to say that he laughs at me," said the chaplain.

"Does he really? How very odd! Well, Mr. Deputy Hangman, you will be so good as to take care how you perform your duty. I hope you will not make any blunder at the last moment."

"Lord bless you, sir, no," said Claude, as he untwisted a rope from round his waist. "I thought perhaps I might have the situation, so I brought this with me, sir, and if you will hold your head on one side for a moment while I put the noose on, you will see how nicely——"

"Me! me! Oh, gracious no! Keep off! Keep him away! knock him down, Mr. Governor. Oh, dear—oh, dear, I'm all over of a profuse perspiration at the thought of such a thing. How dare you, you rascal, propose to put a rope over my neck? Do you know, sir, who I am, I ask you, sir?"

"I am only going to show you, sir."

"You were only going to show me, you rascal? Why could you not hang the chaplain or the governor?"

"I am quite willing," said Claude, advancing towards the chaplain, who had indulged in a quiet smile at the sheriff's trepidation, but who now started to the further end of the room and cried—

"Murder!"

"Go and wait in the vestibule," said the governor. "You will be sent for when you are wanted."

"Very good," said Claude. "It's all right, I hope, and no mistake. I shall be ready, gentlemen.

'We're all hanging—hang—hang—hanging,
And we're all hanging at our house at home.'

I shall be ready All's one to me as long as it's a good job. Come, I say, old chap, they call you Jack, don't they? Can you get such a thing as a pot of ale?"

"I tell you what it is," said the man, "you make too free by half—I don't want your company; and I don't exactly suppose there is any one here who does. I don't think you'll find any gentleman on the lock in this place, as we'll dip his nose along with yours in a pot of ale; so just keep yourself quiet."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Claude. "Well, when your turn comes to be tucked up and I have the job, I'll give you a twist in the wrong place by placing the knot a little on one side, you may depend."

"Oh, go to the deuce!"

"So I will, but not yet. Ha! ha! I've got the job, and you will see me go off like a jolly highwayman in Dick Turpin's clothes, that you will. Rare sport that will be; I don't know but that I may call myself Turpin's ghost and take to the road myself. They say that he made no end of money by it and lives like a prince; and now and then when I want a little change of occupation, I can come here to see if there's a little bit of a job doing in the hanging way, and who knows but there may be?"

Claude made these remarks in the vestibule in a general sort of way, but it was quite evident that the turnkeys during his observations had made up their minds to give him the cut direct, for they none of them answered him, and one of them pretended composedly to whistle as though nobody was speaking.

If anything could, in the state of intense anxiety for the success of his scheme that he was in, have amused Claude, it would have been the conduct of the turnkeys of the jail; but he could not laugh in reality, although he executed two or three mock-peals of merriment, which had the effect of greatly annoying everybody.

The prison clock struck eight.

Claude counted the strokes, and scarcely had the last one died away when a man called out:—

"Where's the executioner?"

"Here!" said Claude.

"Come this way, then; you are wanted."

It was morally and physically impossible for any human being not to feel some amount of trepidation at this moment. The only fear that Claude had was that Dick Turpin, knowing him so well as he did, might recognise him, notwithstanding his diguise; and in the surprise of the moment, utter some exclamation that might have the effect of ruining the whole scheme; and now that he felt he was about to be introduced to Dick, he shook certainly.

The man led him through several gloomy winding passages until they entered a stone vaulted room, in which there were a number of persons. The heavy strokes of a hammer came upon Claude's ears, and he knew that the prison-smith was knocking off the fetters of Dick Turpin prior to his being led out to die. Claude felt that it would not do for him to exhibit by word or look the state of his feelings, and therefore, with the most admirable self-control, he kept all outward show of feeling down. He whistled as he entered the room in which there were all the persons now who had official concern with the execution.

The chaplain walked up to him, and in a tone of great severity, said—

"How dare you whistle when a fellow-creature is so near to his last moments, you wretched man!"

"Oh, well, I won't then," said Claude.

The sound of the smith's hammer effectually drowned the tone of Claude's voice, or else Dick might have detected him by it, and Claude had a faint hope that he would. But as nothing resulted from the few words that he spoke, that hope dissipated.

"All's ready now," said the smith, as he gave the last blow, and the irons fell to the floor with a clinking sound. "Good by to you, Dick Turpin, I have done my duty."

CHAPTER CCII.

OFF AND AWAY.—BAD LUCK TO THE HINDMOST.

Good-by, my friend," said Dick, "and if ever we meet again in this world, I will thank you for doing it so gently."

The smith shook his head as he gathered up his tools, and muttered to himself—

"That ain't a very likely thing."

The chaplain now went up to Dick, and in a canting sonorous voice, into which he threw, Heaven only knew why, a powerful nasal twang, he said—

"Richard Turpin, I now expect from you a full confession that you are a hardened sinner, and a complete admission of the justice of your sentence. It is to be hoped, too, that on the scaffold you will advise everybody to work hard and go to church regularly, for fear they come to your disgraceful end."

"Then," said Dick, in a clear, cheerful voice, "you expect what you won't get."

"What?"

"I say you expect what you won't get. I do not acknowledge the justice of my sentence, for I know perfectly well that a man ought not to be hanged for stopping another on the highway without any violence; and as for the advice you expect me to give on the scaffold, I shall not give it."

"Hardened wretch, have you no regard for your immortal welfare?"

"Yes, every regard, Master Parson, but you and I differ as to the mode of showing it. If I say anything on the scaffold, it will be to advise the rich and the great, as they call themselves, to pay more attention to the poor man's comforts, and above all things, to pray the people not to be robbed by the parsons in the way they are."

"Oh, this is truly dreadful. You abominable sinner!"

"Don't begin calling me names, you humbug," said Dick.

"Come—come," said the sheriff, "this won't do at all. There's the prison-bell beginning to toll, I declare. Now, Mr. What's-your-name, come and pinion your man, and let us get this very uncomfortable affair over as soon as possible."

Claude stepped forward, but Dick did not look up to him at all. Claude got at his back to tie him with a cord that he had, and then inclining his mouth to his ear, he whispered—

"Dick! Hope—hope!"

"Hilloa!" cried Dick. "Who—what—no—no—no!"

The governor ran up to them in a moment, but before he could say a word, Dick added—

"It's easier now. There's no occasion to cut a fellow's wrists with the cord, Mr. Hangman, confound you!"

"Oh, was that all?" said the governor.

"About it," said Claude.

"It can't much matter now, Turpin, whether a rope is a little too tight or not. Half an hour will settle all that."

"Yes, by settling me, you mean," said Dick.

The governor nodded.

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you for the friendly hint, but yet I don't agree with the reasoning, and if you and I meet again in this world, I will put you in mind of it."

"Oh, pho! pho!"

"Very good. Have you done all your tying and trussing me up, Mr. Hangman? Confound you, any one would think that I was a fowl about to be roasted."

"Yes,—all's right," said Claude. "I don't want you to slip through my fingers, old fellow!—Courage, Dick."

"Yes," said Dick Turpin. "Yes. That's it. There's many a slip between the cup and the lip. Now, governor, you have not behaved badly to me upon the whole, and before I leave I beg to thank you for many kindnesses. Will you give me a cup of wine now, and will you give one to the hangman here? for I always said that before I suffered, I would take a drop with the executioner, if I could get it."

"If the sheriff has no objection, Dick Turpin," said the governor, "I will give it to you, and welcome."

"Oh, dear no," said the sheriff, "not in the least, and—and Mr. Governor, I could take a nice glass of port myself, I think; so bring a bottle and some glasses."

"I protest against this," said the chaplain. "This Richard Turpin is such a hardened sinner, that he is entitled to no indulgences whatever. He called me a humbug."

"And so you are," cried Claude,—"a hardened sinner," he then added, turning to Dick.

The chaplain shook his head, for although that was a very good turn off, yet he felt, and so did every one else, that the first part of the sentence was evidently intended to refer to him. The governor smiled slightly, and whispered to one of the prison attendants, who left the room, and in a few moments came back with a bottle of wine and half-a-dozen glasses on a tray.

"Help yourself, Turpin," said the governor. "I don't grudge you a bottle of wine at such a time as this."

Dick poured out two glasses, and handing one to Claude, he said—

"Here, my friend, it ain't your fault, you know, that you are in this rather uncomfortable situation, and come what will, I shan't forget you—not if they were to kill me by inches, and however I may be *clawed*."

Duval perfectly understood Dick's pun upon his name, and taking the glass of wine, he said—

"Here's better luck still," and then he tossed it off.

"Really, a-hem!" said the sheriff, who by this time had supplied himself with a glass, "I wish you, Dick Turpin, a speedy release. Upon my life, this is a capital drop of port."

"Is it?" said the chaplain. "I don't mind if I take only one glass, just to show, in fact that you see, in a manner of speaking, how humble and unaffected I am."

"Don't mention it," said Dick, giving the bottle a joggle that upset it with a smash on to the stone floor. The chaplain gave a stamp of rage, and the sheriff cried—

"All ready—it's only twenty minutes to nine now. All ready. Now, Dick Turpin, we will settle this little morning's work."

"I hope so, sir," said Dick.

"So do I," said Claude. "Come on."

A hasty procession was formed, and Claude took care to keep close to Dick, lest any one should observe how very ineffectually he had bound him. Indeed, the cord was put on in such a way, that a touch almost would be sufficient to remove it from the arm of the condemned one.

The sheriff, as in duty bound, led the way, fretting and fuming as he went, for at the bottom that little fussy sheriff was not a bad-hearted man, and he did not like to herald anybody to death. Then came the governor of the jail, who at the gate of it was formally to deliver up to the sheriff his prisoner; and then came the chaplain, reading the prayers for the dead aloud; and then came Dick Turpin, with Claude hold of his right arm, as though he was quite determined that his victim should not escape him. After them, came about half a dozen officials of the prison, who attended the sheriff upon such an occasion, as a sort of body-guard.

It was strange to note the effect produced upon a large concourse of people outside the jail, by the appearance of the different parties. The sheriff, who was not unpopular in the country, was received upon this occasion in silence. The governor heard a groan raised against him, for what, nobody knew exactly. The chaplain was received in silence; but when Dick Turpin appeared, with Claude close by him, the shouts, groans, hisses, and bravoes, rent the air.

Of course, all the complimentary effusions of mob outcry were intended for Dick, while all the discordant noises were hurled at the supposed hangman. It had got brooted about among the crowd that the regular hangman was ill, or dead, and that the person who was about to officiate was a mere volunteer; so the populace were determined that he should not remain in ignorance of the kind of estimation in which his office was held.

The cries and groans were truly frightful.

"This won't do," said the sheriff, pausing.

"No danger, sir," said the governor. "It's only at the new hangman. The more noise the mob make, the less danger there is in the people. It is always better, sir, to let them have their say."

"Well—well, let us go on; where's my horse? Oh, there he is. Woa!—woa! Hold him while I get on, somebody. Oh, dear, there he goes again. Thank you; that will do."

The sheriff got mounted with some difficulty; and never was the versatile nature of a mob so completely shown as at that moment; for whereas it had been all indignation and fury at the new hangman, just because the sheriff's horse moved aside twice as he tried to mount, the explosions of laughter were tremendous, and everybody seemed to be highly delighted.

It was during this amusing state of the mob that Dick Turpin, and Claude, and the chaplain of the jail, took their places in a cart that was at the prison door, and which now, surrounded by half a dozen officers on horseback, began slowly to move off through the dense mass of people that upon all sides surrounded it.

In the cart, too, was a coffin, in which it was kindly purposed to place Dick after his demise.

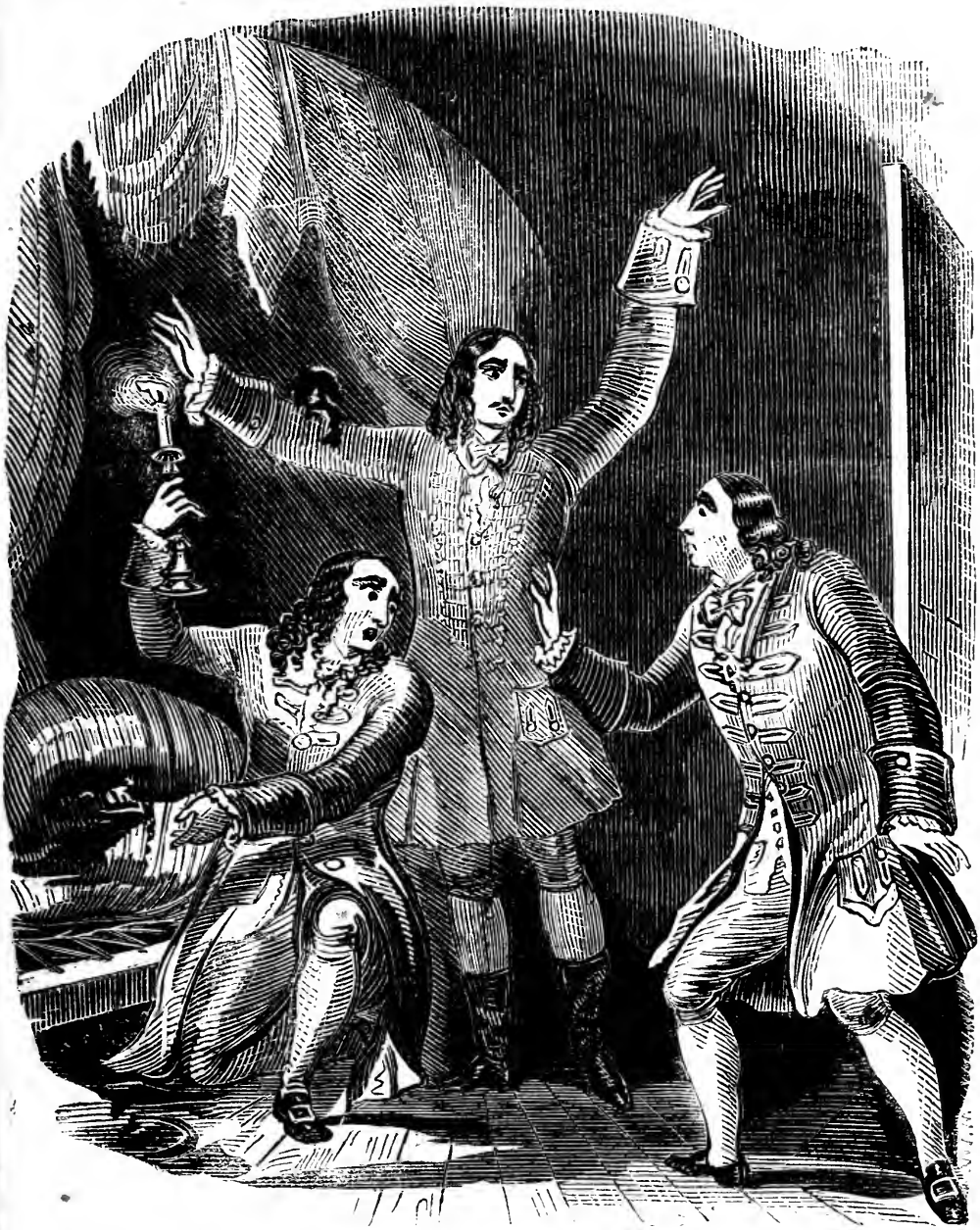
"That," said Dick, "is a lodging for a single man, that I would rather not take."

"Nor shall you," whispered Claude.

"Is it right, my dear friend?"

"Right."

Dick smiled, and drew a long breath. Amid the dim confusion that reigned, they might have freely enough discoursed, without any one being a bit the wiser, for the chaplain was very much discomposed by the jolting of the cart,



THE DISCOVERY IN THE ROOM OF THE "BUNCH OF GRAPES."

and was holding on to one side of it, with his teeth set in a manner that gave his mouth a kind of quiver that mightily amused the people. He then, as the cart-wheel next to him went over a large stone in the road, made a grasp at the coffin, to keep himself up, and down he went into the middle of the cart, with it upon his stomach.

This event produced a roar of laughter, and altogether, so highly comic an exe-

cution as that of Dick Turpin's promised to be, had not been seen to start from the jail at Oxford.

With no little difficulty the reverend gent aroused himself, and then he found that he had lost his book. Neither Claude nor Dick thought it prudent to say anything more to each other, notwithstanding these incidents seemed to leave them so much at liberty to do so, for they could not take upon themselves to say that the eye of some wary officer might not be upon them; and, of course, now the slightest indiscretion would have upset the whole affair.

The driver of the cart found the parson's book for him, and he commenced again reading the burial service, to which Dick offered no sort of opposition, for to tell the truth he did not hear it, as his whole soul was absorbed in considering in what way Claude intended to attempt his rescue.

One of the mounted officers rode close to the side of the cart, and said to Claude in an imperious kind of tone—

"I don't think you have pinioned the prisoner at all well."

"Haven't I?" said Claude.

"No. Don't you see? Why one of his arms is almost, now, at liberty. You are a regular bungler, or else you are doing it on purpose."

"I'll soon settle that," said Claude. "If you don't like my way of doing things, come and hang him yourself, stupid."

"I shall keep an eye on you, fellow."

"Which one?" said Claude; "the one that squints, or the green one?"

The officer shook his head and moved off, a little in high dudgeon, and so the procession, which after all began to assume a melancholy aspect, went through Oxford. The people began to recollect that a man was being conveyed to death, and that it was not exactly the thing to laugh at it. Some cried out words of consolation to him, and more than one pressed up to the side of the cart, saying—

"Turpin, do you wish anything done that we can do for you when you are no more?"

"Nothing," said Dick. "But I thank you all the same, and, dead or alive, I won't forget one kind word that is spoken to me on this day, by any one, let him be whom he may."

Dick and Claude at this exchanged glances, and in the firm compressed lip and flashing eye of his friend, Dick read volumes of comfort and hope, and framed his spirit with the idea that he would yet live to see many a fair moonlight night, and to have many a dashing gallop upon his noble steed; although how his rescue from all those who were intent upon his death, some from duty and some from inclination, was to be accomplished, he could not guess.

The windows were crowded along the line of the procession, and many a pitying tear fell from bright eyes, to see a human being in health and strength carried out to die; and the crowd, each moment, increased in numbers until Claude wondered where on earth all the people could come from.

And still ever and anon, above all the sound of the feet of the people, and the tramp of the horses, and the rumbling of the cart, sounded the death-bell!

CHAPTER CCIII.

CONTAINS SOME VERY CURIOUS INCIDENTS.

Claude kept his eyes well about him. Perhaps he hoped to get a glimpse of some friendly face amidst all the throng, but if he did so, he hoped in vain; for most of the countenances he looked at, that happened to be close to the fatal cart, were actuated by curiosity more than by sympathy.

And so the cart went on.

Probably no malefactor had ever been led out to die through Oxford who had created such a sensation as did Dick Turpin; and as the procession passed a large

hotel, the judge who had presided at Dick's trial, was seen at the open windows, taking a peep at the cortege. Dick's eyes happened, at the moment, to take that direction. Raising his hand, he pointed at him, crying out, with a loud voice—

"We shall meet again!"

The judge immediately retired from the window, but not before he had been seen and recognised by many in the mob, and the solemnity with which Dick uttered the words, made a deep impression upon many present. The chaplain turned to Dick, and said—

"What do you mean, you unhappy man, when you say that you and the judge will meet again?"

"Just what I say," replied Dick. "Did I not speak plainly?"

"Yes, as regards words; but where did you expect to meet the judge again, you miserable sinner?"

"On the road."

"The road to where?"

"To London, most likely."

The chaplain groaned, for he flattered himself that he was getting Dick into quite a religious discussion, and certainly he never was more mistaken in his life; for Turpin, with all the flutter of expectation in his breast that Claude and Jack would yet manage to save him even at the eleventh hour, was in a much worse mood than even if he had been listening to the chaplain's exhortations.

"It is to be hoped, that before you are turned off you will repent," he said.

"I promise you I will," said Dick.

Claude admonished Dick by a glance to be careful how he went too far in what he was saying, as in truth a very little more might have awakened serious suspicions that he had some hopes of a rescue, and in such a case the authorities might have made some move that would have effectually destroyed all Claude's plans and projects.

Turpin was silent, and pretended to hang down his head in deep thought; and soon now the procession came in view of the spot destined for the execution. It was a strange sight then to see how most of the crowd that had attended the cart through the streets from the jail, set off at a mad sort of gallop towards the scaffold, in order to get good places, so that, with the exception of the official persons, the cart was nearly deserted. Perhaps, if Claude could have foreseen such a thing, which it was quite impossible he could do, he would have thought that a better opportunity for the rescue than any other that could possibly occur, but as all the arrangements with Jack were made differently, he could not take the advantage of that favourable moment.

"Get on quicker," said an officer to the man who was driving, or rather leading the horse that was drawing the cart. "The road is even enough now, and we are behind time."

Upon this remonstrance, the man quickened his pace, and in the course of a few minutes the cart was stopped under the gallows, the mode in which Dick was to hang being the barbarous one of suspending him by the neck to the gallows as it overhung the cart, and then drawing the vehicle away from under him.

The crowd was intensely closely packed, but within six feet of the gallows' fool was Jack with the horses. He looked ghastly pale, and the moment his eyes felt upon Claude and Dick in the cart, the former saw him perceptibly tremble. It was not for any want of courage that Jack shook, but it was from his deep anxiety for the success of the plan.

"Now, Turpin," said Claude, as if speaking in his professional capacity. "Look up, will you?"

Dick started to his feet, and his eyes fell upon the horses and Jack. His own gallant and well-tried steed he knew in a moment, and a cry escaped his lips.

"What's all this about?" said one of the mounted officers.

"Ay, what's all this?" said Claude.

"It's rather a hard thing to die in such a way, in broad daylight!" said Turpin.

"Oh, stuff. Come, Mr. Hangman's deputy, do your duty. It's high time you got you job over."

"Do you wish to say anything to the people?" said Claude to Dick, and he said it in such a tone of voice, that Turpin felt that it was a kind of invitation to him to do so. For the moment he could not very well make out what Claude wanted him to make a speech for, but then it suddenly struck him that it must be for the purpose of propitiating the crowd, so that the less impediment might be offered to his escape, the mode of conducting which, since he had seen Jack with the horses, was no longer a mystery to him.

"Yes," he said, "I should like to say a few words to the people."

"Stuff!" cried the officers. "Stuff! It can't be."

"Hear him! hear him!" shouted the people. "Let the poor fellow have his last say in this world! Hear him! hear him! Down with the bloodhounds!"

The officers looked a little alarmed at this demonstration upon the part of the crowd, and the sheriff turned quite red in the face, while the chaplain turned quite pale.

"Let him speak," said the sheriff. "It's usual enough. Let him say his say. Come, Turpin, speak if you will."

"Yes," said the chaplain, "and tell the people that it was bad company, and not attending your parish church, that have brought you to this disgraceful end."

Dick advanced to the side of the cart.

"Hold him," whispered the chaplain to Claude.

"All's right, sir," said Claude. "He shan't get away from me, you may depend upon that. I wouldn't now lose sight of him for a hundred-pound-note."

"My friends and fellow-countrymen," said Dick, "God bless you all, and your wives, and your little ones, and your pretty sweethearts that I hope you will be all happy with."

"Bravo!" cried the people. "Hear him! hear him! Down with the bloodhounds! Let him go! let him go!"

"Cut it short," said the sheriff.

"I have only to say," added Dick, "that I make a full and free confession that I have taken many a guinea from a rich man with no heart of compassion in his bosom, and given it to a poor one to buy food for his wife and his little ones that were crying in their wretched home from hunger. But God bless you all, my friends; you have come to see me hanged for it—hanged like a dog!"

The yell that burst from the throats of the crowd was perfectly terrific. If Dick Turpin had spoken for an hour he could not have said more to the purpose than he did. There was surely not a person present whose feelings and sympathies were not deeply enlisted in behalf of the prisoner; and some women who were at the outskirts of the crowd got quite desperate in their rage at the idea of his being hung, and they called loudly upon the men to rescue him.

The sheriff, chaplain, and officers all got alarmed; and Claude was called upon to proceed with the execution. Jack pressed forward with the two led horses close to the scaffold.

"Keep back, you fellow with the horses," cried the officers. "Keep back. Do you want to get into the cart?"

"No," said Jack. "But the duke don't like anything said to me, old fellow: I'm his own groom."

Such is the slavish submission of rank among all official persons in England, that even the groom and the horses of a duke were held something sacred, and no more was said to Jack.

"Now Mr. Whats-your-name," cried the sheriff to Claude. "Be quick—look alive there! Don't you see the people are all in a ferment?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Very well, then, turn your man off, and let me get back to Oxford as quickly as I can."

"This won't do," said the officer who all along had interfered so much in the affair. "This won't do. I am convinced now of what I have suspected all along,

and that is, that there is something wrong. I will shoot the first person who interferes with the due course of the law. Let them take the consequences."

As he spoke, this active officer took a pistol from his coat-pocket, and deliberately placed it at full cock.

Claude went to the edge of the cart and very mysteriously beckoned to this officer, saying—

"There is something amiss. I will tell you, but I don't want all the world to hear."

The officer inclined his head towards Claude, as he said—

"Well, what is it?—what is it?"

"This," said Claude, as he snatched the pistol from his hand, and then struck him from his horse with the heavy but-end of it. "This is what's wrong, and this is what's right."

To turn then and release Dick Turpin from his bonds was the work of an instant, and then taking him by the hand, he cried—

"Jump—jump!"

They both cleared the side of the cart and alighted outside of it among the people, while Jack made a sudden dart forward with the horses; and now a struggle ensued of a most fearful character, for the officers made an attack upon Claude and Dick with their short cutlasses, and two or three pistol shots were fired. The battle, however, did not last above a minute, for then with a roaring shout the mob made one rush, and cart, and gallows, and officers, and Dick, and Claude, and Jack, were all mixed up in one pellmell of confusion.

By great good fortune, Jack kept the horses on their feet, and Claude would have been killed if Dick had not thrown his arm round him, crying—

"He is not a hangman. He is my friend, Claude Duval!"

"And I'm their friend, Jack!" shouted Jack, "and this is Dick's mare, Bess, and this is Duval's horse. A rescue—a rescue!"

The mob raised a delirious shout of satisfaction, and in a moment or two they fairly lifted Dick Turpin and Claude Duval to the saddles of their respective steeds.

"Off and away!" cried Claude, as he raised his hat in the air, and then flung it fifty feet above his head.

"Bless you all," shouted Dick. "I don't know how to thank you, but if I live I won't forget the men of Oxford, nor the pretty girls either."

The officers made a desperate attempt to rally, but they were beaten down, and disarmed, and, half dead, they were thrown into the cart one upon another. The sheriff had, upon the very first commencement of the row, turned his horse's head towards the city, and set off at full speed, and no doubt he would have got back first if his horse had not thrown him into a ditch.

"Clear the way!" cried Jack.

A hundred voices immediately added—"Clear the way!—Clear the way!" and then, as if by magic, a lane was made for the three friends to gallop through. Dick, with his face flushed, rode on, calling out his thanks to the people. Claude came next, laughing and waving his hand, and Jack was the last, and not a little pleased did he look.

When they all three got clear of the vast throng of people, Dick turned in his saddle, and gave a wild sort of shrill "Hurrah!" which was echoed by the mob in tones of thunder, and then off they went like the wind.

The moment they were gone, the people made another mad sort of rush at the cart and the gallows, and pulled both fairly to fragments in a few moments. The chaplain had his gown torn to shreds, and was glad to get back to Oxford as fast as he could; and the officers, whose horses had all been let loose in the fray, likewise fled the best way they could.

The only one who seemed to have received rather a serious hurt, was the one who had been so officious with his pistol, and who had been knocked down by Claude at the commencement of the riot. He was unable to walk, so the people very considerately propped him up against the road-side and left him.

There was a person hovering about the outskirts of the crowd, who, when the affair was all over, and the mob went streaming back to Oxford, was heard to say—

"Dear me. Well, who would have thought of such a thing as this happening? I really was never so much surprised in all my life. The idea of Dick Turpin not being hung, after all! Do tell me how it could possibly happen, somebody?"

The person who thus spoke, was no other than Mr. Zadoc, and having got hold of one of the well-shaken officers, he treated him to something warm and comforting at the first public-house they came to, and heard the account of the whole affair, to which he listened without once changing countenance.

Of course, Zadoc's wish was to find out what the impression of the officer was concerning the rescue; but really this one that he had pitched upon was in such a state of mental and bodily confusion, that he could tell him nothing. In the meantime, our three friends were miles from the ancient city of Oxford.

CHAPTER CCIV.

A PLEASANT RIDE TO LONDON.

"HALT!" said Dick.

Claude and Jack both drew up immediately. "What's the matter?" said Claude; "anything amiss, Turpin?"

"No; but now that we are far enough from Oxford to set pursuit at defiance. I do not see why I should not shake hands with my best friends, and try, however inefficiently I may do it, to thank them."

"None of that," said Jack. "We don't want to be thanked, Dick."

"Well, but—but—"

"Come, come," said Claude, "we have just done for you what we know very well it would give you great pleasure to do for us; and it's such a grand thing to have succeeded in it, that that is quite congratulation enough for us; so don't say another word about it, Dick.'

"Well," said Turpin, "you may stop me for speaking about it, but you can't stop me from thinking; and to my dying day I shall fee how nobly and how gallantly I have been rescued from death."

"There you go again," said Jack. "He will have his say, Claude, do what we will, or say what we will."

"I am done now," said Dick.

"And a good job, too," laughed Claude; "for Jack is evidently getting into a perfect fever. And now, tell me, Dick, if you knew me when I first came into the press-room of the prison?"

"Not a bit."

"Then I was well disguised, and Zadoc did his part of the affair, after all, most admirably."

"Ah," said Dick, "Zadoc was in it? Then, I don't wonder that everything went well. But you, both of you, forget that it is all guess-work to me, and that beyond the result, I really know little or nothing of the affair."

Upon this, Claude briefly related to him the whole particulars of the proceedings after their failure in the attempt at escape from the prison; and Dick, shaking his head, said—

"Ah, I gave it all up as a bad job, when that rascal of a governor knocked me down in the prison-yard with the ladder."

"He didn't get much by that, though," said Jack.

"He got what has perfectly satisfied him," said Dick; "and so completely so, that he will not ask the justices for his next quarter's salary. You shot him dead, Claude."

"And he would have it," said Duval. "I did not use my pistol until he played the coward."

"Don't apologise, Duval. It was all right. But what do you both think of doing now?"

"Why, here is a very convenient spot," said Jack, "for opening the large vallise at my back, and getting out some of our own proper clothing, for I don't like the idea of Claude and I going much further in this sort of costume, which can be described by so many people."

"Right," said Dick; "and if out of your stock you can lend me a coat of a different colour to that which I have on, I shall not be sorry to wear it, for you may depend that the hue-and-cry will be after us sharp and fast, before many hours are over our heads."

Claude fully agreed in these remarks both of Jack's and Dick's; and as they were close to a little clump of trees, where they would be quite hidden from any casual observation, Jack opened the vailise, in which a number of articles of apparel were very closely packed, and in a very short time, they all three, by changing their coats and cravats, altered their appearance amazingly.

Dick Turpin was accommodated with a handsome scarlet coat belonging to Claude; and when they were all three mounted again, Claud cried out with a laugh—

"I think now that we might call upon all the world to stand and deliver!—Don't you, Dick?"

"It would not be a trifle that would stop us," said Dick.

"But," said Jack, "it would be anything but prudent just here; so come on, and let us get further off from Oxford; for you must recollect that any of the officers would know us in a moment, notwithstanding, by the alteration of our coats, we may not be described by people on the road."

"A carriage! A carriage!" said Dick Turpin, "by all that's good! A carriage!"

"Where?" said Claude.

Dick pointed in the direction of across-road, and there, sure enough, came cantering along one of those immense old-fashioned vehicles called a family coach—which, by-the-by, despite all the ridicule that has been cast upon them, are comfortable things. The coachman had a formidable wig on, and the footman the same, while both of them were too fat to dream of offering any resistance to anybody on the road. The horses were sleek and in capital flesh, and the whole equipage moved on at about the rate of five miles an hour.

Dick looked at Claude and laughed; but Jack interfered, saying—

"I cannot help thinking that it will be very imprudent to stop that carriage now, and so keep up a kind of ferment on the road. Of course, it will be the effect of pointing out exactly which way we have come. I would not think of it."

"Come—come, Jack," said Turpin, "withdraw your opposition, I beg of you, for I really want to see whether my imprisonment in Oxford jail has done me any harm, and I can't find out until I stop something or somebody on the highway."

"Well—well," said Jack, "if you must, you must. But let us all go, and then the affair will be sooner over. I will stay at the horses' heads while you two go to the carriage windows, and let me beg of you to be quick about it."

"All's right," said Claude. "Come on."

They then all three trotted along the cross-road so as to meet the carriage, and Jack, when they got sufficiently near, increased the speed of his horse, and cried to the coachman—

"Pull up, unless you want your brains blown out."

The coachman dropped his whip and turned purple in the face with the exertion he made to pull up the horses sharply.

"That will do," said Jack.

Claude went to one window of the carriage and Dick Turpin to the other, and

letting down both the windows at once they looked into the vehicle. It was full of young ladies, with the exception of one tall grim-looking female, with a pair of blue spectacles.

"Don't be at all alarmed," said Claude. "We are only highwaymen, ladies, that's all."

"Nothing more," said Dick.

The tall grim-looking female with the blue spectacles tried to rise, but struck the top of her head in a moment against the roof of the carriage, and then in a voice like a cracked trumpet, she screamed—

"Murder!—thieves!—murder!"

All the young ladies huddled together and uttered little shrieks, so that for a few moments it was quite impossible for either Dick or Claude to get a word spoken with a chance of its being heard. They quietly waited until the commotion had died away, and then Claude said in a bland tone—

"My dear young ladies, don't be alarmed. Where are you going to?"

"Oh, sir," said one, "to school; and this is Miss Blink, our governess, and so cruel to us."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes! yes!" cried all the girls, in a breath.

"And has she got any money?" said Dick.

"Not a farthing, as I'm a living sinner," said Miss Blink. "Not a solitary farthing; and if any young lady says I have, I'm afraid when we get to Minerva House Academy that something disagreeable will happen to her. I have not a farthing."

"Oh, dear!" said all the young ladies.

"Well," said Claude, "we, of course, want money, and however disagreeable it may be to you all, we shall have to search every one of you, and begin with your governess. Of course, if you hand us out something handsome, we shall be off in a moment."

"Oh, you cruel Miss Blink!" said one young lady, bursting into tears. "How can you have us all searched by two highwaymen, when you know pa paid you thirty pounds before you left the lodge."

"And my pa did the same," said another.

"Here's all I have," said another, as she tremblingly handed half-a-guinea through the open windows of the carriage.

"Keep it, my dear," said Turpin. "You don't suppose that we are going to take anything from any of you, surely, with your pretty faces? Don't begin crying, now."

"There's no danger to any of you," said Claude; "and only think what lots of letters you can write to all your friends and acquaintances about this adventure; you can all say how you saw Claude Duval!"

"Duval!" said all the young ladies, in a breath. "Oh, my!"

"Yes," added Claude, "I am that person. Jack! Jack!"

"Yes," said Jack.

"Get the large shears ready! The shortest way of searching an old lady here with spectacles, who has got sixty pounds, and won't give it up, will be to cut her skirts off."

Miss Blink uttered an ear-piercing shriek, and involuntarily laid hold of the lower part of her dress. "I'll give the money, you wretches!" she said. "I'll give the money! Here it is! Here it is!"

"That will do, madam," said Dick.

"And hark you," said Claude. "I have means of information about what I wish to know, that you little dream of; and if I hear that any one of these young ladies suffer any punishment or harshness in consequence of what they have said to-day, we will come to Minerva House, in the dead and still hour of the night, and make you remember it."

"Oh, thank you!" said all the young ladies.

"How good-looking he is," whispered one of them.

"Oh, very!" said another. "Black eyes!"

Miss Blink looked absolutely frozen with rage and terror. Her nose almost emulated the colour of her blue spectacles, and although she opened her mouth several times, like some expiring fish, she could not say another word.

"Good day," said Dick; and he closed the window, at which he had stationed himself. Claude smiled an adieu, and closed his window.



THE DISCOVERY OF THE DEAD BODY IN THE "BUNCH OF GRAPES."

"All over?" said Jack.

"Yes, Jack."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Coachman, the very best thing you can do is to move on as quick as is at all convenient to you and your lazy horses, to where you were going to when we met you."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" said a voice at some little distance behind the carriage. Hurrah! there are the rogues! Down with them! There they are! The squire will pay well! Come on! Charge at 'em! Never mind about hurting them! They deserve all they get!"

"What the deuce is all this?" said Claude.

"What, indeed?" said Dick.

"We forgot the footman," said Jack, "and he has run off and got a dozen of country fellows with pitchforks and hedge-stakes. By the promise of a heavy recompense, they had made good speed; and being told there were only three highwaymen, they thought that they could easily overcome them."

"Upon my word," said Claude, "we are going to be taken by storm by the yokels."

"It looks like it," said Dick. "What is to be done?"

"Frighten them, by firing a few shots over their heads. I don't wish to kill them, but if they give my horse a touch with one of their pitchforks, I won't answer exactly for what I may do then."

"Nor I," said Dick.

"Come on—come on," shouted the footman, "there are the rogues. You will have five guineas a-piece for taking them. Come on, and take the rogues. Lay hands on 'em. They are all cowards—Knock 'em down—down with 'em!"

"Will you be so good," cried Claude, "as to shut your mouth?"

"Ah! that's the worst of the lot. Stick him!" cried the footman.

Claude levelled a pistol at him, and fired. It would have been an easy thing for Duval to have hit him, had he felt at all inclined to do so; but he had no such intention, although he did not wish to run the risk of going so close to him as he did, for the bullet carried off his hat and wig.

The footman thought that he was shot, and he fell flat upon his back, crying out—

"I am a dead man!"

"Blaze away!" said Claude. "Kill them all!"

Both Dick and Jack now fired over the heads of the country fellows, who now lingered but just long time enough to enable them to throw down their pitchforks and hedge-stakes, and then, in a wild riot, head over heels, and impeding each other in their efforts to get away, off they set.

It was a decided defeat; and our three friends amused themselves by sending three more shots after them, which made them yell again with dismay; and there was not one of the party that did not in imagination feel the bullet running riot in his inside.

"Now," said Jack to the coachman. "Drive on."

He did so immediately; and Dick dismounting, took up the prostrate footman and threw him right into the middle of a stagnant ditch, where he came with a frightful splash, and then they left him floundering about, while they again sought the high road to London.

CHAPTER CCV.

MORE ADVENTURES ON THE OXFORD ROAD.

"This is not a very bad beginning," said Jack.

"Far from it," laughed Claude. "If we go on in this way, we shall soon make up the little expenses at Oxford."

"Not a doubt of it," said Dick Turpin; "but it would please me much better, if the whole of those expenses could be by any means got out of the Oxford authorities; and if it were to be years hence that I come across any of them, I shall insist upon it that they owe me the amount, and enforce payment."

"Yes; according to law," said Jack.

"The law of the road," cried Claude, "you mean. That is the best law for us. Its jurisdiction is undeniable, let the country be where it may, and the proceedings are all of the most summary character, and nobody is incommoded by any vexatious delays."

"That is true enough," responded Dick, "and I do believe it would save many a man many a heart-ache if, instead of being placed in the court of chancery, he would just put his money in his pocket, and come out on the road and have it taken from him by us, in a quiet and gentlemanly manner."

"Not a doubt of it," said Jack. "It ought to be recommended in some of the public papers."

"Stop," cried Claude, "we are in luck's way surely to-day, as regards carriages, for here is another. Look, it will be in the high-road in a few moments."

They all looked in the direction that Claude pointed, and they saw a curricle, which was then a very fashionable description of carriage, coming rapidly on. Only one person was in it, and he was dressed up to the very height of fashion, and what was then considered to be elegance. The hat he wore was like that with which Mother Shipton is now accommodated, being the shape of a sugar-loaf, and the rest of his costume, to our present notions, was equally outrageous. The only things very natural about the whole affair were the horses, and they were as nature made them and intended they should look.

"Now, what do you think that fellow is?" said Dick.

"Can't say," replied Jack.

"Doubtful," said Claude; "but you two stay here while I go and stop him. It would perhaps terrify him to death, poor devil, if we were all three to appear at once upon him."

"Very good," said Dick. "Go on, Claude. We will consider this to be your adventure, now."

Claude did not wait to make any further remark, but trotting up to the corner of the lane, from which the curricle was about to emerge into the high-road, he cried—

"Pull up, sir, unless you want to be a dead man!"

At these words the dandified personage in the curricle at once dropped his reins, and slid off his seat on to the mat at the bottom of the curricle.

"Oh, spare my life!" he said. "Spare my life, my dear sir; do, if you please. Only spare my life! Oh, do!"

"Upon some conditions I will," said Claude.

"Oh, yes, anything, my dear sir. Anything in the worl! that you like. I suppose, my dear sir, that you are a highway-gentleman, are you not?"

"I am, and my principal pleasure is in cutting peoples' throats if they do not do as I wish them. In the first place, who are you, sir?"

"Oh dear. My name is Hannibal Popham, commonly called Hannibal Popham, Esq.; and I am going to the christening of a baby, I am, that belongs to Mr. Scatters, at the lodge about a mile on. They are new people in the neighbourhood, and have invited all the respectable people; and I am to be the godfather of the dear infant; and here's the silver mug that I have gone to the expense of four pounds ten shillings to purchase as a present for it."

"Indeed?'

"Yes, sir. Here it is."

"Very good," said Claude, as he took the mug and put it in one of the capacious pockets of his coat.

Mr. Popham groaned.

"Now, tell me, sir," added Duval, "if you are personally known to the Scatters family?"

"Oh dear, yes; that is to say, they have heard of me, my dear sir, as a highly respectable resident in the county, but they never saw me, if you mean that."

"And what is the name of their place?"

"It is called Athens Lodge, and they do tell me that the Scatters have made it quite charming."

"Very well, Mr. Popham, now listen to me. I have nothing to do in this world, but to fulfil my promises, and I here solemnly promise you, that if you do not get out of your curricle and walk to Oxford, I will hunt you up if you be twenty miles in the bowels of the earth, and make your brains into a supper for a favourite cat I have at home. If you, however, do what I tell you, to walk to Oxford, and stay there an hour and then go home, your curricle will be restored to you, and I will give you a pass which shall for ever save you from being stopped on the road by any highwayman. Now, sir, which do you decide upon doing?"

"Oh, dear, can you doubt?"

"Decide, sir."

"I will go to Oxford, certainly; but I would rather ride, do you know, for I am not a very good walker. Perhaps you will let me have the curricle?"

"Decidedly not. There is a person, just at the entrance to Oxford, who will let me know if you pass his house, and if you do not, woe be to you. It is a red-brick house, with the name of Jenkins on the door, and as you pass you must throw a stone through one of the window-panes. Do you quite clearly understand that?"

"Yes, sir, quite—oh, quite clearly! But you have not given me the sign that is to carry me free and harmless from the attacks of all gentlemen of your honourable profession, sir."

"This is it."

"You don't say so?"

The sign which Claude gave to Mr. Popham was merely to place the point of his thumb upon the tip of his nose, and to spread out the rest of the fingers in the manner vulgarly called "taking a sight."

"Well," added the simple-minded Mr. Popham, "who would have thought it! And if there are two of them, sir, I suppose you do this—

Mr. Popham perpetrated what is known popularly as a "double sight."

"Precisely," said Claude. "Nothing can be clearer, my good sir—nothing in the world can be more apt than your mode of doing it; and I can assure you that from henceforward you will have the singular and most unprecedented advantage of passing along the public roads free from the exactions of highwaymen; and for your readiness in coming to my conditions, I shall not ask you for your purse, but permit you to carry it with you, provided you set off at once to Oxford."

"I'm off, sir," said Mr. Popham, "I'm off! Thanks, Mr. Highway-gentleman, I'm very much obliged to you, sir! Good day!"

With this, Mr. Popham got out of his curricle, and summoning all his energies to assist him, he set off on his rather long walk to Oxford alone.

"Now, of all the idiots that ever I came near," said Claude, "this fellow is about one of the worst. This is too easy a triumph, and is hardly to be considered as one. There he goes! Poor devil! Now he gets to that turn of the road, and then he disappears. Ha! ha! Jack! Jack! Dick! Come here! It is as good as a play. Come here, both of you, I have something famous to tell you. Come on!"

Jack and Dick at once rode up full of curiosity to know how Claude had possessed himself of the curricle, and sent the owner of it off on foot, apparently so well contented. Claude could really hardly tell them the story for laughing; but he did, at length, manage to do so, and they were as highly amused as he was, and could not contain their laughter, which broke forth in vociferous peals.

"Upon my word it was almost too bad," said Jack, "to send the poor devil off on such an errand."

"Not at all," said Claude; "he will be wiser for ever after for it."

"But what do you mean to do," said Dick, "with the curricle? Here we are all mounted."

"Well, I tell you what I should like to do with it. We have had quite enough of gravity in Oxford, and I am inclined for a frolic, just for the purpose of knocking out of one's brains the recollection of the proceedings of the last few days. I should like very much to go to the christening."

"Oh, Claude," said Jack, shaking his head.

Dick said nothing.

"Yes," added Claude, "I own I should, and what I propose is that we put up our horses somewhere, and make what change we can in our apparel, and then all three get into the curricle, which you see is quite roomy enough, and drive to Athens Lodge, where I will personate Mr. Popham, and pass you off as two friends whom I have brought with me to do honour to the solemnity. What say you to that?"

"That it won't do," said Dick.

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Just because, although it may well happen that this Scatters family may not know Mr. Hannibal Popham by sight; if they have visited this neighbourhood to the christening, there will be many there who do, and detection would be immediate to our very great danger and discomfiture."

"Confound it, yes," said Claude; "that's true."

"Give it up," said Jack.

"No, there is no occasion to do that," added Dick. "If Claude has a fancy for the freak, and if we can find any really safe place to leave our steeds at, I think it may be done by representing that the captain is rather indisposed and cannot come, but that he has sent us, as three London friends of his in his stead, and lent us his curricle, which, most likely, he is well-known to come in."

"Yes, that will do," said Claude.

"With the difficulty of safely bestowing our cattle," said Jack. "That seems to me to be the point upon which all the affair ought to turn. If that can be done, I am as willing as possible to go into it, but it would, indeed, be a very serious thing if we were for the mere sake of a frolic to deprive ourselves of our horses."

"It would," said Claude, "but by a gallop of about three miles along the road, we shall come to an old public-house called the Yew Tree, and I will engage that there our cattle will be safe enough as long as we like to leave them."

"If that is the case," said Dick, "I have no objection; but I must own that it would cut me to the heart, now, to part with my bonny Bess, after having been deprived of her so long, and only again renewing the acquaintance for a few hours."

"Then I give up the scheme," said Claude. "If there should be any doubt lingering in your mind, Dick, about the safety of your steed, you would not enjoy the joke, so I would rather give it up."

"Not so, Claude—not so. I have no doubt when you say all is safe, you know the inn to which you refer."

"Well; and our horses will be as safe there as they are now, while we have our hands upon the bridles."

"Come on, then—I am for the frolic," said Dick.

"And I," said Jack.

"Then I will drive the curricle," said Claude, "and you be so good, Jack, as to lead my horse. The creature knows you, and will trot along by your side comfortably. Here we go."

This arrangement was speedily enough effected, and off they all went, Duval taking the lead in the curricle. The three miles he had spoken of was rapidly enough passed over, and there snugly ensconced among some trees in a very pretty situation, the old Yew Tree Inn was discerned.

"There is the house," said Claude, "and there is the landlord shading his eyes with his hand as he looks down the wood to see who is coming at such a dashing pace."

Claude drew up sharply at the door of the inn. The landlord lifted up his hand, and in a strong Scotch accent, said—

"Gude guide! is that you!"

"Yes," said Claude. "I have taken to travel the road on wheels, now, instead of on horseback. How do you think it will do?"

"Eh, sirs? not at all—not at all."

"Then I'll give it up, and all I want you to do now, is to let our horses stand in your stable ready saddled for the road at a minute's notice, while we go after a bit of fun in this curricle. Can you do it?"

"Can I? surely I can—surely I can, but just be taking care of your necks, my braw callants, or ye'll rue the day, but make yersels easy about the beastes. They will be all right enough. What will take a taste of?"

"Anything you like."

The landlord upon this rather general order, retired into the house and brought out a silver flagon, half full of brandy.

"Take a sup of this," he said, "it's only a strong kind of ale, if you look at it with the eye of philosophy."

"It just is a strong kind of ale," said Claude. "It's enough to make one wink again."

They all three took a drop of the brandy and then they rode the horses into the inn-yard, and left them up to the mid leg in fodder, after which they got into the curricle, and Claude waiving his whip as an adieu to the landlord, turned the horses heads on the route they had come, but before he started he called out—

"Do you know a place called Athens Lodge?"

"Do I know it? To be sure I do. You'll see it only a mile from here. It has the oddest crinkum crankums of chimneys that ever you saw in all your life."

"All's right," said Claude. "I saw the very chimneys as we came along, but did not know it was the place we sought. We shall be soon back, Sanders. Good-by for the present."

CHAPTER CCVI.

DETAILS SOME ADVENTURES AT A CHRISTENING.

"Now Dick," said Claude, "is your mind easy about your horse?"

"Quite. It was before, too, after your assurance."

"Some people, Dick, have a decided objection to my assurance."

"And well they may, in one sense."

"Not a doubt of it," said Jack; "but only look—there among the trees a good way on, you may see the very chimneys that our friend of the old 'Yew Tree' calls crinkum crankums."

"To be sure," said Claude. "There they are, and here we are in a nice shady bit of road.—How do we all look for guests at a christening?"

"Well enough," said Dick, "we can make an excuse for not being in full dress, as we can say we only came down to see our frend, Popham, and did not expect the honour of being asked to represent him upon the auspicious occasion, and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Capital," said Claude, "you shall make the speech."

"Not I," said Dick, "it is your joke, Claude, and you shall carry it out, I will have nothing of that sort to do with it, and if you try to let me in for any of the speech-making, I shall be off back to the 'Yew Tree' and there wait for you both."

"Well, well.—I'll do the speeches—I'll do all that, but mind you keep a sharp look out, both of you, in case any of the Philistines should be about, for we don't know exactly who may be invited to this affair at the lodge."

"Trust me for that," said Jack. "I know an officer by the look of his eye in a moment. They can never deceive me let them be disguised how they may. There is always a particular white wooden look about their faces that they cannot get rid of."

Both Dick and Claude laughed heartily at this odd idea of Jack's concerning officers, and then as the gates of Athens Lodge appeared in sight, they thought

it prudent to put on a grave aspect, and to commence playing their parts as they intended to play them.

Several vehicles of different descriptions were already at the gates of the lodge, and there was quite a bustling aspect about the servants who were lounging about. The moment Claude, who was driving, drew up at the gate, a servant came to him and touching his hat respectfully, said—

"I will take charge of the curricle, sir, if you please."

"Very well," said Claude. "I hope all the family is well?"

"Quite well, sir. They say that Julius Cæsar is a little fractious, this morning, that is all."

"Who?"

"Julius Cæsar, sir, who is going to be christened to-day, but the nurse don't think it is anything serious at all, and master and misses, sir, believes that he will be able to go through the ceremony quite properly, sir."

The man delivered all this with such an abominable stupid solidity that it was really quite dreadful to hear him, and it was only with the greatest possible difficulty, that Claude prevented himself from bursting into a general roar of laughing, but as that would have spoiled everything, he resisted the impulse to do so, and said with great gravity—

"Julius Cæsar then, I presume, is to be the name of the child?"

"Oh dear, yes, sir, that's quite settled."

"Very good. We will go at once to the house, if you please."

"Yes, gentlemen—certainly. You will find the whole family in the lodge, gentlemen. It's only round those trees, you see them right on a-head, gentlemen."

"Thank you, that will do. That will do, we know the way. It is all right."

The servant took charge of the curricle, and Claude—with Jack on one side and Dick Turpin on the other—deliberately walked up the trim and well-kept gravelled path that led to the lodge, which they soon came in sight of, and which they could not help admiring. It was a very pretty structure, indeed, built after the Greek model, and with a row of Corinthian columns before it, that lent an air of great grace and elegance to the whole structure.

"Upon my word," said Claude, "our dear friends, the Scatters, are very well lodged here."

"They are, indeed," said Jack.

"It is not owing to their taste, though," said Dick; "you may quite depend upon it. Money has purchased this place, which probably has been the abode of one whose taste has outrun his means."

"Not a very rare circumstance," said Claude.

"By no means. But who have we here?"

A servant out of livery came to meet them, for they had been seen from the windows of the lodge, and as everybody in the drawing-room had disclaimed any acquaintance with them, it had been thought advisable to send out for the purpose of ascertaining who they really were. The servant executed a bow, and then said—

"If you please, gentlemen, I will announce you names."

"Very well," said Claude. "I am Mr. Green, this is Mr, Brown, and this Mr. Grey."

The servant bowed again.

"You can tell your master that we are all intimate friends of Mr. Popham, who was to have stood as god-father to Julius Cæsar; but as he is very much indisposed, and under medical advice, dare not leave his room, he hopes that I shall be permitted to officiate in his stead on this interesting occasion, and we have come here in his curricle."

"Pray step this way, gentlemen. I will tell master directly."

"Very good; you go on before and let him know the state of affairs, and we will follow you."

Thus authorised to carry his news as quickly as he chose, the servant darted

off into the house, and Claude, with his two friends, purposely went on very slowly, in order that there should be time for the master of the house to be made acquainted with their pretensions, which would take off a great deal of the awkwardness of the meeting.

"Will it do, do you think?" said Dick.

"To be sure," said Claude. "What can they say?"

"Well," said Jack, "I don't see how they can get out of it very well; but here we are, and there are no end of eyes looking at us from the drawing-room windows. If there should be any there who know us it will be rather a treat, I think."

"We will not think such a thing possible."

"It will be quite sufficient if we do not think it probable," said Jack. "But here comes some one else."

A pompous-looking man now made his appearance in so remarkably stiff a cravat, that it was quite impossible he could look down or turn his head without turning his whole body at the same time. This was no other than Mr. Scatters himself, and as he advanced towards his guests he made a very condescending kind of bow, and said—

"Gentlemen, you are extremely welcome, indeed—I may say extremely welcome; and it is to me a source of very great regret that Mr. Popham is indisposed and cannot do us the pleasure of coming to the lodge upon this little, rather interesting, occasion."

"Sir," said Claude, "it is to us likewise a matter of great regret that our esteemed friend cannot come; but if my humble services, as his representative, will suffice, I tender them with pleasure, otherwise, sir, we will not intrude upon you any further."

"Don't mention that, gentlemen. Come in—come in, I pray you. I am very happy, indeed, to see you at my poor little place here. Ah!—hem! A nice little lodge, you see, with no pretensions. Some of these days I may, perhaps, take it into my head to build a mansion—A-hem!"

It was quite clear, that the weak point of Mr. Scatters was vanity; so Claude was quite resolved upon exhibiting a tolerably large dose of flattery, and he said—

"Sir, this place, to my humble judgment, is superb; and I can only answer, that it could have had its origin in the fine taste, and exquisite imagination of a Scatters."

"Then," said Dick to Jack, in a whisper; "if he will swallow that, he will stop at nothing."

Mr. Scatters bowed as he replied—

"Sir, I rejoice to find that Mr. Popham's representative, upon this little occasion, is a gentleman of so discriminating a character."

Upon this, Claude bowed; and all the bowing, and the movements of the arms were exceedingly interesting, no doubt, to the people in the drawing-room, who had not the smallest idea of what it was all about. It was with no small difficulty, that Jack and Dick kept themselves in a decorous state of gravity; and as for Claude, he was ready to burst with laughter at the antics, and the vanity of Mr. Scatters.

They all ascended the flight of steps that led under the columns with their Corinthian capitals; and then passing through a hall, paved with marble, they entered the drawing-room, where there was an assemblage of some twenty or thirty people, waiting for the ceremony to commence.

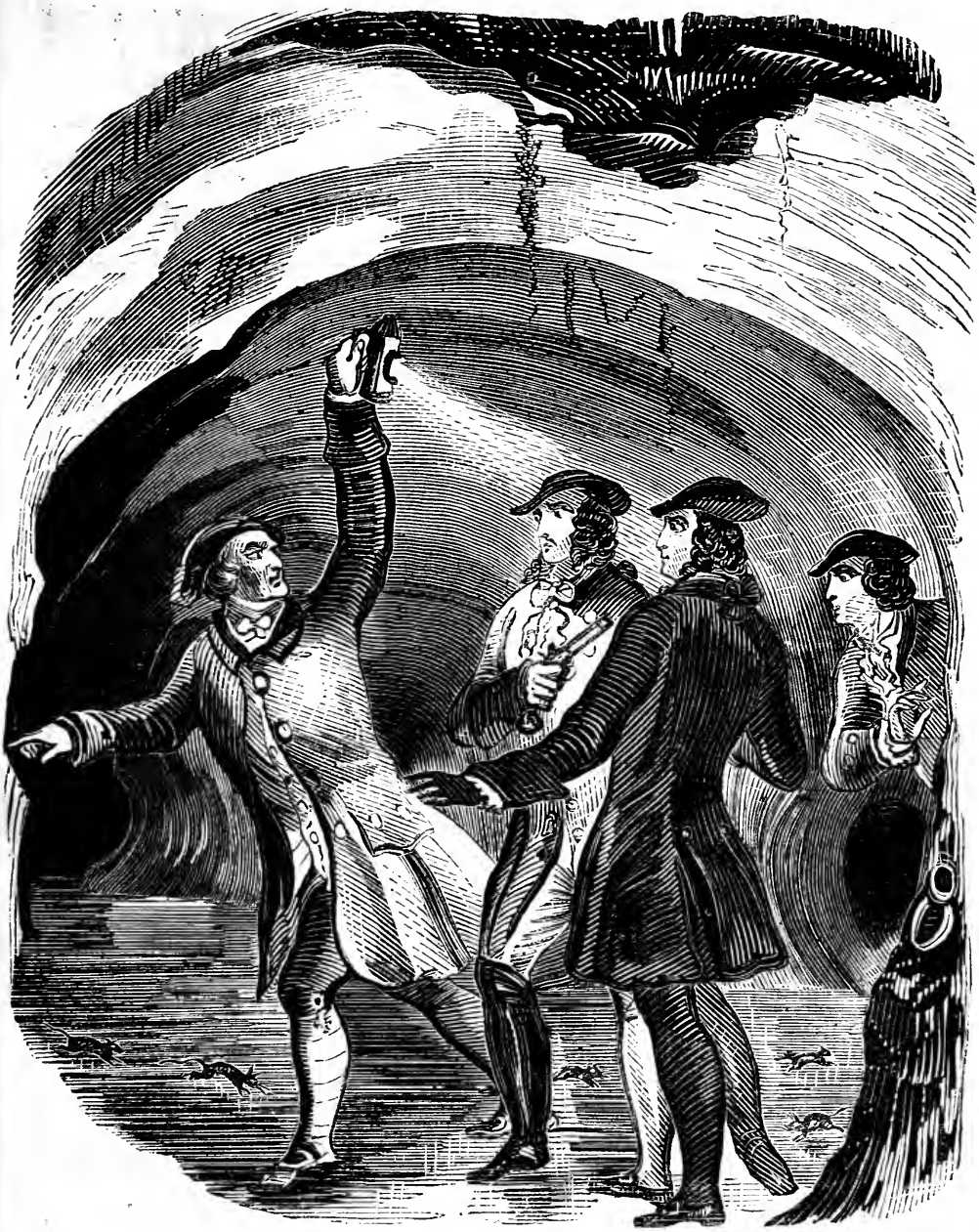
"Allow me to introduce," said Mr. Scatters, "the representative of our excellent neighbour, Mr. Popham, who is too unwell to attend upon this little auspicious, and interesting occasion. I beg, ladies and gentlemen, to introduce to you all, Mr.—a—a——"

"Brown," said Claude.

"Brown," said Mr. Scatters, "and this is his friend, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Green," said Claude.

"Green," added Mr. Scatters, and then in like manner Jack was introduced as Mr. Grey; and then all the guests smiled, and bowed, and awarded, in a pleasant sort of smiling way, their satisfaction; and just as Claude was about to say something, a tremendous squall came upon the ears of the company, and Mr. Scatters exclaimed—



THE THREE ADVENTURERS FOLLOWING BOB THROUGH THE VAULTS.

"It is Julius Cæsar! Oh, it is Julius Cæsar! What are they doing to that adorable infant?"

"Here he is!—here he is!" cried everybody. "Here he is! Oh, the love! Come along! Oh, the duck!"

A succession of little howls and squalls now proceeded from the further end of the drawing-room, and, in a few moments, an amazingly fat nurse made her

appearance, carrying the baby, and the mother, no less a personage than the female Scatters, following closely, dressed up to the eys in a profusion of satins, and laces, and flounces, and jewellery.

"He comes – he comes!" cried Mr. Scatters. "Oh, he comes!"

And then all the ladies surrounded the infant Scatters; and such a fussing, and kissing, and squealing was never seen.

"This is affecting," said Mr. Scatters.

"Very," said Claude.

"The man," said Dick, "who could refuse the sympathetic tear to a scene like this, would think nothing of sending his own father to be baked for a Christmas dinner."

"Where is Mr. Popham?" said Mrs. Scatters, in a sighing tone of voice. "Oh, where is Mr. Popham, who is to assist in placing Julius Cæsar in the pale of the church?"

"My dear," said Mr. Scatters, "calm yourself. Mr. Popham can't come, but he has sent a most elegant gentleman, of the name of Brown."

"Oh, gracious!"

"My love! My life! Be calm. Allow me to introduce Mr. Brown to you, and I am sure you will be quite pleased to find so very gentlemanly and appreciating a person. Mr. Brown, allow me to present you to Mrs. Scatters. My love, this is the representative of Mr. Popham."

Mrs. Scatters took a glance at Claude, and finding, as it was easy enough to find at a very transient glance, that he was decidedly well-looking, she bestowed quite a favourable regard upon him, and murmured out that he was very welcome.

"I am much obliged, madam," said Claude; "it is a pity that child is not a girl."

"Indeed, sir. Why so?"

"Because then there might be a chance that the world would have such another face and form as her mother's to gaze upon."

"Oh, sir."

The lady bestowed, now, upon Claude a very gracious smile, indeed, and it was quite clear that she was just as fond of flattery as Mr. Scatters, and, indeed, as all the world is.

"The most reverend, the dean," announced a servant, and then all eyes were turned towards the door, at which entered a clergyman with a very white placid, stupid-looking face, who was to perform the ceremony of christening; and who being the second cousin's nephew of a member of the government, was made a Dean in the church.

"Dear me," said Mr. Scatters, "this is very delightful. Here we are all, and Julius Cæsar quite quiet."

A terrific squall at that moment from the young scion of the Scatter's stock, contradicted the rash assertion, and several of the guests placed their hands to their ears to shut out the sound.

"Oh, Gracious!" cried Mrs. Scatters, "what is the matter with Julius Cæsar?"

"Nothing, mum," said the nurse. "It was nothing, mum. It's only one of his little ways, mum, bless his heart, that's all. There, now, he is for all the world just like a lamb again."

The dean was, now, the centre of a circle of ordinary ladies, who thought that in every stupid common-place sentence that came from his lips, there must be hidden some very proficient piece of wisdom, and so they admired it upon trust, accordingly.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" said Mr. Scatters, suddenly.

Every eye was turned at once upon him.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the little interesting ceremony will be performed in this room first, and then when it is all over, there will be a *Dejuner a la Fa-*

chette in the dining-room, and we shall all have the pleasure of drinking the health of Julius Cæsar. Are you quite ready, Mr. Dean?"

"Oh, dear yes; as I was saying, after the rain you generally have it a little fine, you see, in consequence of a change in the weather," said the sapient dean.

CHAPTER CCVII.

DUVAL MAKES AN EXTRAORDINARY SENSATION AT THE LODGE.

This announcement from Mr. Scatters appeared to give the most unqualified and general satisfaction, as such announcements seldom fail to do; for upon such occasions as that one, the good people who had come to the lodge, were rather more intent upon what they were to get in the shape of good things to eat and drink, than upon anything at all concerning the fate or prospects of Julius Cæsar.

Claude was close to the dean when that miracle of wisdom made the remark with which we concluded our last chapter, and he could not resist the very natural impulse to reply to him something after his own fashion.

"That, sir," said Claude, "is a very just observation of yours, and I have frequently remarked that when the wind is blowing in this country, it raises the dust, and that if any of it gets into the eyes, it has quite an effect, for the time, upon the vision, and in some constitutions induces a sneeze."

"Really," said the dean, "that is a remarkable fact. You are, sir, a most observing individual."

"I pride myself upon being so, sir."

"And you may with justice, sir. That last remark of yours about the dust strikes me as being both original and true. I will make a note of it when I get home."

"Oh, sir, you do me too much honour."

"Not at all. Not at all. But we are really the only persons conversing, and I see that our kind friend, the gentleman, is anxiously waiting for the christening of the baby."

"Do not let me interrupt you, my dear sir."

The dean and Claude bowed to each other very ceremoniously, indeed, and then the company assumed extremely decorous attitudes in which to witness the ceremony.

A silver mug of water was brought to the dean, by the aid of which he was to sprinkle Julius Cæsar, and then lifting up his eyes like a dying duck, he commenced the ceremony.

Several of the ladies, particularly those who happened to be the nearest to Mrs. Scatters pretended to be deeply affected at what was going on, and made considerable snuffling with their noses to indicate the extent to which their feelings were affected, and Mr. Scatters, with his eyes half shut, looked as though he fully believed that a choir of angels were invisibly assisting at the ceremony.

In a very few minutes it came to be Claude's turn to make the responses, and everything went smoothly enough, until, in a very bland kind of voice, the dean asked what name was to be given to the child.

Of course, everybody fully expected that it was as fixed as fate that Julius Cæsar was to be the name, and it was not for the moment imagined that any combination of circumstances could possibly occur to alter such a thing. The consternation of the whole assembly may therefore be imagined, but certainly not described, when Claude Duval proceeded to enact this most extraordinary part in the performance, and which no earthly consideration, connected with his own safety, could possibly have induced him to alter.

In a clear voice—alas! a world too clear for the peace of the Scatters family, Claude replied to the dean,—

"The name of this sweet infant will be Dick Turpin Jack Claude Duval!"

The dean very nearly dropped the hopes of all the Scatters on to the floor, and as he had his hand in the water, ready for the very polite sprinkle he had been going to give the child, he, on the surprise and the impulse of the moment gave it such a dash with the cold fluid in the face, that Julius Cæsar, who had for the last few moments behaved with the utmost decorum burst into a roar that was perfectly terrific, and made everybody wink again.

"Goodness Gracious!" shouted Mr. Scatters, trying to make himself heard over the cries of his infant heir; "what do I hear? This must be some terrible dream, surely?"

The dean looked aghast, and Mrs. Scatters would have fainted, only there was no one near to her but a very small gentleman, who looked as though he would be quite certain to let her drop if she ventured upon the very hazardous feat of falling into his arms.

Claude pretended to look astonished at the sensation he had created, and Jack and Dick had the greatest difficulty to keep themselves from bursting into a roar of laughter.

"My dear sir," gasped the dean; "you don't really mean to say that the child is to be christened in so many names?"

"I believe," said Claude, "that as the good father, I may name the child what I like."

"Yes; but—but—Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"And I further believe, sir, that you are bound to go on with the ceremony which is thus scandalously interrupted. I have given you the name, sir, and must beg you to be so good as to finish christening the child, and here's the silver mug that I intend to give it."

"No—no—no!" cried Mr. Scatters, rushing forward, "I can't have it christened Jack and Dick and all that sort of thing. It can't be done! Stop it—stop it, I won't hear it!"

"But my dear sir," said Claude, "are you aware that you are interrupting one of the most awful and serious ceremonies of the church? Really this is shocking conduct."

"Bother the church and the ceremonies, too. I am a man of ample means, sir, I can tell you, and as regards the church and its ceremonies, I am willing to uphold them, as all highly respectable people do, as long as they are convenient to me, but no longer, sir. Stop the christening—stop the christening! There is some horrid mistake! I can't have Julius Cæsar called such frightful names."

"If the dean," said Claude, "don't go on with the christening, and give the child the names I mention, I shall represent his conduct to the bishop of the dioscese."

"That, sir," said Mr. Scatters, "allow me to tell you, will not be of the slightest consequence, for the bishop's wife's cousin's aunt is the twin sister of the dean's wife."

"Oh, ah, to be sure then," said Claude, "of course the dean may do just what he likes."

"Exactly so, sir. Therefore, Mr. Dean, I beg that you will be so good as to put an immediate stop to the christening."

"Very well then," said Claude, "I shall go, and my friends will go with me, I have no doubt. You may all say what you like, and do what you like, but that child's proper name now is Dick Turpin Jack Claude Duval, and that is the name he will have to go by in spite of you all. There is the mug that I brought to him, and which I scorn to take away again; and now, ladies and gentlemen, I and my friends bid you all good day, and when there is another christening here we hope to come again."

These words were scarcely out of Claude's lips, when a servant, with much less ceremony than the Scatters' family usually looked for in their domestics, rushed into the room, crying aloud—

"Oh, sir—oh, sir—oh, missus, oh!"

"What is it?" shouted half a dozen voices.

"Why, sir, there's come a mounted officer from Oxford, sir, and missus and he says that three notorious highwaymen, named Claude Duval, Dick Turpin, and Jack Somebody, are on the road, and that everybody ought to be warned about them, and to go about with loaded pistols and all that sort of thing."

All the ladies present raised a simultaneous scream, and looked at our three adventurers.

"The game is up," whispered Dick to Claude.

"Rather," said Claude. "Jack, go to the door of the room, and don't let a soul out of it."

Jack did so, and then Claude, with one bound, sprang upon a table, and looking around him with an air of haughty defiance, he said—

"Ladies and gentlemen—It don't matter much who I am, or who my two friends are. Let it suffice you that we are willing to leave this house in peace, and that it will be highly dangerous to prevent us."

The ladies gave another scream.

"Nothing," added Claude, "can possibly be to me more afflicting than to be a source of terror to the ladies. I sincerely hope that among all the beauty and bright eyes and lovely forms that I see around me, I shall not occasion one pang of alarm; such is far, very far distant indeed from my intention."

"He is really a very nice man," whispered one lady to another, who was close to her.

"And handsome, decidedly so," said the other.

"And so discriminating," said a third, joining the conference, "such evident taste he has."

"Oh, great—great."

"But," cried Mr. Scatters, "goodness gracious, we cannot put up with this. I am a respectable man, and cannot think of it for a moment. Police—police! Murder!"

"Hark you, sir," said Claude. "The pattern upon this wall is very pretty, but I shall be compelled to alter it, if you make any more disturbance. Be warned, sir."

"Alter the pattern on the wall? What do you mean, sir? What do you mean, you low highwayman?"

"I mean that I will plaster one of the panels with the few brains you possess. Do you understand me now, sir?"

Mr. Scatters staggered back until he was supported by the wall, and then Claude said to Dick—

"Be so good as to shoot that young gentleman who is trying to get out of the room by yonder window."

"Certainly," said Turpin, as he drew a pistol from his pocket, and presented it at a lanky youth who had thought he might make an escape without being noticed, and who certainly would have done so if Claude had not been so elevated, from his position upon the table, that he could see everything that was going on remarkably well.

When the youth found that his clever device did not succeed, he rolled upon his back in an agony of terror, and sought for safety among the feet of the ladies.

"Oh, well, let him be," said Claude. "It is sufficient that he is stopped in his design; and now we will go."

With this Claude jumped from the table, but the dean came up to him, and in a mild voice, said—

"I sincerely hope that you and your friends will be so good as to give yourselves up to justice; and I beg to assure you that such a proceeding on your part, will be highly satisfactory to the authorities."

"You don't say so?" said Claude, as he lifted the silver ewer of water, that had been brought for the christening, from the table, and discharged the whole

contents into the dean's face. "You don't say so? There, now I have christened you, and you may take the name of Tom Noddy, forthwith."

"Bless me," said the dean, as he went spluttering away. "How water does wet you, to be sure."

"Come," whispered Dick to Claude, "come. Every moment now is fraught with its own particular dangers."

"I know it. These people must all be locked into this room. Is there a key in the door?"

"Yes."

"Then lock it on the outside, and then we will make the best of our way to our horses and be off, for the neighbourhood of the lodge will soon be decidedly too hot to hold us."

"It is now."

"Come, then. Ladies, once more, adieu."

Claude made for the door, and in a moment they were all three on the outside of it; Dick locked it, and took the key away with him, and then they ran out of the house.

"Stop one moment," said Claude, as they halted within a side-view of the windows of the room. "Stop a moment."

"What for, Claude?"

"You will see directly. Some one will make an attempt to get out at one of the windows, and I want to put a stop to that sort of thing for the next ten minutes."

"I understand you."

The anticipations of Duval regarding what would occur, turned out to be quite correct, for in the course of half a minute the head and leg of somebody was projected from one of the windows that opened on to the terrace, that went partially round the house. Claude had a pistol in his hand, and he immediately fired, but he did not intend any mischief. All he wished was to give a salutary fright to the owner of the head and the leg, and through him a warning to the whole of the company.

The bullet flew past the window, and the head and leg disappeared into the room again in a moment, while a loud scream testified to the effect that the shot had had upon the nerves of the person to whom those members belonged.

CHAPTER CCVIII.

CLAUDE REDRESSES SOME GRIEVANCES ON THE ROAD TO LONDON.

"That will do, I think," said Claude.

"It ought," said Jack, "but the panic won't last very long, so let us be off at once. It won't do to have Mr. Scatters and all his guests yelping at our heels like a lot of curs, and Julius Cæsar, for all we know to the contrary, bringing up the rear."

Both Claude and Dick laughed at Jack's description of what might be, but they did not neglect the sound advice that his words contained, and they all made off now as quickly as they possibly could from Athens Lodge.

No doubt the servant who had brought the information into the drawing-room, of there being upon the road three such very desperate personages as Duval, Jack, and Dick Turpin, was not the only one of the domestics at the lodge entrance who had heard the tale of the mounted man from Oxford; and now when the three friends where seen advancing in haste towards the gates, it struck everybody there that they might be the very personages mentioned by the officer, who had got off his horse, and with the bridle of it hanging upon his arm, and a pot of ale in his hand, was listening with a

look of sharp suspicion upon his face to the echoes of the pistol-shot that Claude had just fired.

"Look," said Jack.

"At what?" cried Claude. "Which way, Jack?"

"To the gate—there is one of the Oxford officers. He was with us all at the foot of the gallows on a recent occasion, Dick."

"Don't mention it," said Turpin. "It gives one almost a crick in the neck to hear of it, but we must not allow him to be at all mischievous. I will run on."

As he spoke, Dick run on, but the officer saw that there was danger, and not probably feeling himself to be quite a match for three stout men, he threw down the pot of ale, and made a rapid and vigorous attempt to mount his horse again.

"Stop that!" cried Dick. "Stop that!" and then he just reached the officer in time to lay hold of his leg, and prevent him from mounting the horse, and not only did Dick do that, but he pulled the officer right on to the ground, saying—"Resistance will be madness. You may preserve your life by lying still."

"When I can't help it," said the officer, "I will, but not before. You are my prisoner, and I call upon all here to aid me in the king's name."

He then laid hold of Dick by the ancles and tried to throw him down, but as Dick resisted the first shock, the officer did not succeed in doing that. The servants who were about made a slight kind of movement, as though they fully intended in some sort of way to answer the appeal of the officer; but Claude stepping up with a pistol in each hand, cried out in a loud stern voice—

"If any man here present is tired of his life, let him only move hand or foot to interfere with us, and away goes the top of his skull, as sure as he now breathes, and that there are a couple of slugs in each of these barrels that will do that business for him most effectually."

This was a threat that had the desired effect, particularly as Jack appeared close to Claude similiarly armed; and as Dick dealt the officer, who would not leave go of his ancles, a blow with his clenched fist, that sent him rolling over and over to some distance, where he lay insensible, or affecting, from prudential considerations, to be so; for by this time he must have seen that the only chance he had in the affair, was of a broken head.

Not one of the servants now ventured upon anything in the shape of interference; and our three adventurers passed out by the open gate into the roadway.

"Don't hurry," said Claude, "but the sooner we are on horseback, the better it will be for our healths, I think."

"Not a doubt of it, for if I mistake not," said Dick, "we shall have the whole parish up in arms in the course of another half-hour, and we may yet have a hard tussle to escape."

"Don't say that, Dick," added Claude, "or you will make me something worse than miserable, for I cannot forget that it was I who brought you both into this scrape."

"I forgot it then, Claude, or I should not have spoken; but let what will happen, don't you fancy that. It is true you suggested the affair, but it is equally true that we both joined in it of our own free will; so it is the special fault of no one in particular; and now I think, as we have got some distance from the lodge gates, we may as well take a run, and get to our steeds as fast as possible."

"Agreed," said Claude.

Upon this, they all three went at a good hard run towards the public-house, at which they had left their steeds; and it was rather ridiculous to see them all get there out of breath; but then they did not consider that to be of any consequence, as they knew that when mounted their fatigue would be over.

The landlord of the inn had kept a good look out, for he guessed that they might come back at speed, and the moment he saw them on the scamper, he got their cattle out, so that they really had nothing to do but to spring to their saddles; and then Claude burst into a hearty laugh, as he said—

"All's right. I feel as if every danger was all but over, when I am once fairly mounted."

"I am not good at such a sharp hunt as this we have had," said Jack, panting for breath; "but it was just as well, for a minute saved may be a life."

"Are they after you?" said the landlord.

"Oh, no," said Claude, "but they will be, without a doubt. Come on, Dick, we must try back a little way and get into some cross-road. Ah! well done! Here they are, and in some strength, too. Come, this is interesting. Keep together, and don't fire hastily, whatever you do. It may not come to anything serious after all, though they do show such a good front."

The occasion of these words from Claude's lips, was quickly and easily observable, for along the road, which they had so recently traversed at speed upon foot, came about a dozen horsemen, headed by the officer, who had thought proper, when his affairs did not look well, to be quite unconscious of what was going on, but who, the moment Claude Duval and his friends had turned their backs, and left the lodge gates, revived, and by the promise of large rewards, induced the grooms and others who were waiting for the guests at the christening, to mount and aid him in an endeavour to capture the highwaymen; and it was this party, so hastily got together, that had attracted the attention of Claude.

The officer having two pairs of pistols with him, kept one pair to himself, and divided the other between two of the grooms, so that there was the appearance of three men being well armed with pistols.

An old gun, too, had been brought out of the gate-keeper's little residence, and that made a formidable show. As for the rest of the party, they were armed with such desultory weapons, in the shape of pitchforks and shovels, as upon the spur of the moment the gardener's lodge afforded.

"This is too bad," said Dick.

"How do you mean by too bad?" asked Jack.

"Why, first, that we shall be obliged to do a mischief to some of these stupid fellows, and it's all owing to the officer, who won't let we three alone."

"We must protect ourselves," said Claude; "and if they will run their heads into mischief, it's their own look-out. See, they hang back already. The only thing to put them all into wonderful spirits would be for us to run away."

"No doubt. Keep a good look-out upon that fellow with the gun. He seems as if he were very much inclined to fire it at us. Look at him."

Claude did look at him, and then, as he held out his hand with a long highly-polished pistol in it, he called out,—"The man who fires the first shot dies, if he had as many lives as a cat."

Upon this, the valorous personage who had the gun reversed it so suddenly that he poked the muzzle of it into the eye of the person behind him, and gave a sound rap upon the back to one who was before him with the butt of it. Probably the officer did not think his party that he had so hastily collected was half so formidable as it looked, for waiving his hand, he advanced a few paces—they were very few though—and spoke—

"You are well-known, all three of you," he said, "and it is quite impossible you can get away. You know that by resistance and open violence you can only make your case much worse than it is, and bring down upon you the vengeance of the law; whereas, if you give in now at once, without causing any bloodshed, I shall be very happy to say all I can in your favour."

"You are very kind," said Claude; "but we beg to decline your good offices, my friend."

"Come—come, only consider. We must have you. I and my gallant fellows here, will have you."

"Where are the gallant fellows?" said Claude. "Since you are so fond of talking and giving advice, allow me to tell you that at the first shot that is fired by us, the gallant fellows will run away and leave you to any fate that you may provoke us to inflict upon you. For myself, I beg to say that I am very well as long

as I am in tolerable humour, but I won't answer for myself if you carry this affair too far."

The officer was a little staggered, and when he replied, there was a slight shake in his voice.

"Claude Duval," he said, "I know you; and I can well judge that it will be



THE THREE ADVENTURERS IN THE KEN IN THE OLD MINT.

no easy matter to get the better of you; but I am bound to try it if my death were certain."

"Well, try it then."

"I must. Will you surrender?"

"Certainly not."

The officer rode a little aside, and cried—

"Fire!"

Immediately he discharged one of his pistols at the party of three, and the two grooms, who had been by him supplied with fire-arms, likewise used theirs, but with so little judgment, that the bullets went at least six feet over the heads of Claude, Dick, and Jack. The officer took a better aim, and the bullet from his weapon went through Dick's hat.

The most extraordinary effect though was produced by the man with the gun, for when he got the order to fire, he managed to pull the trigger without caring in what direction the muzzle was, and accordingly, off it went, and nearly shot one of his own friends, at the same time that it burst, and the stock of it hit him a blow in the face that knocked him off his horse, sprawling in the road, and shouting "Murder!" at the top of his lungs.

"Now for it," cried Duval.

The words had no sooner escaped his lips, than the whole party took to flight, with the exception of the man who had had the gun, and who could not get up, and the officer, who gallantly kept his ground.

"Surrender!" he cried again, "surrender!"

"Are you mad?" said Claude.

"Perhaps so. Take that."

He fired his other pistol, or meant to fire it right in Claude's face, but it only flashed in the pan, and in an instant Claude now fired fairly at him, for he was put past all patience by the officer's pertinacity. The bullet hit him in the shoulder.

"You have killed me, Claude Duval," said the officer.

As he spoke he turned of a deathlike paleness, and hung partly over the neck of his horse. Claude rode up to him and held him by the arm to look where the wound was, and he at once saw that it was too high on the shoulder to be necessarily fatal to the man.

"Nonsense," he said, "you are not much hurt, and you and I may have a brush at some other time for all this."

"Then you don't mean to kill me outright?"

"No. I am quite content, if you are."

The officer tried to say something else, but he could not, for at this moment he fainted, and but for the aid of Claude's arm, he would have fallen from his horse to the ground; but Duval held him up, and cried—

"Jack, dismount a moment and help him off the saddle. Dick will hold your horse."

"Dead?" said Jack.

"Not a bit of it. It's only a faint—partly from pain and partly from vexation; but he is a brave fellow, and as such, I will do him no more harm than I can help."

Jack dismounted and assisted the officer from his horse, and placed him against the step of the inn. They then all set off at a hard trot towards Oxford, but they took the very first turning they came to on their right hand, in hopes of getting by a round into the London-road again.

CHAPTER CCIX.

A STRANGE ADVENTURE NEAR THE METROPOLIS.

"Shall we get to London with whole bones?" said Jack.

"Why not?" replied Claude. "I hope, for one, to be able to accomplish that feat. What do you say to it, Dick?"

"And I, for another," said Dick. "After what we have already gone through, I do think we may almost laugh at fate. For my part, I believe we shall escape all our perils, and in some comfortable ken in London, I shall live to tell how

you and Jack saved me from what looked as like inevitable death as anything could."

"If you do," said Claude, "I shall take it as the very worst return you can make me."

"And I," said Jack.

"Indeed? You surprise me."

"Say not one word about it, Dick, if you have any feeling for either of us, my dear fellow. All Jack or I want you to do, is just what we know you will do."

"And what is that?"

"Serve us as we served you if you hear that we are in the same predicament."

"Yes," said Jack, "that I will. So now let us push on, for the horses are in good trim, and there is now no reason on earth why we should not make a good twenty miles without a stop of any importance. Let me beg of you, Claude, not to engage in any fresh adventure just now, unless it should be forced upon us."

"Agreed, Jack."

"Amen, say I, to that," cried Dick; "so now let us do gently and comfortably as much of this twenty miles that Jack is so anxious to get over as we can."

With this, they left off conversing, and separating as much as possible from each other upon the road, so as not to impede each other's movements, they put the horses to a long trot that did not distress them, but really got over an amazing quantity of ground in a short space of time.

This they kept up for a good hour, at the end of which time they had actually done twelve miles of Jack's twenty, and Dick called out—

"Halt—halt!"

They all three at the moment drew up, and Claude cried out—

"What is it, Dick? Anything amiss?"

"Yes; my mare has fallen lame for the last mile or two, and I cannot press her on."

"Certainly not; it would be a sin, and a shame, and a pity, and a folly, and half a dozen other things."

"So it would, Claude," said Dick, as he dismounted, "and I will lead her for a dozen miles further, rather than distress her. She has done me too good service upon many an occasion, not to command my greatest affection."

As he spoke, Dick dismounted and began to examine the foot of his steed carefully.

"It's a thorn, but it has got so far in that I am afraid it will be no easy job to get it out without proper tools. Have you anything that will do it, Claude?"

"No, but Jack has."

"Rather," said Jack, as he dismounted. "I never travel without a few useful implements, for such little accidents by the way."

Jack took from his pocket a very minute pair of tweezers, and while Dick pressed the foot of the horse to make a very little bit of the thorn project from it, Jack laid hold of it and drew it out.

"That will do," said Dick. "It is not a quarter of an inch in length, and yet how lame it made her."

"I tell you what it is, Dick," said Jack. "If you don't give this creature a few hours' rest, now, she will have a bad foot, for dust will get into the little wound of the thorn, and you don't know what may be the consequence of it."

Dick looked rather perplexed, which Claude observing, induced him to say—

"Don't put yourself out of the way, Dick; the day is disappearing, and there is no reason on earth why we should not put up somewhere for the rest of the evening. Suppose now we rest till about ten o'clock?"

"Agreed," said Jack.

"Of course I shall be very glad, for the sake of my horse," said Dick, "only I feel as if I were the cause of delaying you upon the road to, perhaps, your great peril; but that may be easily obviated by your going on without me, you know."

"Yes," said Claude, "but we don't mean to do it; so you may make your

mind easy about that; Jack will bind up your mare's foot for her, as he is an adept at that sort of thing, and we will all put up quietly and respectably at the next inn we come to. You can lead her, Dick, and we, by walking our cattle, will keep by you."

"It's very kind of you both," said Dick, "and when I forget all your generous conduct to me, may I be—Well, well, it's no use talking; but the time may come some day, when I may do more in a minute than I could talk in an hour; so come on, rest we will, till ten o'clock, if that will be time enough for the mare's foot to rest."

"Lots," said Jack. "Besides, I will get a bit of an old hat wherever we put up, and when we start again, I can cut it so as to wedge it in the shoe, and she won't tread upon the injured part at all next to the ground. Her feet are worth the taking care of."

"Truly they are, for I can assure you that, more than once, her heels have saved her master's head."

After strolling along, now, for about half a mile or so, they came to one of the prettiest little road-side inns that the eyes of man ever beheld. It was quite covered with roses and honeysuckle, and ivy, and looked as if it were embedded in a wood, so many well kept thriving trees and flowering shrubs, were all around it.

"That's the place for us," cried Claude. "We shall all feel, while there, like love among the roses."

"It's to be hoped," said Jack, "that while we do stay there, nobody will disturb our felicity."

They all stopped at the door of the inn, and soon made arrangement with the landlord to have the horses put up for some hours, and to have a repast got ready for themselves. There was a very pretty, well-kept garden at the back of this little inn, with a number of bee-hives, the tenants of which were in a state of the most industrious commotion.

"Two highwaymen!—Two highwaymen!" cried Jack, suddenly.

"Where?---where?" said Dick.

"There," said Jack. "Don't you see those two wasps have got hold of a bee laden with honey, and are robbing him of it in the most unmerciful manner before he can get to the hive?"

Both Dick and Claude laughed, but in a moment or two twenty bees came and attacked the two wasps, and after a sharp scuffle of nearly a minute's duration, killed them, and pulled them to pieces, scattering their fragments to the ground.

"Humph! that's sharp justice," said Jack.

"Very," said Claude. "I think it would take rather more than twenty officers to serve us in that way. But let us to dinner, for I feel, now that we have made a regular halt, that I could make some way into a round of beef, and you must recollect both of you that we missed the luncheon at Mr. Scatters, which I did hope would have stood us in good stead; and so it would if he had only had the sense to have it before the christening instead of after it. That arrangement spoilt the whole affair, so far as our stomachs were concerned."

"It did," laughed Dick.

"But it did not spoil the joke," said Jack; "and if I mistake not, my nose will inform me that there is something very nice indeed getting ready for us in the inn kitchen."

Jack was not far wrong, for the people of the pretty inn laid before them a most enticing breakfast as the innkeeper called it, but it was certainly a time of the day for calling it a dinner. To their surprise, too, they found that some very choice wines were to be had from the cellar of the inn, and everything was very much better than could have been at all expected.

There was no guests in the house but themselves, so that they had no dread of any unpleasant interruptions, and the innkeeper told them that he seldom had any one there at odd times, but that the gentlemen members of several hunts were such good customers to him at times, that he was able to keep his house

open, and have a stock of every thing of the first quality, and they did not begrudge him his price for it.

This Claude thought was a kind of hint to them, that they would be expected to pay well for what they had, and he was determined to put the landlord's mind at ease upon that score.

"My friend," he said, "we don't care a straw what you charge, as long as what you lay before us is worth it. We want the very best of everything, and there is the money for it."

They staid drinking their wine and making themselves quite comfortable until half past nine o'clock at night, and then they thought of moving off, and Claude, as he rose from the table, said—

"We have taken a good medium of wine each of us, but somehow we are none the worse for it, I think."

"Not a whit," said Jack, "not a whit. Let us ring for the horses to be got to the door. Hilloa! what's that?"

"Rain, by Jove!" cried Dick, "and a dashing storm too. Only look at it against the windows, Claude."

"It is a rattle, indeed."

The noise of the rain splashing against the windows was incessant, and they looked at each other in doubt about proceeding. Dick had rung the bell, and the landlord made his appearance.

"Ah, gentlemen," he said, "what a night it is."

"Rain, we hear," said Claude.

"Oh, yes, sir—quite a water spout. The roads will be in a frightful state in a little while, and it don't seem at all likely to clear up either. There it comes again."

Splash came the rain against the latticed window, with a force that seemed enough to storm it in.

"You will hardly like to ride throught such a storm," added the landlord, "surely, gentlemen."

"Why, no, hardly. It would not be very pleasant."

"Besides, there's a little stream crosses the road not above a mile from here, and it will be so swollen now, that it will be almost enough to carry a horse off his feet. We have the very best beds, I can assure you, gentlemen, and you will find every possible accommodation; so that I feel assured you will never regret passing a night at the Bunch of Grapes."

Dash came the rain again against the casement, and the landlord shook his head, as he added—

"Ah, this will last—this will last, I am very much afraid!"

"What do you say, Dick," whispered Claude; "shall we stay, or make our way through the rain? Jack, what is your opinion about it, eh?"

"Would it not be better to stay," said Dick, "until a very early hour in the morning? It will do none of us any good to get thoroughly drenched, as we shall get. There it comes again!"

"Well, let us stay, then," said Dick. "Can you show us a room, landlord? as we are old travellers, and always like to see where we are to sleep, before we remain anywhere for the night."

"Yes, gentlemen, with pleasure—with pleasure."

Upon this, the landlord took up one of the lights from the table, and opening a door in the wall of the room in which they were, and which had not at all been noticed previously, he said—

"This leads to two nice bed-rooms, indeed, and in one there are two beds, and in the other only one, and you will find them all amazingly comfortable, I can assure you. At least, we never had a complaint from any one who slept in them."

The rooms were rather dark and gloomy. They opened one into the other, and there was some old trees growing so close to the windows, that in daytime they must have been quite shaded. Before they went into these rooms, the landlord

had rung the bell in the other one rather sharply, which they did not see any occasion to do; but they had scarcely been in the first bed-room above a few moments, when dash came the rain against its window.

"Ah, there goes the storm again," said the landlord. "Dear me, I do, indeed, pity people who are forced to be out on such a night as this. How the wind blows, too."

"I must confess I don't hear the wind," said Claude.

"Not hear it, sir! Lord bless you, sir, there was a most terrific gust just then. I hope you like the bedrooms?"

"Oh, they will do very well—very well, indeed, and we will stay; but we must be off by the first streak of daylight, whether the rain is coming down or not; so take care that some one is up to get us our horses, and all that sort of thing."

"Depend upon me, sir, I will attend to you. Any more wine, gentlemen, if you please?"

"Yes, you can let us have another couple of bottles of the same Madeira. Where are you, Jack?"

"He has gone into the next room," said Dick.

"Oh, very good. The wine will do in the course of half an hour, landlord, as we have not finished the last bottle."

"Certainly, gentlemen; you may depend upon every possible attention at the Bunch of Grapes, I assure you. Nobody ever complains of the Bunch of Grapes, I can assure you, gentlemen. Dear me, how the rain does dash away, to be sure. I wouldn't turn a dog out on such a night as this, I declare."

The landlord, with this, bowed himself out of the room, and shut the door after him. The moment he was gone there came another dash of rain against the windows, and then Jack, who, while they had been talking to the landlord in the bedroom, had gone back into the sitting-room, held up his finger, and mysteriously beckoned to Claude and Dick to come close to him.

They did so in some surpise, if not alarm.

"Did you ever know it to rain in this desperate way," whispered Jack, "while the stars shone bright and clear?"

"Not exactly," said Dick.

"Well, did you ever know all the rain to come upwards against a window, instead of down from the sky?"

"Certainly not," said Claude.

"Then the rain which has induced us to pass the night, or to say that we would pass the night at the Bunch of Grapes, is of that very strange character, that it dashes away while the stars are shining brightly in a cloudless sky, and it comes all from below in the most remarkable manner, being strongy suggestive of being thrown up with a mug from a pail below."

"A mug!" said Dick.

"A pail!" said Claude.

"Yes," said Jack. "I don't know what it means, or what can be precise object of it; but we are humbugged into staying, on pretence that it is raining hard, when, in reality, the effect is produced by water being dashed against the windows, as I tell you."

Claude and Dick looked at each other in amazement.

"What can be the meaning of it?" said Claude. "I will then open the window at once and see——"

"No—no," said Jack. "Be careful. You don't know what we have to contend with yet; go into the front bedroom, Claude, and open that window, when you will ascertain, without any sort of doubt, if the night be a wet one or not. You go likewise, Dick; I am quite satisfied upon the subject."

CHAPTER CCX.

THE NIGHT OF DANGER AT THE BUNCH OF GRAPES.

Dick and Claude knew perfectly well that Jack would not have spoken upon such a subject at all, but upon the very best grounds, and his manner was sufficient at once to convince them both that he was not at all in a joking humour. Without a word Claude went into the bedroom, and when he returned, he said—

"It's as fine a night as ever came out of the heavens."

"I told you so," said Jack.

"But, good gracious," said Dick, "what could be the object of all this? Does he know us, and is he merely keeping us here until he can send for assistance to capture us?"

"That is the most likely supposition," said Claude. "Let us go down stairs and be off at once by force."

"No—no," said Jack. "Do not be hasty, Claude, I beg of you. I do not think that that is the true solution of the mystery, for if it were so, have we not been here quite long enough for him to have carried out such an idea? and if he knew us at all, he would know us from the first, of course."

"What is it, then?"

"There's the mystery, and a mystery it is. Claude, you have very sharp ears. The landlord, and a woman, and another man, whom I saw hulking about as we came in, seem to make the room below this their common sitting apartment. There is a door, as no doubt you noticed, at the bottom of the stairs. If you will creep down to that and listen, you may hear something."

"I will do it."

"Be careful, though, Claude, and have your pistols ready. Dick and I will be just at the top of the stairs to render you immediate assistance in case you should require it."

"Help me off with my boots, Jack; I will go down on my stocking-soles, and then, I know, they cannot hear me; but my boots will creak, in spite of me."

Jack helped him off with his boots, and then Claude, after making a slight examination of one of his pistols that he chose to carry in his hand, tripped softly down the narrow flight of stairs which led to the room below, and at the foot of which was the door which had been noticed by Jack. Dick and Jack leant as far over the balustrade at the top of the stairs as they could to listen, and they could hear the hum of conversation in the room below, although they could not make out what was said.

Claude, however, had got his ear to the panel of the door, and he heard every word. The landlord was speaking.

"I tell you I saw it," he said. "He has got a bag of gold with him—the youngest of the three, I mean, be he whom he may; but I suppose they are gentlemen travelling about for pleasure."

"Well, then, do it," said a woman's voice, "only if they go to the window and look out, they will see that it is a fine night, and they will suspect something."

"Oh, stuff! They stand it pretty well, but they have taken too much wine already to be very observing or scrutinising; and they are good judges, too, I can tell you."

"And that," growled another male voice, "I suppose, frightened you out of putting in the stuff?"

"I own I shrank from doctoring the wine to them while they were quite sober, and their taste was fresh. They might have found it out, for you know it does give the wine a taste, and particularly light wines. I they had called for port it would have been another thing; but they didn't."

"It's safest, though," said the woman. "Then there's no bother about it, and down they go into the old well-hole, as nice as may be. How much money do you think there was, John?"

"A hundred pounds if there was a penny-piece! Whose to say that the other two may not have as much? I'd settle the whole three of them for half that money, to say nothing of the horses, which, you know, we can get rid of."

"True enough—true enough; and we don't have such a chance every day. Look at the last person we put out of the way. There was a disappointment! Only twelve pounds in all, and we thought by his appearance that he had plenty."

"Ah, and his watch was gilt, too."

"Yes, what a take in! Oh, I have no patience with such horrid swindling; but, as you say you have seen their money, John, why that is quite sufficient, you know."

"I have seen it; and I tell you what I'll do. I'll put some of the stuff into the two bottles the have ordered, and take the chance of it. If they go to bed upon that, they will sleep sound enough, I'll warrant; and then Ben and I will cut their throats quietly enough about the time of midnight."

"That will do," said the woman, "nicely; and now you, Ben, go and splash some more water against their window, for it all depends upon their not finding out that trick, which I'm quite in a fidget about."

"Why, how the deuce else was I to to ask them to stay?" said the landlord. "You know it has answered before, and why shouldn't it now? People think they hear the rain, and they don't think of looking when they have got a good bottle of old Madeira before them, and have once made up their minds to stay where they are."

"Oh," thought Claude, "that will do. A pretty establishment we have dropped upon here."

There was some sligh movement in the room now, and Claude, apprehensive that the landlord was going to open the door that led to the staircase, stepped up stairs again, and pulled on his boots.

"Well?" said Dick.

"What did you hear?" said Jack.

"Oh, it's all right."

"Is it, though? Well, I will never trust myself again," said Jack. "They are honest folks, are they?"

"As honest as a set of brutal cut-throats can be expected to be—that's all. Listen. and I will just tell you what a nice pleasant sort of predicament we have been very near falling into to-night. Speak low, and don't utter any exclamation of surprise at what I tell you, because, now that we know our danger, it vanishes."

Claude then narrated to Jack and Dick exactly what he had heard from the people below, after which they all three stared at each other in silence.

"Why, Jack, this affair," said Claude, "seems to have struck you all of a heap."

"It has—it has!"

"And you, too, Dick. I don't think you will ever shut your mouth again."

"Oh, yes, I shall," said Dick, closing it with a loud clap of the teeth; "but I never was more staggered in all my life, I must confess. I would——Ah! there goes our friend Ben with the bucket of water against the window."

Dash came the mock rain again, and then before any further remarks could be made, the landlord made his appearance with the other two bottles of Madeira that had been ordered by Claude, and he looked so meek and mild, and smiling, that no one could have supposed for one moment, without they really had the knowledge of the fact that our friends had, that he could be a deliberate murderer.

"I have brought the wine, gentlemen," he said, "and I hope you will find it to your liking."

"Not a doubt," said Claude. "How it rains yet."

"Oh dear, yes, it does indeed, sir. I should think that the Oxford coach would hardly get on such a night as this."

"Scarcely; but it's a good thing that we are housed. We will ring when we want anything, landlord, and we shall go to bed quite early to-night, as we intend to rise so soon. I hope you have properly attended to our horses?"

"Lord bless you, sir, if they had been my own from the first moment they set foot in the stable, I could not have been more attentive to them than I have been."

"That's right—thank you."

"Thank you, gentlemen; and I feel quite sure you will never complain of your entertainment at the Bunch of Grapes."



THE PURSUIT ON THE THAMES.

The landlord retired, and when they had fairly heard the last of his footsteps retreating down the stairs, Claude said—

"Did you ever come near such a consummate villain as that, Dick? Really it is a mercy that we have stopped here, and found him out, is it not?"

"It is, for if we don't stop his career, he ought to be allowed to stop ours; and

he shall, too, for I will not leave this place with the idea that any other people less wide-awake than we are, should fall into this fellow's snares."

"Good," said Claude. "We will consider that it is a duty we owe to society to put a stop to his villany, and it will perhaps be considered as a kind of set-off to some of our own little escapades in this world. Who knows?"

"Ah!" said Jack, "who knows, indeed? I very much doubt it, however, Claude. But what do you purpose doing?"

"Well, I was thinking of that all the while I was on the staircase listening. If the landlord had opened the door and seen me, I should have shot him without a doubt; but as he did not, he escaped. Would it not be better to pretend to go to bed, and see what comes of it?"

"Unless," said Dick, "we now sally down at once, and have it out with the wretches."

"I have only one objection to that," added Claude, "and that is, that as they may not be all in the room below, some mischief may come to our horses, and that would be about as bad just now as getting us to swallow that cursed Madeira and then comfortably cutting our throats."

"And putting us down the well-hole," added Jack.

"Precisely."

"Then let us do as you think, Claude," said Dick. "I, upon consideration, think it is the best plan. It is getting fast on to eleven o'clock now, but I should like to take a good look at the two bed-rooms, while we have the lights all ready here to do it with, and while we are not likely to be disturbed."

"Come on, then," said Claude, "it is what I was thinking of doing myself. Jack, place a chair against the door, so that if the rascal comes here while we are in the other rooms, we shall hear him, and catch him before he goes again."

Jack placed the chair in such a way against the door of the room, that if any one tried to open it from without, over the chair would go, and make sufficient noise on the floor in its fall to give them an alarm. They then took one of the two lights that were upon the table, and went into the next bed-room; and now, with the knowledge of how it had in all likelihood been the scene of many a murder, they fancied that they was something peculiar even in the very atmosphere of it.

They walked as noiselessly as they could, for they did not wish to give any alarm to the landlord or his myrmidons, by letting him think that they were making a search in the bed-rooms instead of drinking the drugged wine, and they only spoke in whispers.

"Here's a lot of clothes under this bed," said Jack.

"Is there? Pull them out."

Jack pulled some of them out, and it was quite evident that they had belonged to different individuals. No doubt they were the suits that had been worn by the unfortunates who had lost their lives in that room.

"Look here," said Dick.

They both app oached Dick, who had turned one of the beds half over. The under side of it was one mass of gore!

For more than a minute they maintained the position into which they had been cast by this frightful spectacle; and then Dick let the bed drop again, and in a solemn tone, he said—

"This is indeed horrible. The people in this house must be fiends, not human beings. We are to lie down upon one side of a bed, after the horrible evidence of a recent murder stained the other. It is too terrible!"

"The villains!" said Jack.

"Hush—hush, both of you!" said Claude, holding up his hand in a warning attitude. "Let me implore you not to let your natural feelings now run away with you on this occasion. We can and will put a stop for ever to the frightful practices going on in this place."

"So help me Heaven, I will!" said Jack. "Oh, Claude, we are bad enough, and our mode of life perhaps won't stand much talking about; but we are angels compared to the people in this place."

"We are, I think."

"I can bear this no longer," said Dick, drawing a pistol from his pocket; "I will go down stairs and—and——"

"Make a mess of the whole affair," said Claude. "Be calm, Dick. The management of this piece of business is in our own hands, and it would be folly to mar it. Jack, lend me the light; I want to see what is in that cupboard over there. We don't know what horrible confirmation of what we already know well enough it may contain."

CHAPTER CCXI.

DETAILS HOW THE FRIENDS SETTLED MATTERS AT THE "BUNCH OF GRAPES."

THE cupboard door was locked.

"Quite fast," said Claude. "But that won't detain us for very long, I take it, Jack?"

"Certainly not; I will open it, Claude. You hold the light so that I may see well what I am about, for it is rather a desirable thing to make as little noise as possible, as we intend to let the vagabond of a landlord here have his swing out. Now for it."

"You listen, Dick, if all is quiet in the next room," said Claude. "It would spoil all if they were to come up stairs just now, you know."

"All's right," said Dick, as he stood in a stooping posture between the two rooms; "I should catch the smallest sound that can take place below now. You go on with your inquiries; I will warn you in time if anything is amiss"

Jack always had a few well made tools about him, by the aid of which any lock could be readily opened, and he was not above two minutes in managing that one that belonged to the cupboard door in the bed-room.

"Here it comes," he said, and it did come with a vengeance; for bouncing open, evidently from the pressure of some weight on the inside, out fell, nearly upon Jack, a dead body, presenting a frightful spectacle from being covered with blood.

Jack had a difficulty in keeping himself from uttering a loud shout of alarm, and, as it was, Claude could not help exclaiming—

"The deuce!"

"What is it?" whispered Dick. "What's the row?—Eh?"

"Nothing very particular. Only just step here, and you will see, while I watch at the door."

Dick did just step there, and the sight he saw filled him with horror and amazement.

"Gracious Heaven!" he said, "this is a confimation of our suspicions, even if they had amounted to nothing more. This is a frightful spectacle."

"It is," said Jack, "but it must be got back into the cupboard again, or else it will strike the eyes of those below the moment they come into this room, and put a stop to our plans of catching them in the moment that they think of committing new crimes."

"It's all very well," said Dick, "to talk of putting that into the cupboard again, but unless you do it yourself, Jack, I don't fancy that Claude or I will fancy much touching it."

"I? Oh, I could not touch it for worlds!"

"Hist!—hist!" said Claude.

"What is it?"

"Somebody coming. Let us all get into the other room. Come on! Quick with you both—come on. Somebody is creeping up the stairs; but let them be ever so slow over it, they must get here soon. Come this way."

Dick, upon the spur of the moment, with his foot, sent the dead body right far away out of sight under one of the beds, and then he followed Jack into the sit-

ting-room again. They all three sat down, and looked quite calm and contented, as though nothing had happened. The landlord slunk into the room with a faint smile upon his face.

"I have brought the wine, gentlemen."

"All's right," said Claude; "I hope it is equal to the last?"

"Oh, dear yes, gentlemen. It's from another bin, but, if anything, it's better, and the gentlemen who come here praise it quite wonderfully, they do. It's a very fine wine!"

"Thank you, landlord. Will you join us in a glass of it? Don't say no from any modesty upon the subject, now."

"Ah, gentlemen, it's so kind of you to ask a fellow, it is indeed; and if it wasn't for Dr. Jones, I would, with all the pleasure in the world—feeling what an honout it was, too, at the same time, you see, gentlemen."

"And who is Dr. Jones?"

"Oh, he is my medical man, and he says that I must not take wine, but spirits instead, if I take anything; though, to tell the truth, he tries to persuade me to take nothing."

"Oh, well, of course, you must not run contrary to the advice of your medical attendant."

"No, sir. Good evening, sir."

"What sort of a night is it, now?" said Dick.

"A little better; but it's gathering up again, and we shall have, I am afraid, the worst of it yet."

"So I think; good night. We shan't want anything else; and as it is getting late, I don't think we need keep you out of your bed, landlord."

"That's very kind of you, gentlemen. We are simple conscientious folks, and go early to rest with easy souls. Ah, dear, a clear conscience is everything, ain't it, gentlemen?"

"Oh, yes," said they all in chorus.

Turning up his eyes, then, as though he were repeating some mental prayer, the landlord left the room, and for a few moments our three adventurers could only look at each other in silence, they were so thoroughly disgusted by the cant and the hypocrisy of the landlord of that den of murder.

It was Jack who first broke the silence.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of our kind host of the Bunch of Grapes, now?"

"Think?" said Dick, in a loud tone. "Think——"

"Hush! my dear friend," said Claude. "We ought not be surprised that the man who can commit a murder should be an accomplished hypocrite. It is impossible that the landlord of this house can increase my abhorrence of him, let him say what he will, or do what he will."

"But the cant of the fellow——"

"Well—well, never mind it. Let us thoroughly settle what we mean to do."

"It is all in your hands, Claude; I am ready and willing to do whatever you please in the affair."

"Very well. Upon one thing you may depend, Dick, and that is, that I won't balk you of the proper amount of retribution, which, I see, you feel you would like to visit the landlord with; I think as keenly upon that point as you do. Now, what I propose is, that we go to bed—that is to say, that we pretend to do so—you and me, I mean Dick, while Jack hides in the room likewise, in such a place as will enable him to give us notice of anything going on. I will have a pair of pistols ready for action in my hands, and you can have the same."

"What then?"

"Why, I feel strongly inclined to shoot any one who intrudes into the room."

"And I most certainly will do so. All that I ask of you is, that you will let me have first pop at the landlord; I owe him a grudge, and I shall not feel at all satisfied until I have paid him in full."

"You shall then, Dick."

"I am satisfied; and now as this wine is poisoned, of course, he took none of it; but it will look suspicious to see the full bottle, so there goes a lot of it into the ashes; and now let us to bed, for the very air of this place now to me after the discoveries we have made in the next room seems thick and full of the very aroma of murder."

"I don't care how soon I am on the road again," said Claude, as he rose.

"Nor I," said Jack; "I will hide carefully behind the door in the next room, so as they come in they will only the more effectually conceal me by opening it upon me, and then I shall be ready to pounce upon them at a moment's notice; but mind, both of you, if you begin pistol firing, and there is but a dim light in the room, don't mistake me for one of the murderers, and accommodate me with half an ounce of lead as a stomachic. Mind that."

"We will be careful, Jack."

They now all three walked about the room a little, and then they flung down one of the chairs, for this object was to render the belief that they had got tired of sitting over the wine, and were going to bed. Then they all three sallied into the bedroom, and after slamming the door of connection between the two rooms, so as it should be supposed below that one of them had gone there, they all stood in the front room, and listened attentively.

Not the smallest sound broke the stillness of the place. Claude went to the window and looked out. "The night is a lovely one," he said, "and I hope we shall soon be out in it. If the air of the sitting-room was full of uneasy feelings, what must this be? Did you put the body in the cupboard again, Jack?"

"Not I. Dick kicked it under the bed there."

Claude shuddered, but he made no further remark about it. They then hastened their preparations. Dick got just under the coverlid of one of the beds, and Claude under that of the other. They both had a pistol clutched firmly in the right hand, and they were neither of them men to miss their mark very easily when they chose to hit it. Jack got behind the door, and then Claude said—

"Is all right?"

"All is right," they both replied.

"Out you go, then," said Claude, as he flung the pillow at the candle and upset it at once.

The room was even then not very dark, in consequence of the night being so fine; and if the old trees had not grown so close to the windows as almost to make the effect of an outer blind to them, no doubt every object in that apartment, within whose walls murders had been done, no doubt, many a time, would have been distinctly visible. As it was, everything had a dim and spectral look, and a coat that hung upon a peg, with a hat upon it, looked so like a human figure, that Claude could hardly convince himself that it was not one.

It was not policy for any of them to speak now, but Dick did just whisper,—

"Jack! Jack! do you hear anything?"

"Not a thing. But don't talk."

The stillness that ensued was most intense, and it lasted for nearly half an hour. It seemed really to be half a day to those who were waiting the denouement of that strange adventure. The patience of Claude was getting quite exhausted, and he was on the point of saying something, when all at once a footstep was quite plainly heard in the outer room, where they had sat at their wine. They now all three listened most intently.

The footsteps were quite plainly to be heard, and it did not seem as if the person or persons who were walking in the outer room were at all careful about the noise they made. Suddenly, then, some one came close to the door that separated the double-bedded room from the outer one, and the voice of the landlord, to the great surprise of Claude and his friends, said—

"Gentlemen, if you are not asleep, will you rise, for we are afraid that there are some thieves in the house."

It was a wonder that neither Jack, nor Dick, nor Claude, replied to this, it really seemed so very plausible; but they did not. Ordinary men, unaccustomed

to the strange and adventurous mode of life which they led, must have been deceived by the manner in which this remark was made; but they were not ordinary men, and they kept up the most profound stillness.

"As fast as a church," said the landlord, then. "How much have they taken of the wine, Wilkins, my boy?"

"Oh, about three parts of the bottle," growled another voice.

"Then that accounts very well for it. Half that quantity would make them sleep for a couple of days."

"Oh bother!"

"Why, what's the matter with you, now, Wilkins, my fine lad? What are you on the growl about, now?"

"Oh, it's enough to make a fellow growl when there's nothing but botheration in the world. I could easy have brought up the old blunderbuss and shot 'em all three an hour ago, you know I could; but you are so precious frightened of a noise, and you must have your drugged wine first, and your pails of water thrown up against the windows, and all that sort of thing. Don't you call that botheration to a fellow, eh?

"Well, but, my good lad, it is so safe."

"Oh, safe be hanged."

"Come, come, don't you be out of temper. I have let you have your pick of the three horses you know, and that ought to be something. I am quite certain that dark bay whom you have chosen, is worth a hundred guineas if it is worth a sixpence."

"Well, who said it wasn't?"

"Nobody, my good lad, only you didn't seem to be pleased; but come, we can make short work of it now, and you know there's already one dead body in the cupboard to get rid of, so we can do all that sort of job at once, and clear off to night. Come on, it's all right."

"Well, who said it wasn't?"

"My dear boy, you really seem determined to be displeased at everything."

"No I ain't. Who said I was, eh?"

"Well, well, my good friend. Be so good as to come and assist in the cutting the throats of these people, and then that nice little job will be over."

"Well, then, come; for' bless me, you are so precious slow. Mind, now, I'm to have half of all the swag, and the horse I picked out, and an extra five pounds for the job of putting the bodies into the old well."

"Yes, my dear boy, yes. Oh, yes, you are quite a model of contentment, you are, and it does one's feeling good to hear you talk. Come on, now, come on."

With a full confidence that their intended victims were in a sound sleep, this precious pair of worthies now made their way into the large bed-room in which were the two beds, without the smallest idea of the fate that awaited them within its precincts.

The landlord carried a light, and the "dear boy" came close upon his heels. As they entered the room they swung the door so wide open that they quite jammed Jack up against the wall; but they did not notice that there was any obstruction to its coming wide open.

"Which will you settle, Wilkins?" said the landlord.

"Oh, I don't care."

"Yes, but you know, my lad, there's one in the farther room, and he has to be done for; and you see we can't divide this little job if we would."

"Oh, you settle which one you like, and I'll do the job for the other two of 'em. Now be off with you, and settle it all. I don't like such shilly-shallying. Mind, I am to have the horse?"

"Oh, of course—of course."

Dick gave a loud snore.

"Ah! you may snore if you like," said the landlord, "its nearly about the last snore you will make in this world, my friend. I will just settle you, as you seem to be sleeping rather uneasily; so here goes."

CHAPTER CCXII.

THE FIRE AT THE INN.—THE ROAD AGAIN.—LONDON.

As the landlord spoke, he advanced towards the bed upon which lay Dick. He had placed the light that he carried upon the dressing-table in the room, so that he had nothing to impede him in his murderous plans.

The beautiful Mr. Wilkins stepped up to the bed on which was Claude; and our friend could perceive that he was armed with a knife. The landlord had a similar one; and such a systematic pair of murderers, surely, had never existed, as these two men, who made a trade of slaughter, and looked upon human life as nothing.

"Hold!" cried Jack, for as Dick nor Claude moved, he began to be afraid that they had fallen asleep in earnest, and would become the victims of the murderers.

"All's right, Jack," said Claude, sitting up in the bed, and pointing a pistol at the amiable youth.

"That's it," said Dick, as he likewise sat up in his bed, and levelled a pistol at the landlord.

For a moment or two, the two ruffians were evidently too much petrified with astonishment and dismay to move or speak, and then, with cries of terror, they turned to the door of the room, but there stood Jack, with a pistol in each hand.

"No—no," he said, "you don't pass here."

"Mercy!—mercy!" said the landlord, crouching down upon the floor, and huddling himself up into the smallest possible compass that he could. "Mercy!" The brutal comrade of this man shrank back against the door of the cupboard, and then he screwed himself up as he said—

"You wouldn't go for to come to shoot a poor fellow, would you now? Oh, don't!"

"What do you want here?" said Claude.

"Oh, dear, gentlemen," said the landlord, "all we wanted was to see if you were quite comfortable!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, gentlemen, that is all, upon my honour! Wasn't it, my boy, ins—w asn't it?"

"Oh, yes, upon my honour, too!"

"Dick?"

"Yes, Claude."

"You shoot the landlord, and I will shoot Master Wilkins, so we shall rid the world of two as awful rascals as Heaven ever permitted to crawl upon its surface. I do not feel that this is a murder. It is an execution founded upon the clearest evidence, for the benefit of society at large."

Upon hearing these words, Wilkins fell to the floor, where he lay howling and writhing about in the most extraordinary manner; and the landlord wept, and prayed, and shouted for mercy. Jack kept guard at the door of the room, and all he said was—

"Put them both out of their misery at once. I don't like bloodshed; but I have not a word to say in favour of two cold-blooded murderers!"

"When I cry 'three,' fire, Dick," said Claude.

"I will."

"One—two."

The landlord and Wilkins seemed both going mad, they rolled about so upon the floor, and dashed themselves against it in so terrible a manner. Surely this was a shocking scene; but if ever two human beings merited such an amount of punishment for their crimes, those two men did. They were, as Jack said, two cold-blooded murderers.

"Three!" said Claude.

Bang—bang! went the two pistols. Wilkins, with a cry of agony, bounded to

his feet, and then staggering back, he fell upon the landlord, who had been shot through the head by Dick, and who lay all but dead, shivering upon the floor. The bullet from Claude's pistol had hit Wilkins in the chest, and now he fell on the landlord, and they both drew their last breaths in that room, which no doubt had often echoed to the cries of their victims.

Jack had shut the door, and his back was against it, but now some one tried to get in from without, and a harsh female voice, cried—

"Haven't you done it yet? Where did you get the pistols from? Wilkins, my dear, haven't you done that little job yet?"

"No, ma'am," said Jack, suddenly moving aside from the door, and letting a most repulsive looking woman fall into the room upon her hands and knees. Both Dick and Claude had sprung from their respective beds by this time, and the latter caught the woman by the arm, and swung her right to the other end of the room, saying as he did so—

"Remain with your dear Wilkins, you disgrace to your sex. Come away—come away, my friends, and let us leave at once this horrid house."

With a shriek of dismay as she saw what had happened, the woman fell to the floor, and then our three adventurers hurried from the room, and descending the stairs, they caught up a couple of lights that were burning below, and proceeded to the stable, were they had the satisfaction of finding their three horses well looked to; for the landlord and Master Wilkins had paid all the attention they could to them, looking upon them as their own from the moment they first entered the stable.

The saddles were soon put on, and then the horses were led to the door.

"Stop a bit," said Claude, "I don't feel disposed to leave this place just yet."

"Oh, come away," said Jack. "What more would you do?"

"Wait for me. Hold my horse, Jack."

Jack did so, and Claude went into the house, in which he was absent about five minutes. Then he came back and mounted at once, saying—

"I have set fire to the murder den."

"Have you though, really?"

"Yes, and I think it is the very best end it can come to. There's not a living thing in it but that woman, and she will take good care of herself, no doubt."

"And if she don't," said Dick, "it won't grieve me much, for if anybody deserved a roasting in the world, it is surely such a person as that. This has been rather an ugly night's work, and a most narrow escape."

"It has, indeed. Let us get on, for the further we are from the Bunch of Grapes, the better I shall think the air."

The horses were tolerably fresh, and they now made good speed along the road, but they had not been gone above a mile, when Jack looked round, and cried—

"There burns the old crib. Don't you see the light in the sky?"

They all three paused for a moment or two, and sure enough it was sufficiently evident that the public-house was in roaring flames. It was quite a relief to Claude to find that such was the fact, and to think that he—by the aid of his two friends—had been the cause of sweeping from the face of the earth such a den of iniquity as that house had been.

They started again, and soon left the inn, and the whole district in which it was situated, far behind them. Nothing of further moment occurred to our heroes, until they reached to within a mile of Tyburn-gate, and then they saw a carriage coming along in great state, with a couple of footmen behind it.

"Hilloa!" cried Claude. "Coachman! coachman!"

The coachman thought that something was amiss with his vehicle and pulled up.

"That will do," said Claude. "Who have you got in the inside, coachman?"

"You rascal!" said the coachman; "I really thought a linch-pin had come out, or the tie off one of my precious wheels. Get out of the way, you villain!"

Claude fired a pistol apparently at the coachman's head, but he took care to miss. It was so very nigh to a hit, however, that it frightened the coachman very nearly out of his wits, and dropping his whip and his reins, he cried out—

"Oh, my lord, it's highwaymen! it's highwaymen!"

Dick had ridden up to the carriage-door, and a gentleman, in a powdered wig, looked out, crying—

"Drive over the rascals, coachman! drive over the rascals!"

"No, don't," said Dick, as he laid hold of the wig, and by its assistance gave



A NIGHT ADVENTURE AT THE "BUNCH OF GRAPES."

its owner's head a sound rap against the side of the coach-door. The wig then came off in Dick's hand.

"You villain!" said its owner; "do you know who I am?"

"Not I,—perhaps you will tell us?"

"I am the prime minister."

"The deuce you are! Then you ought to have rather a long purse, for all the

world agrees that you rob the people at such a rate as was never known before. Come, sir, hand out your purse, your watch, rings, or any other jewellery you may happen to have; and I beg to tell you that it won't be at all safe to trifle with us."

"Help! help!"

"Oh, certainly. Jack, the prime minister wants to be helped out of his coach; open the door, Jack."

"No—no! If I am to be robbed, I may as well submit quietly. There is my purse and there is my watch, and there is a diamond ring, which is the only one I ever wear."

"You won't wear it any longer, my lord."

"Nor you, I hope, for long. I shall offer a reward of one thousand pounds for your apprehension, in the morning."

"Make it two," said Dick, "and I'll come and give myself up and claim it, my lord. All's right. Comrades, the prime minister has done the handsome thing, so he may go—off and away: Good-night, my lord, good-night."

"Ha! ha! good-night!" laughed Claude, as he passed the carriage window.

"I should only just like to know who you are," said the minister, "that's all, my fine fellows."

"Why, the fact is," said Claude, "we are three young ladies in disguise. We have just run away from a boarding-school, at Turnham-green. My name is Lydia; that one who took your purse, and watch, and ring, is the amiable Sophia; and this one who is close to me is the gentle Emily. Good-night, my lord. Mind you advertise us all well."

The prime minister was so indignant at this fun being poked at him, that he drew up the window of his carriage with a jerk and would not say another word. One of the footmen had to get down for the purpose of picking up the reins and the whip for the bewildered coachman, and while that was being all settled, our friends rode off.

"Well," said Claude, when they got into Oxford Street, "there has been some fun in that."

"Yes," said Dick, "it was done in an off-handed way at all events; and what is better, the purse seems to be pretty heavy, too, that he handed me out."

"That's the best of it," said Jack. "Here's a good lamp in Quebec Street here. Let's look what's in it."

"With all my heart."

They all three turned their horses' heads up Quebec Street, and halted close to a lamp. The purse was a most magnificent one that the prime minister had handed to Dick, and now he opened it, and poured some of the contents into his hand.

"Halfpence, by Jove!" said Dick.

"All halfpence!" cried Claude.

"Yes, every rap. Here's a do!"

Claude was so highly amused at the long face that Dick pulled over this affair, that he nearly fell off his horse with laughing, and the tears ran down his face.

"Oh, that's good," he said; "but the best of it was your look, Dick, when you turned them out into your hand. That was truly rich. Where's the watch?—Is that copper?—Oh—oh!—I shall never leave off laughing at this."

"No, the watch is all right, and so is the ring, but I admit I never was so thoroughly done with a purse before. It's really provoking."

"Not at all," said Claude. "It's a clever thing, and I give him credit for it, that I do."

"Come—come," said a watchman, at this moment turning a corner, and officiously holding up his lantern to look at them. "Come—come, move on."

"What do you say, my friend?" asked Claude.

"Move on, I say."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Just step here; I have got something to say to you. A little nearer. It's rather a secret."

"Well?" said the watchman coming up close to him. "Well?"

Claude poised his riding-whip in his hand, the end of which was heavily loaded.

"I," he said, "am Claude Duval, with one thousand five hundred pounds reward for the taking me. That is Dick Turpin with a thousand pounds for him; and there you go, old fellow."

Down went the riding-whip, and the watchman fell sprawling in the kennel.

"Come on," said Claude. "All's right. He won't like it when he comes to his senses again. Come on."

CHAPTER CCXIII.

THE KEN IN THE OLD MINT.—A NIGHT SCENE.

"WHERE shall we go?" said Jack when they had got nearly as far as the junction of Oxford Street with Holborn.

"That is worth the considering," remarked Dick, "before we proceed any further, I think. Suppose we go to the old ken in the Mint? I have not been there for a considerable time, and I dare say you have neither of you crossed its threshold for a long day."

"It is a couple of years since I was in it," said Claude.

"And three times a couple since I was there," said Jack.

"Well, then, is it a bargain? We can put up our horses elsewhere. We have plenty of places where we can safely do that, I should say; and then, on foot, we can walk to the Mint."

"Well, come on, then," said Claude. "It will be a pleasant enough way of passing the night; and who knows but we may chance to meet some old friends there? I think it is always as well now and then to pass a few hours in such places, for the sake of being able to contrast them again with the beautiful open country, which, I confess, is much more my admiration than the town can ever be."

"And mine, too," said Jack; "so let us be jogging."

They put up their horses in the City, where they knew they would not only be perfectly safe but comeatable at a moment's notice, if needs were; and then, on foot, they proceeded to the Mint at Southwark. That locality then was considered quite sacred to the thieves of London, and it was seldom, indeed, that an officer ventured into it for the purpose of attempting a capture. If one had done so, it would have been a great chance for him to escape with his life.

The ken—as it was called—to which our three adventurers proposed to go, was one of the most celebrated in the whole locality; and if any of what might be called the aristocracy of iniquity went to the Old Mint at all, it was there that they bestowed themselves.

A gentlemanly-looking man suddenly stepped up to Claude, and said—

"Sir, can you tell me the time?"

"Oh, yes. It is past twelve."

"Thank you, sir."

The man looked keenly in the face of Claude, and then, with a bow, walked away.

"What is the meaning of that, I wonder?" said Claude.

"A spy," said Dick. "There was something in that fellow's manner that convinces me at once of his vocation. He is on the look-out for some one; but it can hardly be for us, as our presence here could not be even suspected by any one, since we only made the determination to come here at all within the last half hour or so."

"And yet I feel a presentiment," said Jack.

"Of what?"

"Of much danger. Oh, Claude, it seemed to me as if at the moment that man

spoke to you, an audible voice from some invisible lips had said to me, 'Go not to the Mint.'"

"Oh, Jack, you should not give way to such fancies," said Claude. "If you continue to do so, you will at last find yourself the slave of all sorts of fancies, and you won't know what to do or to think. Every enterprise you dream of executing will be nipped in the bud by your imaginary terrors, and you will be the slave of your own feelings."

"All that is true, Claude; and yet——"

"Yet what, Jack? Speak freely."

"I would give something if we were not going to the old ken in the Mint to-night."

"Oh, stuff, Jack. Come on—come on!"

"I will go if you go, Claude; for in life or in death, in safety or in danger, I feel that my place is by your side, and it is the place of all others in which I best wish to be; but I still cannot help having my fears."

"Which will all prove groundless, Jack, and to-morrow we shall laugh at them. Come on! It's all right enough."

"There are three of us," said Dick, "and we are all well armed. It would be a bold man, and indeed, I may say, it would be a bold half-dozen of men, who would interfere with us."

"You are right," said Claude, "it would indeed; but here we are."

They had now reached the door of a large building, that looked like some old tavern that had decidedly seen very much better days, but had given up the hope of ever seeing them again. Hanging at right angles from the wall, there was an old, blackened sign; but the wind, and dust, and rain of that not very clean and favoured region, had long since obliterated all traces of what had been upon it.

The roof of the house, which, by-the-by, was only one story in height, was one of those huge sloping ones with a perfect wilderness of tiles, which are still to be seen in some of the very old streets in London. The frontage was rather extensive, for there were no less a number than eight windows in a row, and the doorway was huge, and deeply sunk in the front wall of the old house.

"Well, here we are," said Dick, "and the old ken don't to my eyes look a bit different to what it did a couple or three years ago, and I do believe it will just look like what it does now till the end of the world."

"And three days afterwards," said Claude. "I wonder now if any one is here. There used to be a jolly enough lot always about the old crib. Knock, Dick, and we shall soon see."

With the handle of his riding whip, Dick knocked in a very peculiar way at the door, and he repeated the summons thrice before any attention was paid to it by any one. Then from a little window, that looked like an eye above the door, a face looked out.

"Hilloa!" said the voice that belonged to the face. "What now—eh? Who is it?"

"Old friends," said Dick. "Open the ken. Confound you, don't you know me? You ought to do so."

"Why, it's Turpin!"

"Hold your noise, will you? What do you mean bawling out a man's name in that way for?—I have got two gentlemen with me, and it don't look well to keep them waiting."

"Gentlemen? Why, who are they?"

"The right sort, you may depend; so be quick, will you? Is there anybody in the old ken?"

"Oh, yes, a jolly lot. Ain't it quiet, though? Now they are all singing a chorus, and yet you can't so much as here that a mouse is stirring, can you now? Oh; we keep the sound in nicely now; but that's all owing to science, it is."

The head disappeared from the little window, and Claude said to Dick and Jack—

"He may talk of keeping the sound in as much as he likes, but I can hear the rumour of voices as I stand here. They are under this part of the ground on which we tread. But I don't see that it much matters, for the officers and the beaks know of this place as well as we do, only they dare not come to it to do any mischief. I take it now that there is not a ken in London that is without its spy or two to give notice of who has been there, and that's the only danger with them. It is not in the ken that you run any risk, but it is in being closely watched as you go from it, that you may have a fellow upon your heels when you least expect, who will give the affair to the grabs, and then they will have a snatch at you."

"You are quite right, Claude," said Dick. "But here's the door opened. We won't stay long, and then off we will go to the road again, if you like."

"Agreed."

"And the sooner the better," said Jack.

The door of the old place was cautiously opened, and a man with a lantern made his appearance.

"Come in," he said. "Come in. It's all right."

They, upon this, all three passed into the house; and when Dick had passed the man, the lantern was held up in the face of Claude.

"Oh, gracious, it's him!" said the man. "Why, it's Claude Duval!"

"To be sure, my friend," said Claude. "Couldn't I find time to come now and then to some of the old cribs?"

"To be sure—to be sure, and there ain't a face in the old place that will be welcomer than yours; but who are you, old fellow?"

This last question was addressed to Jack, but although the man looked well at him, he failed to recognise him, and shaking his head, he said—

"You are a puzzler.—I don't know you."

"But you will take our word," said Claude, "that he is one of the right sort, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear, yes. I'd take your word for a good deal more than that, I rather think; so come on all of you."

The man with the lantern led the way and they followed him closely. After traversing a very large passage, they came to a door, which he pushed open, and then descend a flight of stairs that evidently led quite down among the foundations of the house. Then a couple of gloomy-looking cellars, which might possibly have been dignified by the name of kitchens, were passed through, after which, at the end of another short passage, a blanket, hanging double from the ceiling, was pushed aside, and they were in the ken.

The scene that now presented itself was a most extraordinary one. The ken was an apartment roughly boarded on all sides, ceiling included, with planking, that, by the aid of time and tobacco smoke, had become as nearly black as it very well could be. At one end was a great roaring fire, but owing to there having been some difficulty in carrying the flew so that it should not point out the exact locality of the ken, the fire had the amiable peculiarity of discharging the greater quantity of its smoke into the ken.

This little circumstance imparted a cloudy look to the atmosphere of the place, and always set everybody coughing upon their first entrance into it. The room, if room it could rightly be called, was capable of holding a couple of hundred people with tolerable ease, and it was now about half full.

There was a large proportion of ladies (?) present.

It was not usual to announce guests in that place; but that quiet rule of allowing anybody to go in and out unobserved, was on the occasion of persons of such celebrity as those that were now ushered into the ken, dispensed with, and the man with the lantern called out in stentorian accents—

"My rum 'uns, here's Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and a friend of theirs as they goes bail for!"

At this startling announcement, all eyes were directed to the door of the ken,

and then a shout of gratification arose from the assemblage, which was materially assisted by the shrill voices of the ladies.

Claude advanced, and with a smile upon his face, he said—

"I have only just popped in to spend an hour with the family, and to take a bottle of wine, to the health and good keeping of old friends. After that, we must be off again, for London is rather a warm place for us to be in, just now."

"Hurrah!—hurrah!"

A rather dashing specimen of the female sex now came forward, and throwing her arms round Claude, she cried—

"You are as welcome as gin in sorrow, Claude Duval. Come, sit down and tell us what you have been about for this age. Why, some of the old family coves would have it that you were married!"

"Dear me, what could put such a thing into their heads?" laughed Claude. "How very ridiculous. You know, my dear, that a highwayman is married to the road, and that he never seeks to break the union that binds him to a lonely path and a moonlight night. What say you, Dick?"

"I can hardly say anything, Claude, for a young lady has got me so fast round the neck, that I am in peril of instant suffocation, if she don't let me go."

A roaring laugh at this rung through the place, and then the wine was brought. Claude had ordered it as they came along the gloomy passages that led to the old ken, but the bottle he spoke of had somehow swelled to two dozen, of which everybody was to partake.

"Come," said Claude, "I don't come often to the old ken, but when I do, you know, I feel that I ought to order as much as though I had been here once a week, at least; so, as I can't drink it all, I hope all kind friends will help me a little."

This was one way of insuring the most enthusiastic popularity in the ken, not but what Claude was, with his great reputation, sufficiently popular without standing treat to such an extent as that; but with it, he might be called the king of the old family ken.

One hour was thus passed, and the ladies were getting rather glorious, when a voice suddenly cried out—

"It ain't all right. Hilloa!"

At this announcement, everybody was hushed, except a young lady who was singing a song, and she heard nothing but her own dulcet strains; and was not aware that there was anything amiss, until some one threw a glass of wine into her open mouth and nearly choked her.

"What's amiss," cried Claude.

"I'll tell you," said the young fellow who had made the announcement that all was not right; "I'll tell you. The Crinkley Fox and me was a going out of the ken, and he went first, and directly he got outside he was grabbed. I hung back and got the door shut again."

"Perhaps he was wanted *pertickler*," said a deep gruff voice, from a corner of the room.

"Perhaps he was," said Claude, "and if so, it don't much affect us; but that's what I have always said, my friends—the ken's are safe enough while you are in them, but they are watched by the grabs like a cat watching a mouse."

At this moment the man with the lantern rushed into the ken, and in a voice of dismay, he called out, to to the astonishment of all present—

"*Milintery*!"

"What?" cried Claude.

"He means military," said Jack. "Hilloa, old Bob White, tell us exactly what you have got to say at once. Is there any danger to Claude Duval?"

"Who is yer, that yer calls me Bob White? Why, I havn't been knowed by the name of Bob White for the last five years or more. I calls myself now, Peter Brown."

"You are determined to be among the colours, then?"

"I tell you what it is, I don't like your looks. You know more than you

ought, old fellow, and I don't know nothing about yer, nor does any of the family know nothing about yer. I've been among 'em and asked 'em, and they don't none of 'em know you; and now all on a sudden yer calls me Bob White!"

"A spy!—a sneak!—kill him!—down with him!" cried a number of voices.

"Silence!" said Duval; "you seem quite to forget that I brought him with me, and that I answer for him as a friend of mine."

"And I too," said Dick.

"Yes," said Bob White, alias Peter Brown, "but yer is both taken in, that's the fact. No doubt yer think he's all right enough, but it's a take-in."

"There you are wrong," cried Claude, "and if any one here attempts to lay a hand upon him, they must first take my life; so I warn you all."

"Hold!" cried Jack; "this must not be."

"And they must kill me likewise," said Dick. "Our word ought to be sufficient for the safety of any one."

The thieves rose in a body with menacing gestures, and the noise of voices was quite tremendous.

CHAPTER CCXIV.

THE ESCAPE BY THE RIVER.—THE FATE OF THE POLICE GALLEY.

As the enraged members of the old ken advanced thus threatingly upon Jack. many concealed weapons were produced, such as knives, and other steel means of offence and defence, such as few of the large fraternity of thieves in those days were ever without.

The complexion of affairs was indeed threatening.

"What is to be done?" whisperd Dick to Claude.

"Defy them."

"But they are half mad with drink."

"That, indeed, is the worst feature of the whole transaction. Jack, what do you think of this affair?"

Before Jack could answer, the thieves made a further advance towards him, and one pressed so near, that Claude at once stepped forward, and grappling with him, he flung him right into the fire at the farther end of the ken, from which he was only just clawed out in time to save his life by some of the ladies, who, when there appeared some signs of a disturbance, had retired to that end of the ken for safety.

"Beware!" said Claude; "I tell you all to beware of me. When I say I am answerable for the good faith of a man in a place like this, I likewise make myself answerable for his safety."

"Kill him! Down with him!"

"Who says that? Whoever he be, he can howl loud enough," said Jack. "If he will be so good as to step forward and try it, here I am, and I promise him a warm reception."

"Don't speak, Jack," said Claude.

"Oh, but I must; it is time that I should speak; and, now that I have begun, I will speak to some purpose, and they shall hear me. I find that the gentleman with the powerful throat, who was so anxious to kill me, and down with me, don't seem to be glad to come forward."

As he spoke, Jack got upon a table that was close at hand, and Claude and Dick stood close to him to protect him. Claude, with a pistol in his right hand, called out,

"I see a man aiming a bottle at my friend; let him throw it, and I will give him a pistol-bullet in exchange for it."

"Hark ye," cried Jack. "You call me a spy?"

"We do—we do!"

"And you think I am a sneak, an have got into the old ken for the purpose of knocking it up and bringing mischief on all of you? That's what you think?"

"We know it!"

"Indeed! and you think that I have been so cunning as to impose upon Claude Duval and Dick Turpin? Two pretty innocent babes to be taken in by any one truly!"

There was a loud laugh at this, particularly from the ladies, and one man called out, "It's all right, I think; let it pass, comrades, I say; it's all right."

The tide of popular feeling regarding Jack was certainly on the turn; but yet, in the flashing eyes and the menacing gestures of some present, he saw that they were still far from satisfied, so he added:—

"My good friends, for myself I am not afraid; but if there be danger to-night, it is fit that we should all be united, and well able to resist it. If there be anything like doubt or disunion amongst us, we are lost; and so for that reason, and not for any other, I will tell you who I am."

This announcement created the greatest interest, and every sound was hushed, while the utmost attention was given to what Jack might next say.

"I am quite astonished," he added, "that Bob White don't know me. To be sure, it is years since we met; but that ought not to make much difference to him, for he knew me well."

"If I did," said Bob White, "you are preciously altered, that's all."

"I am altered," said Jack, in a tone of sadness; "and yet I am not so much altered as I was a year ago. Look at me!"

He took off his hat, and stood looking at Bob White, who, shading his eyes with his hands, regarded him for some moments in silence; and then in a loud voice he cried—

"'Why, by all that's good, it's—it's——"

'Who?—who?" shouted everybody, and then a silence, as profound as that of death, reigned in the ken. Jack smiled faintly as he still looked at Bob White, who then cried—

"Yes! I'd swear to him now he has laughed. Why, old fellows, this is Sixteen-string Jack!"

The moment these words were pronounced by the old servitor of the ken, there was a roaring shout of pleasure, and Jack was dragged from the table to be half smothered by the caresses of the ladies, and the shaking of hands to which the men subjected him.

"Lor' bless us!" said Bob White, "we have all of us heard an odd story of how Jack was brought to life agin, arter his dance upon nothing at Tyburn, but we none of us believed it till now; but this is him, as sure as eggs is eggs."

"Yes," said Jack, "I am Sixteen-string Jack, and the story is true; and let it have been dressed up in ever so marvellous a manner to your ears, it cannot transcend the truth. But now that your minds are at ease about who I am, let us think of the main chance. What is the danger, Bob? Tell us all about it."

It took about ten minutes to get the meeting into the quiet orderly state which was so highly necessary under the circumstances; and then Bob spoke clearly and distinctly—

"You see, pals," he said, "I began to think it a very odd thing, that half an hour and more had slipped away without any fresh arrival to the old ken, so I got up to the little window, and looked out, and what should I see but the *millintery*, actually a parcel of soldiers, a keeping guard at the corner of the old house, and close to the door stands half-a-dozen of officers waiting to nab everybody as comes out of the ken."

"Yes, and the Crinkley Fox is nabbed already."

"You hold your noise. What's to be done, that's the thing! Who do they come after, that's the question? It ain't all of us."

"That," said Claude in a clear voice, "can scarcely be a question now. By some means or another, they have dogged me, and Dick, and Jack to this place, and it is us they are after."

The general silence in the ken sufficiently proclaimed that such was the universal opinion of all present.

"I don't mean to say it isn't so," said Bob White, "but we know how to settle that without troubling them, after all. There's two ways of getting in and out of the old ken."

"I know there is," said Claude. "You have a mode of getting to the bank of the river, I am well aware, from this house, and that is the only way by which we shall have a chance of escaping. The sooner we go the better, and it is not at



THE ESCAPE ON THE THAMES FROM THE OLD MINT.

all likely that any one else, upon leaving the ken, will be more than merely temporarily inconvenienced by a detention long enough to convince the officers that he is not one of those whom they seek. I would wish you all to stay as long as you can, so as to give them a good waiting job. And now, Bob, if you will show us the way out to the river, we shall be glad enough to be off at once."

"Listen to me a moment first," said Bob; "I don't feel, do you know, quit clear in my own mind that they don't fancy we have such a way to the river though they don't know where it is exactly, for the last time we had to use it there was a police-galley plying about the spot, as if on the look-out."

"It must be risked, though, for all that."

"In course it must; but it's as well you should know that there may be the grabs in that direction."

"It's much better that we should know, and we all feel not a little obliged by the caution, Bob; but the sooner we be off now, the better."

"Good again. Now for it. We will soon open the way from the old crib to the Thames, if that will do any good, and I am in hopes as it will."

There were many then present who perfectly understood how to open the secret passage from the ken that led to the banks of the Thames. It was done thus:

From a corner of the ken, three of the floor-boards, that were placed apparently quite permanently against the wall, were removed, and when such was the case, they disclosed an aperture behind them, about large enough for two persons to walk in abreast.

"There it is," said Bob. "All folks have to do now, is to go right on, and then they will come to the old wharf that's always to let, on the banks of the Thames."

"Always to let?" said Dick.

"Yes, it belongs to us. This secret passage from the old ken opens on to it. It ain't worth above twenty pounds a-year rent, and by asking forty pounds for it when anybody comes about it, we keep it unlet, you see; for we would'nt let it on no account at all, as if we did, the people would be sure to go poking about, as folks do when they get into a strange place, till they found out the secret passage."

"Not a doubt of it."

"Well, now, I'll go before you with a light, so that you can't help being all right. Come on."

Claude turned to the thieves in the ken, and said in a cheerful voice—

"Good-night, or rather good-morning to you all I hope we shall meet again soon, when we may be able to spend a little more time together than now."

"Hurrah!" cried the thieves. "Good-night, and good luck to you all three. some again to the old ken as soon as you can."

"We will," said Dick and Jack. "You may depend upon it that we will, my lads."

"Come on," cried Bob White. "Come on; who knows but the *millintery* may get outrageous, and come in all of a troop? Come on now, while you can."

Claude, Dick, and Jack, followed Bob through the opening in the wall; and as he preceded them with the lantern, it seemed as though they were diving right into the bowels of the earth, or exploring some long closed up mine, with a faint star to guide them. The air was mouldy and misty in that place, and they could feel that the ground upon which they trod was very damp, while here and there an absolute pool of water splashed under their feet.

"This is not the most delightful place in the world," said Claude. "It seems reeking with moisture."

"Well, perhaps," said old Bob, "it isn't the most delightfulest place in the world; but it's a deuced deal better than a cell in Newgate, I should say."

"Oh, there's no comparison," laughed Claude. "But what makes it so damp? It don't lie so very low, I think."

"It's always been so since the last time the Thames took a freak of rising about six feet higher than it was used to do. This old place was flooded then, and so was the ken; but what with the constant fire and the feet of the family coves, we got it out of the ken; but it never all *ewapooiwated* out of this here old passage."

The three friends smiled to themselves at the rather peculiar manner in which old Bob pronounced the word evaporation; but they controlled their inclina-

tion to laugh outright, for they had a respect for the old man which made them anxious to spare his feelings, independent of the fact that he was there and then doing them a very great service.

"Mind, Bob," said Dick, "that you put us down for the rent of the old wharf this year."

"Oh, that will be all right, I know. Don't say anything about that, old fellow. We know you all well enough to feel quite sure the payment is forthcoming some day or another."

"It shall be forthcoming at once," said Dick. "We have enough for that, although we are not what we consider in full feather, just now, Bob; but, you know, we have ways and means of getting more."

The old man laughed; but he did not refuse the money that Dick thus implied that he would hand to him. The passage now certainly did not improve in appearance or in comfort, for the sloppy condition of the ground of it was much worse as they neared its termination on the old wharf; and it was but natural that such should be the case; for it went on a slight incline all the way, and, of course, the lower part of it took the greatest possible amount of drainage from the upper.

Now and then, too, a suspicious scampering sort of noise, just on in advance of them, spoke eloquently of the presence of some of the reptile tribe.

"You have rats here," said Claude.

"A few," said Bob. "I don't think there's a great lot; for there ain't much to get here, you see, and they are wide enough awake for to look after their own insides, you see."

"Not a doubt of it, Bob. If you were to put a nice old Cheshire cheese now here for them, it would be doing them rather an extensive favour."

"Ah, catch me at it! But here we are."

As he spoke, the old man emerged from the long and dismal passage on to an old miserable wharf, that was upon the bank of the river. All was in intense darkness, for before leaving the passage, he had placed the lantern on the ground with its dark shade turned towards the wharf, as he did not know who might be on the look-out from the river.

"This is the place," he said, "and when your eyes get a little used to the out-of-door darkness, you will be able to see what a rummy old den it is; but there are several wherries generally moored off it, and one of them will be the thing."

CHAPTER CCXV.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT ON THE RIVER.—THE OLD BUILDING AT BUCKINGHAM-STREET.

CLAUDE and his friends looked about them as well as they were able, and they were not a little struck by the gloomy aspect of the place to which they had been led; and Jack, as he nearly fell over a piece of timber, said—

"Confound the place! why, it seems full of pit-falls, and man-traps."

"Well, it is, in a manner of speaking," said their guide, "and it's a good thing to look where you are going here. A false step might take you right into the tide in a moment, and then away you would go."

"And in the darkness, no help for you," said Dick.

"Not a bit—not a bit!"

"What's that?" said Claude, suddenly.

"Where—where?" said Dick.

There was a light upon the river for about the space of half a minute, and then it disappeared again. It was more like a flash upon the night air for an instant than anything else; but still, it was suspicious, for the long, darting ray

of light was, to the apprehension of Duval, decidedly directed towards the old wharf.

"Did you not see the light?" said Claude.

"I did," replied Jack.

"And so did I," said the old man; "and I shouldn't be at all surprised if it wasn't one of those confounded police galleys, as they call 'em, that go poking about in the dark to hinder folks from getting a living."

"If so, Bob," said Claude, "it is on the look-out for us to-night, you may depend."

"And if so," said Jack, "we are hemmed in regularly both by land and water; for the soldiers hold us one way and the galley the other. All we can do now is to lead the life of decoyed rats in this place, and finish off by eating each other."

"What a lively picture you draw, Jack."

"Ah, Claude, it may be nearly a true one; and there's the light again—I saw it, and so did you all."

"I did," said Bob, "and I tell you what it is. This place, as I said before, wasn't thought very well off by the police, and you may depend upon it, as sure as eggs is eggs, that they have got their eyes upon it to-night, and are not likely to take them off again. The sooner you get away the better."

"Good advice, Bob," said Claude; "but, like most of the same quality in this world, rather difficult to follow."

"Not at all; you all creep along by the side of the wall, and keep as close as you can till you get to the edge of the wharf. Mind you don't take one step too far and tumble over, that's all. When you get there, wait till you hear something of me. I know all the ins and outs of the old den better than most folks, and if I don't bring you a wherry soon, it will be something rather particular that hinders me. Good-by."

With this, Bob crouched down himself, and crawled away, leaving his friends to follow the good advice that he gave them.

"Come on," said Claude. "Follow me. I fancy I am something like a cat, for I can see capitally now, notwithstanding the darkness of this place; so I shall not lead you astray, any of you. Come on."

"We will follow."

Claude bent forward and kept his eyes fixed upon the ground before him, lest he should, notwithstanding he thought so much of his powers of observation in the dark, go a little too far; and he felt then quite convinced that he saw well enough to know when he should come to the extreme edge of the old wharf.

Moreover, his sense of hearing began to be of some assistance to him in that particular, for he could hear the water hissing and gurgling past the old rotten and tide-worn piers of the wharf; and as that sound increased upon his sense, he crept along still slower and slower, until he reached the verge of the wharf.

"Halt!" he said.

"All's right, Claude?" said Dick. "All's right? Is Bob there?"

"No, not yet; but everything is profoundly quiet now. I don't hear any sound of our enemies on the night air."

"Hush!" said Jack; "I hear a low kind of splashing, as if some boat were being very carefully rowed along. Ah, now I hear the oars working in the rollocks. Be upon your guard, Claude."

"I will. Hush! hush!"

The most profound stillness reigned in the place, and they all three of them faintly heard the sounds that Jack had spoken of as indicative of the approach of a boat. That it was Bob they all hoped and expected; but in that they were disappointed, for in a few moments a voice said—

"Hilloa! Who's there?"

Perhaps the most obvious policy of Claude would have been to keep profoundly still, but he hit upon a bold manœuvre, and in a moment he said—

"Police! Surrender yourselves, or we will fire!"

"Hold hard," said the voice again. "We are police. This is galley No. 4. Don't fire."

"Oh, all's right," added Claude. "Pass on, and don't make a noise. We have got scent of the game."

"Good luck to you, then. We won't be far off."

"I will flash a light if we want you," said Claude.

"Do—do. Good speed and good luck."

The boat which he, Claude, could only just dimly see low down in the water below the edge of the wharf, had some half dozen men in it; and as they glided away they looked like shadowy spectres in the night air, that, mixed with the vapour arising from the river, seemed floating like something tangible around that spot. Claude and his companions preserved the most profound stillness for nearly five minutes, and then Jack ventured in a low tone to speak.

"You did them, then, Claude. It was a capital move, and if anything will save us, it will."

"I think so, too," said Dick. "Half the danger is past now that these fellows are fairly taken in."

"Don't let us be too sanguine," said Claude. "Caution will do us no harm at all. I hear another boat coming. Crouch down, both of you; and if it be an enemy, I will try the same game with it."

"But it ain't," said a voice from the water, which they at once recognised as belonging to Bob. "What the deuce are you talking about?"

"Bob is it?"

"To be sure. I don't see nor hear any of the Philistines, and I really begin to think they have given it up as a bad job, do you know."

"Do you, Bob? Just listen to me a little, and I'll tell you what will open your eyes to the contrary."

Claude then in a few words told the old man what had taken place, and at its conclusion, Bob drew a long breath and said—

"Well, that was what I call taking a lion by the nose, or a mad bull. They say if you lay hold of a mad bull by the nose, he is all civility, and says directly, 'Anything you please, sir!' but the difficulty is to screw one's courage up to do it."

"I should think it was; and likewise to get the gentleman—I mean the bull—to stand still while you do it. But will your boat hold us all, Bob? for I suppose you are not in the water."

"Yes, come on; drop over one by one, and I will take hold of your legs and bring you down safely into the boat. There's a kind of fog getting up on the river, and if we can but get a quarter of a mile from here, we are all right."

"Do you intend going with us, Bob?"

"To be sure. I shan't feel happy to-night till I happen to know that you are all safe and sound; so come on."

It was rather a nervous kind of thing to do what Bob suggested, namely, to swing oneself off the edge of the old wharf in the trust that some one would take hold of one's legs and place them in safety; but Claude and his two friends were so much in the habit of doing all kinds of nervous and adventurous things, that they did not for many moments hesitate over this one—and in the course of a few minutes they were all three safely in a small wherry, that old Bob had got from its moorings not far off, and brought to the spot, borrowing it of its owner without the ceremony of asking his cognisance or sanction to the affair.

"All's right," said Bob. "Here you are. Now sit down, all of you, and be as quiet as lambs. You can't do any good, you know, and you may do no end of harm. I have a pair of skulls here, and will creep along close to the bank, and off we go."

The boat was pushed off, and it had scarcely got two yards out into the stream, when a broad gleam of light came from the old wharf, and a loud voice cried—

"Surrender yourselves, or we have orders to take you alive or dead! Resistance is useless!"

"That's a clever fellow," said Bob; "he is just in time to be too late. Ah! they see——"

"Escaped!" cried the voice again. "Escaped! Hold your light up, Watkins, while I fire at that boat. There you have it."

Bang! went a pistol, and one of the oars gave a jerk as the bullet touched it, and knocked a splinter off it.

"Any mischief?" said Claude, as he drew a pistol from his pocket. "Is any one hurt by that shot?"

"No!" was the simultaneous reply.

"Then I won't return it."

"Fire at them!" cried the voice from the wharf again. "Fire at them! There they go, my boys! Hold up the light."

Bang! bang! went two pistols. One bullet made a splash in the water, and the other hit the hat of Claude.

"They mean it," said Dick, "and I don't feel as if one ought to be made an animated target of here, and not return the compliment. So here goes. How do you like that?"

Dick took as good an aim as he could at the lantern that a man was holding up upon the wharf, and fired. There was a crashing sound, and then all was darkness.

"A capital shot that," said Bob. "What can the fellow be yelling about, I wonder? It was the lantern you hit, not him, I take it. Do you hear him?"

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried some one from the wharf.

"There's some mischief, at all events," said Claude. "Give me one of the oars, Bob. I can pull, and we shall get on all the better. That will do. Now for it—off and away."

Another shot was sent after the boat, and then all was still for a few minutes. Claude and Bob pulled very well together, and the boat shot along; but it was quite a mercy that there was nothing in her way, for if there had been, bump she must have gone against it, as the fog was so thick now that it was quite out of the question seeing above half a boat's length a-head of them.

"This fog is capital," said Dick.

"Ah!" said Jack, "but it will leave us in the lurch."

"What do you mean, Jack?"

"I mean that this is that sort of fog that sweeps over the face of the world often just before sunrise. I have watched it come, and watched it go many a time, and watched where it came from. It will vanish in a few minutes of time, and I take it as a sign that the morning is closer at hand than we all think."

"Hark!" said Dick. "That's a clock."

"St Paul's," said Bob.

The sound came faintly only through the mist upon the river; but yet, in the absence of other disturbing causes, they could count the hour of five distinctly enough to make them feel quite sure that it was no mistake.

"It is as I said," remarked Jack. "The day is coming."

"Pull away," said Bob. "There's a wharf a little further on that we can stop at; and if we can but secure a landing there, I do think we may baffle the bloodhounds yet."

Claude found that the old man was pulling with an energy that was hardly to to be expected at his time of life, and for a few moments it was quite as much as he could do to keep up with him, so as to prevent the boat from being turned out of its course. He did manage to do so, however; and then, in a low but distinct voice, Jack said—

"They are after us."

At this intimation, both Claude and Dick looked narrowly in the wake o the b at, and then they saw what it was that had induced Jack to speak as he had done, and they could not doubt but that he was perfectly correct in the statement that he made.

Creeping on after them through the fog, there was evidently a large boat, with

a light in its stern, for the rays of the light were thrown right on the boat, and revealed a crowd of dusky-looking figures within it; while, by the jerking movement of the light, it was quite evident that the boat was being urged through the water at great speed.

"Ah," said old Bob. "They are coming, sure enough."

"You think they are our foes?" said Claude.

"Not a doubt of it, I should say—not a doubt of it. They fancy they have got us into a regular line, now, and that they must run us down at last. But perhaps they may be mistaken after all. It isn't the best calculation that always turns out the thing in the end. Pull away."

"Yes," said Jack. "You may now pull away, both of you, as much as you like; but I don't think a couple of pairs of oars will do the work of six exactly, and no doubt they have that number of rowers. Ah! what are they about, now?"

Crack! went the report of a pistol, and those in the little wherry could hear the bullet go whistling over their heads.

"A little too high, I take it," said Bob. "They may blaze away at us in this fog, and not do much mischief, after all."

"But the fog is going," said Jack. "Look how much whiter it is getting each moment. I tell you, Bob, if you don't pull in on shore with us in another ten minutes at the latest, the river will be clear, and they will see us as well as if they had us in their own boat."

"There's reason enough in that," said the old man; "but just wait a bit. It won't do to pull in shore now, for there is no place to land at; and as they come on, they would soon see us; for you may depend they keep a sharp look-out now for fear we should double upon them in any way."

"What's this confounded lump of something in the bottom of the boat?" said Dick. "I have been knocking my feet against it I don't know how often. What the deuce can it be?"

"A lump of stone," said Bob. "Don't throw it over, I want it."

"You want it?"

"Yes, to be sure I do, or else I shouldn't have got hold of it, and put it in the wherry, I can tell you. Do you think it's rather a weighty affair, Master Dick?"

"In truth, I do. Why, it's enough to sink the boat."

"Ha! ha!"

With this significant kind of laugh, that none who were with him at all understood the meaning of, old Bob only pulled away still. And now the truth of Jack's prognostications of the weather began to be very apparent, for the fog got whiter and whiter each instant, and seemed to be upon the point of rolling away altogether, for it moved about in flimsy masses, and now and then, through open places in the vapour, the banks of the river might be seen quite plainly in the early morning light that was beginning to make itself apparent on the face of nature.

CHAPTER CCXVI.

AN ALARMING EXPEDIENT.—THE LANDING-PLACE AT THAMES STREET.

"It's going now," said Jack—"it's going now."

"What's going?"

"The fog—the fog."

"Yes," said Dick, "and here comes the police-galley, so I rather think, Claude, that it's no use pulling any more, and tiring yourself. If we are to have a fight for it, the sooner it begins the better, for then the sooner it will be over."

"No," said Bob, as he suddenly shipped his oar. "As you say, it is of no use pulling. They must catch us now."

"What!" said Claude, "do you mean to say that you give up so easily? I will not be taken alive, and I will not die without a struggle. If this is to be the day upon which I go into the other world, I will not go alone. So let them come on, if they will do so, and take the chances of the fight."

As he spoke, Claude stooped down in the boat, but he kept his eyes intently fixed upon the now rapidly approaching police-galley.

"It's no use," said Bob; "you can do nothing."

"I can shoot a couple of them," said Claude.

"Don't, don't. Will you keep your pistols out of sight for a moment or two, and trust to——"

"Yes, if you can do anything, Bob."

"I can try."

"Ah," said Dick, "I can guess what he means to try, and it may do. We will leave all in your hands, Bob. Now try what it will come to. Leave him alone, Jack, and let him carry out his plan, for I have some reason to think it is not a bad one."

"I know it isn't," said Bob. "Crouch down all of you, and don't say one word."

They did as the old man asked them, but although both Claude and Jack now saw by his movements what he intended to try to do, they neither of them had great hopes that it would be very successful upon that occasion. Men such as they were, and leading the wild adventurous life that they led, were much more capable of keeping quiet even under the disastrous danger that threatened them, than as if they had been ordinary members of society; and, consequently, they let the old man have everything his own way.

The fog had not quite gone, but it was reduced to rather a thin fleecy kind of mist, that confused rather than hid objects from view. The police-galley, with its flaring light, that now looked red and lurid through the vapour, came pressing on.

Bob raised his voice.

"Hilloa!—Police there!"

"Hilloa!" was the response. "Wherry a-head! It's no use trying to get away. We have you."

"We know it," said Bob, "and don't want any bloodshed, so you may come on. When a man's time comes, it's no use kicking."

"No tricks," said the voice from the police-galley. "There are twelve of us here, so you will but sacrifice your lives at once by any useless resistance. You had better give up at once."

"That's what we mean.—Come on—come on."

The boat now went very lazily on with the stream, which happened to be running down at the time, and in a very few seconds the police-galley was quite close upon them.

"The first man that makes the least resistance," said a voice, "I will shoot dead upon the spot."

"The boat-hook," whispered Bob to Jack. "It's lying along the gunwale, there."

"I have it."

"Hook 'em fast, then."

At the same moment that some one from the police-galley made a plunging abortive effort with a boat-hook to catch hold of the side of the wherry, Jack, with the boat-hook that Bob had pointed out to him, caught a firm clutch of the galley. The two craft were drawn alongside of each other, and then, with a strength and a suddenness that was quite marvellous, Bob raised the heavy block of stone, and flung it right into the centre of the galley.

"There you are," he said. "Put the darbies on that, but don't think to put such tricks upon travellers again."

There was a sharp sudden crash, and the heavy jagged block of granite went right through the centre of the police-galley. The galley lurched over and began to fill rapidly.

"Pull away!" cried Bob, as he snatched his oar and plunged it into the stream —"pull away!"

"Help!—help!" cried the voices from the galley.

A couple of pistols were fired at random, and in another moment down went the galley, head-foremost, as if diving into the river, and the twelve men were left struggling for life in the stream.



CLAUDE GETS SHOT AT BY A BOW-STREET RUNNER.

Claude seized the other oar, and without a word commenced seconding the exertions of old Bob. Not a word was spoken by either of them for nearly five minutes, during which time they had made great progress from the scene of action. Then it was the old man who broke the silence, by saying, in a calm voice—

"I do think we shall have a very fine day, by the colour of the mist that still clings about the banks of the river."

"Upon my life," said Claude, "you take things easily, Bob. How many, if any, of those fellows could swim, I wonder?"

"If that part of their education," said Bob, "has been very much neglected by their parents and guardians, you know, it ain't our fault, you know, by any sort of means."

Dick executed a long whistle, and then he said—

"I tell you what it is. If I live to be a hundred years old I shan't forget the crash with which that stone went right through the bottom of the boat."

"You see it was rather jagged, and had no end of ugly points and corners about it, so it was sure to go; and I daresay it hunt some of their toes at the same time."

"Well," said Jack, "after all, you know, Claude, they would have either taken our lives here upon the river, or dragged us to prison with the hope of taking them on the scaffold, so that in self-defence we were right enough, I take it, with what we did with them."

"Agreed," said Claude. "Don't mistake me, Bob. I am much obliged to you for the skill and promptitude with which you have saved us from what would have been certain death or capture. I still only regret, as I always shall, that no other way presented itself than that of putting twelve men into the water. But they brought it on themselves."

"To be sure," said Bob; "and, after all, an officer ain't like another human being. They know their chances, and they think to get on and drink their brandy-and-water on the strength of frightening other folks; but with us it don't do; and if they are such fools as not to have found that out, why, they must take the consequences, that's all; and whether they sink or swim don't much matter. They won't be any great loss to society at large."

"You are quite a philosopher, Bob."

"I believe you. But now I advise that we pull right across the stream, and land at some of the little quays an the other side. There's half-a-dozen there to one that there is on this side, and then you can think of what is best to be done."

"I am for the country at once," said Claude.

"And I," said Jack and Dick, simultaneously.

"Agreed, then. We will get our horses as soon as possible, and set off out of London; for after this freak, I should say it would be too hot to hold us."

"Very good," said Bob, "and I shall quietly get back to the old public in the Mint, and look as if nothing had happened at all."

"And if a good face can carry things off," said Dick, with a laugh, "you are just the man, Bob, to do it. You may depend upon it that when we find ourselves pretty well to do in the world, and the fates have sent us some tolerably full purses, we shall not forget you."

"Oh, I know that's all right. You never did forget the old man, and you are not at all likely to begin now; so I am satisfied upon that head, you see."

"You may be," said Claude.

"I think we ought to give Bob a distinct promise," said Jack.

"Very good."

"I propose, then, that we ask him what sum of money will compass any particular wants that he may happen to have."

"Good again," said Dick. "Come now, Bob, don't be modest. Just say what sum of money would make you tolerably comfortable."

"Why, you see," said Bob, "the honest truth is, I don't myself want for anything; but I have a young fellow, a son, and he is in love with a good girl, but they can't afford to marry, cos, you see, all that I have is locked up in the property of the old ken, and I seem as if I should not like to shut it up, or to let it go into other hands while I lived."

"Certainly not, Bob."

"Very well, then, if you could spare among you about a hundred and fifty pounds, you see, some day when you are quite lucky, and can easily place your hands upon it, I should be glad of it for the young folks."

"It shall be done," said Claude. "We all promise; and if we live, Bob, you may expect it soon."

"Don't hurry at all about it."

"We both promise likewise," said Jack and Dick; "so you may consider that as settled."

"I do," said Bob, "and it's quite a weight off my mind, I can assure you. I was in love myself once, and hadn't the money to keep a house over the head of her that took my fancy a kind of prisoner, and popped the darbies, in a way of speaking, on my affections, and locked me up in the stone jug of her charms; so I can feel for the young folks a little."

The three friends laughed heartily at old Bob's highly figurative description of his love-making; and now they got right across the river, and pulled the boat into a little landing place that was at one end of a little miserable turning out of Thames-street.

A water-jack pulled the boat's nose right in shore, and begged for the job of taking care of it, which our friends were nothing loth to give him.

"Mind you keep a good look-out on the sticks," said Bob; "there's so many bad characters about, you know."

"All's right, sir. I'll keep my eyes on 'em."

"Do so. We shan't be gone very long."

"Very good, sir."

Claude could hardly preserve his gravity at the calm, steady, and precise manner in which the old man acted his part, and as they walked up the narrow sloppy turning to Thames Street, he said, "Really, Bob, I had no sort of idea you had one half of the accomplishments that you have exhibited to us."

"Ah, Duval, when I was a young one it was all right enough with me. I was up to everything that you could think of. But now my race is nearly run, though to-night's proceedings have roused me up a little, and once or twice I felt as if a matter of thirty years had gone from me, and I was something like what I used to be."

"Ah," said Dick, "we are all getting old."

"None of your gammon," said Bob.

They all laughed, and then Jack said, "Now, it will be much better for you two to go into some house, and keep yourselves quite quiet, while I get the horses, and thus it will create less observation. I will just go in with you, and make as much change as I can in my looks, without our vallise, with our things in it, and then I will be off."

"That's the best plan," said Bob.

"I think it is,' said Claude; "but it is rather too bad, Jack, to give you all the bother of it, especially after your night's fatigue. Shall I go and get the cattle? I will do so cheerfully, if you are at all tired."

"No—no, Claude, I can go, so let me do it. I am less known than you are, I am quite certain, and so run much less risk."

No further opposition was now made by any of them; and after walking a considerable distance up Thames Street, they got into Cannon Street, and paused at length at a house not a long way from Blackfriars. Jack, as he said he would, made what alterations in his appearance he could, and then set off for the horses.

"Good-by," said old Bob. "I am off home now, for you recollect I left it in rather an uncomfortable state."

He shook hands heartily with them all, and then off he went, and Dick and Claude hired a private room in the tavern they stopped at, and waited the arrival of Jack with the horses with no little impatience, for they were now most anxious to get off to the country as quickly as they possibly could.

In about an hour Jack came back, mounted upon his own steed, and safely leading Dick's and Claude's. They soon settled their reckoning at the tavern,

and mounting, they at a sharp trot got into Fleet Street, and so took their way down the Strand westwards.

"Oh, what a relief is this!" said Claude, when after traversing Piccadilly, they fairly got out into the open country.

"Yes," said Dick, "I feel it as such; but at times I like to visit one of the old kens. They are not only useful to a fellow when he is fairly hunted, but by their contrast with the brightness and the beauty of the country, they make him satisfied when he gets to it again."

"As for me," said Jack, "I could live and die in the open country. It has grown upon me now to be a great delight. But are you going to keep on this road, Claude, or shall we get on the regular western one?"

"What do you say, Dick?"

"Any road but the one which, if pursued a little too far, would take me to Oxford, will suit capitally for me, I should say; for even Oxford Street brings a disagreeable crick in the neck."

Claude laughed as he said—

"Well—well, we need not get further than Southal on the Oxford road; and I propose that you both come with me to the farm at Ealing, where Cicely is, and then that we dine there, and have a rest; and then, after which, we can push on to Southal, and regularly take the road as the shadows of the evening begin to creep about the old trees."

"Agreed—agreed."

"If we are not intruding upon you," added Dick.

"Now, I do think you are laughing at me," said Claude. "The idea at this time of day, after all we have gone through together, of you, Dick, talking about intruding upon me is rather too rich."

"Well, but I really——"

"You really, nonsense Don't say another word about it whatever you do, my dear fellow, but let us cut across Hyde Park her, and get along the best way we can to Ealing."

They were all sufficiently familiar with that part of the suburbs of London, to enable them to go the nearest way to any given point; so they soon reached Ealing Common, and in three minutes from that time they were at the old farm again, where Cicely ever awaited the appearace of Claude, while in his absense a thousand fears for his safety agitated her bosom.

The people of the farm made them all three as welcome as they possibly could, and it was one hour before sunset when they again mounted and took the road with the intention of having a sharp trot to Southal.

CHAPTER CCXVII.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURE WITH THE PLAYERS NEAR SOUTHAL.

THE sun sunk rapidly as the three adventurers got out into the open country beyond the then pretty and rural village of Hanwell, which has since been spoilt by the huge asylum, that, with a melancholy suggestion, meets the gaze at every turn. The trees were gently waving to and fro in the evening air, and the birds had all retired to rest, save some few late songsters, who yet circled the topmost boughs of the tall trees, and caught some faint reflection of the fading glories of the sun.

"This is a fine scene," said Claude, "and one that has rather a different effect upon the feelings to that which is produced by such a combination of circumstances as that which heralded us to the Thames only a short time ago."

"A.," said Dick, "and to me it is a finer scene than——"

"Never mind what, Dick," said Jack. "Just look ahead, and be so good as to say what you see coming on at a tolerable speed."

They all glanced forwards at this speech, and beheld a chariot emerge from a cross-road. A postilion was driving a pair of rather lean and scraggy horses; and from the white bow in his hat, it was rather evident that something in the shape of a wedding was going on in the neighbourhood.

"Now, if that were the bride and bridegroom," said Claude, "I would stop them, just to have a look at the lady."

"Why not?" said Dick. "It may be so. Who shall say to the contrary? "What do you think of the set-out, Jack?"

"Why, that at the force it is going at it will all break down together soon if it don't moderate. Ah, you see the old postilion only put his steeds to their mettle upon emerging from the lane, and now they go at a pretty jog trot."

This was the fact, for the post-chaise was drawn over the ground at a very slow pace, indeed, now that the high-road was fairly reached, by the miserable cattle that were harnessed to it; and, upon the whole, so strange a set-out was seldom to be met with so near to the metropolis.

"Well, Claude," said Dick, "I see that you are hankering to stop the coach. Do so, and Jack and I will keep back, so that you may have it all your own way in the matter."

"Very good. I will let you know if there be any fun going on. I don't think there is a soul in sight besides ourselves."

"Not one, with the exception of the carriage occupants."

"Here goes then," said Claude, and he trotted after the chaise, which he soon came up with. Duval upon this occasion did what he very seldom did in the day time even, and that was to put upon his face a small half mask, with a dependent piece of crape that came down nearly to his mouth, and which effectually prevented anything in the shape of recognition at the moment.

"Hold!" he cried to the postilion, "upon your life, hold!"

The man immediately drew up, exclaiming—

"Oh, Lord! here is a highwayman in arms, as I'm a sinner! Oh, good sir, spare us all, do, and don't blow our brains out upon the spot."

"If you keep your horses still you are as safe as if you were at home in your own bed; but if you play any tricks, I would not give a bad sixpence for your life. Be warned."

"Oh, lor, yes, sir. Certainly, sir. I am very sorry, indeed, sir—very sorry, and won't move an inch."

Claude went up to the coach door, and the moment he got there, he heard a loud voice cry,—

"What's this—what's all this, eh? Am I to be continually annoyed by all the world, eh, eh?"

The window was let down, and the face of a man, of about sixty years of age, presented itself. Old age is frequently venerable and becoming, but this face was wrinkled with dissipation, and the eyes had a bleard and blood-shot look, such as in youth is sad to see; but in age, if arising from excesses, is most particularly revolting. The countenance, too, was of that purplish sanguine hue, which bespeaks a great attention to the bottle in some shape or another.

The voice of this detestable character more resembled the bow-wow-wow of some cross-tempered dog than anything else.

"Well, sir," said Claude, "who are you?"

The old gentleman looked so amazed at this question, that his eyes quite protruded out of his head, like those of some fish after it has been rather over-boiled. Before he could form any reply, or find words in which to express his overpowering indignation, a faint voice from the inside of the carriage cried,—

"Oh, Sir Felix, give the wretch a guinea or two, and let us get on to the Grove. Do, Sir Felix, for my sake."

"Oh, bother your sake," said the old gentleman. "Hold your tongue, madam, will you? Confound you—Pof!"

The pronunciation of this word "pof," seemed to be some insane peculiarity of the old gentleman. Certainly, it was not a piece of jocularity, for to judge from

his countenance, nobody could be in a greater rage than he was at that moment.

"Sir Felix," said Claude, "I will trouble you for your money, watch, and valuables, if you please, or else I shall be under the necessity of taking them, in a manner that won't be half so pleasant as if you gave them up yourself quietly."

"Police!—police!" cried Sir Felix. "Watch—watch! Police! Murder! A highwayman!"

"These cries are quite useless, sir. You will only bring danger upon yourself, but none upon me."

"Cora," said the female voice from within the carriage, "Cora, you speak to the fellow, and tell him that there is nothing here for him. He will not be such a brute as to stop a bride on her way to the home of her dear bridegroom."

"Oh, mother!" said a soft and gentle voice, that was like music itself, "how can you speak to me in such a way, when you know that tears are on my cheeks, and that my heart is desolate?"

"Fiddlesticks! You are married now to Sir Felix, and it is too late to speak about your heart, now. You should have thought of all that in the church, and stopped the ceremony."

"Oh, mother, did not I go upon my kness to you, but you forced me to this, you know you did, forced me to this by an untruth? Oh, Arthur, Arthur! where are you now?"

"Silence, minx!"

"Silence, wife!" cried the old gentleman, and then—as though that word had tickled him very much—he burst out into a chuckle, that ended in a cough that nearly carried him off. He was obliged to lean back in the coach to recover himself. A scraggy looking specimen of female humanity now appeared at the window, and said—

"Now, my good man, go away. There is half-a-guinea for you. Of course, you will be hanged, some day, and serve you right, too. Go away directly, man. We don't want to have anything more to say to you. Samuel, drive on directly, or you will get your discharge."

"Yes, marm," said Samuel; "I'll be shot if I do!"

"You wretch, what do you mean?"

"Spare your anger, madam," said Claude; "I shall, I see, be under the necessity of shooting Sir Felix. It is always much easier to rifle a dead body than a living one, provided you do it before it has had time to stiffen."

"Oh, murder!" cried Sir Felix. "Here's my purse—Here's my watch—Oh dear!—Oh dear! what a loss! Take them; but I can't die just yet, with such a load of wine in my cellar as I have. Oh dear—oh dear! I shall be a long time getting over this, that I shall."

Claude took the purse and the watch. The former was heavy, and the latter glittered with jewels. It was no bad booty, that, for a beginning to the evening.

"What are you about, Cora?" cried the rather scraggy female, as the glass window of the door on the other side of the chaise was suddenly let down.

"Nothing, mother—oh, nothing—nothing."

"Pull up that window again, directly. Do you want dear Sir Felix to get his death of cold and leave you a widow, you unfeeling monster? When a man of property marries you, you ought to study him all your days, that you ought."

Sir Felix gave a terrible grunt, and then Claude, turning to the postilion, said—

"You may go on now, and the less you say about this little affair will be the better for you all. You won't get your money back again, Sir Felix, and it is much better to leave me alone than to make a foe of me. Good-afternoon, or I may rather say evening, for it is that time now. Drive on, Samuel."

Samuel did drive on, having quite satisfied himself that the highwayman was willing for him to do so; and then Claude returned laughing to his two companions, with the purse and the watch in his hand.

"What booty?" said Dick.

"Oh, pretty good, I should say. There ought to be something handsome in

this purse, by its feel; but after the manner in which we were taken in a little time ago, I am always suspicious of chancing hasty conclusions."

"Look at it, then."

Claude emptied some of the contents of the purse into his hand, and even by the fading light of evening, he was satisfied that they were real golden guineas that lay glittering before him.

"All's right. This is no take-in, Jack. I don't think you have a watch, just now, have you?"

"Not I," said Jack. "The one I had didn't go very well, and I tossed it into a tree, where it hung by the chain and seals enough to puzzle a conjurer, from a distance, to know what it was. Do you mean to make me a present of one, Claude?"

"Yes, of this one that I have just had handed to me, if you will accept of it, friend Jack."

"Certainly. All's fish that comes to the net; so I'll keep it till I get a good offer for it; or it gets some stray knock that at once disorders its inside, and prevents it going as it ought to do, and then, ten to one, but I throw it away."

"You should sell it," said Dick. "You will always find a customer for a watch among the fences in London."

"But that is throwing it away, Dick, with the additional mortification of knowing that it is picked up by a rascal. So I decline that mode of getting rid of it except in dire extremity. What's that, Claude, that lies on the ground just where the chaise stood?"

"It looks like a white handkerchief."

"And it is one, too," said Dick.

"Perhaps it means something," added Jack. "I'll pick it up."

He rapidly dismounted, and picking up the handkerchief, which was wrapped up rather carefully, a folded paper dropped from it to the ground. Jack picked up that likewise, and cried out—

"Here's a billet, I'll be bound for Claude, written by the young lady on the spur of the moment, while he was robbing her husband. Read it, Claude, and tell us what it is all about."

"Read it yourself, Jack, as you have it."

"Very good. There is just light enough, I think. No, hang it if there is, though, or else my eyes are bad. The letters run into one another in rather a confusing way."

Both Dick and Claude tried, by the dim light, to read what was on the paper, but could not, and Jack had to light a little match for the purpose of reading it; and so by holding it up and down the paper, Jack managed to read aloud the following words—

"These lines are addressed to any man of humanity who may chance to read them. I am a young girl, not quite nineteen years of age; and my mother has forced me to become the wife of Sir Felix Brown, whom I abhor. I resisted until she swore to me that she had committed a criminal offence that Sir Felix only knew of; and that if I would not marry him, she would be dragged to a prison —perhaps, to a scaffold; but when the ceremony was over, she tauntingly told me that that was all a delusion, merely got up for my own good, as Sir Felix was very rich, and would support us both in splendour at Lime Grove, his estate, near to Southal. I write this in the little bed-room of an inn, where they are baiting the horses; and I implore whoever finds this paper, to send it or take it to Cornet Tarlton, at the Barracks at Knightsbridge; and tell him that I yet hope he will come to rescue me from a fate worse than death itself! Oh, have pity upon the unhappy Cora!"

After this rather singular communitation had been read, our three friends looked at each other with some surprise, as well they might; for the extremity in the fortunes of the young girl who signed herself Cora must have been serious, indeed, when her only hope was to throw herself in such a way upon the charity and good feeling of strangers.

CHAPTER CCXVIII.

DETAILS SOME PROCEEDINGS AT LIME GROVE.—THE RESCUE.

Claude broke the silence, by saying to them both—

"What is your opinion of this affair? Is it one of those things that are likely to give us either profit or satisfaction in the following up? The billet has a genuine air about it."

"Of that there can be no possible doubt," said Dick. "It is quite genuine, and, for my part, I do not for a moment doubt anything of its statements."

"Nor I," said Jack.

"Well, then, if that is the case," responded Claude with a smile, "what do you say to a trot to Lime Grove?"

"Agreed!" they both cried.

"Yes," added Claude, "we will go; but there is no reason on earth why we should neglect business upon the road; so if we do meet with any chances, I vote against throwing them away by any means."

"And so do I," said Dick. "We can easily enough, in our pleasant professional pursuit, combine business with pleasure; and while we choose to play the knight-errant, in the way of succouring beauty and virtue in distress, I have no sort of objection to empty as many pockets as possible."

"Well spoken, Dick. Come on."

Claude had taken the billet of the enforced bride from the hands of Jack, and he took good care to place it in a secure pocket, for he did not know how useful it might chance to be to him when they should arrive at Lime Grove, which they did not anticipate the slightest difficulty in reaching.

The ride that they now took was a very pleasant—indeed, one may say a delightful one. It was through a prettily diversified country; and as the moon rose—it was but a young moon—a faint and gentle silvery radiance seemed to fill the air, as though some gauze-like vapour, spangled with stars, were floating between heaven and earth.

In the distance they began to see the twinkling lights of Southal, and Claude pointed them out to his friends, saying—

"This is Southal, and a pleasant village enough you will find it, take it for all in all."

"Not a doubt of it," said Dick. "I know it pretty well, and have passed a pleasant enough hour at the George Inn there. Why, we shall be there in the course of ten minutes, now."

"Yes, we have made quick work of it, I rather think; but hark! I hear a horse's footstep. Let us draw off to the side of the road, and reconnoitre a little. It is just possible that the kind fates are about to throw something in our way before we get to Lime Grove, where we have to do what we can for the disconsolate Cora."

They all three moved off to the side of the road, and in a few seconds they heard some one muttering to himself as he rode on. The moonlight was not sufficiently powerful to enable our adventurers to see very clearly the person; but by the general appearance, it was evidently some one who basked in the beams of sunny fortune. The horse, too, from its shape and action, could not possibly be mistaken for other than a good one, so that, taking those circumstances into account, Claude thought that it would quite, in a manner of speaking, be flying in the face of Providence if he did not take some notice of the passing passenger. He accordingly rode out from the deep shadow of the trees on the road side, leaving Dick and Jack still concealed; and crossing the path of the horseman, he said—

"Good evening, sir."

The stranger stopped instantly.

"Good evening," repeated Claude.

"I don't know you, sir," said the horseman, in not the most courteous tones.

"Perhaps you will be so good as to say who you are, sir, for I cannot recognise you by your voice."

"Oh, I am an old friend, and was coming to call upon you."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, to be sure. I want to borrow a trifle of you; and as it might be very



CORA'S RECEPTION OF THE CORNET AT SIR FELIX'S.

inconvenient to name a sum, perhaps it will be as well if I say at once that what you happen to have about you will do very well, without further trouble."

"Perhaps, sir," said the stranger, "I am to conclude that you are a highwayman, then?"

"If you please."

"Take that, then, and a good riddance to society you will be. I am very glad I met with you."

With these words, the stranger, in the most off-handed manner possible, fired a a pistol right into Claude's face, and the bullet actually tore the lower part of his ear. At the moment he was so astonished at this sudden assault, that he sat like a rock upon his horse, and he was only roused by Dick and Jack suddenly rushing up to the spot, and knocking the man off his horse to the ground.

They made sure that he had killed Duval, so that the blow with which they knocked him down was not the most gentle one in all the world, and he lay quite still upon the ground. Dick then cried out to Claude—

"Hilloa, Duval! Are you hurt?"

"Speak, Claude, speak!" said Jack, "I shall think you are mortally wounded, if you don't."

"Oh, it's all right enough," said Claude. "Confound the fellow, I believe he has taken away a bit of my left ear; which is rather an awkward thing, as if the officers only get hold of the fact, they will describe me by it to a certainty. I hadn't the least idea that he was going to blaze away in that style."

"Nor we—nor we; but when we saw the flash of the pistol, we saw that mischief was intended.

"Hold my horse, Jack, while I dismount and see how he is; I hope he ain't much hurt; for, after all, you know, it was quite fair, and he was right enough."

"It might be right enough for him, Claude," said Jack, as he held the horse; "but it was anything but right enough for you. Upon my word, you take these things so very easy, that one would think you have a charmed life, and know the fact well."

"I do sometimes think, Jack, that such is the case. You know I am something of a fatalist, and go so far, at times, in my belief, as to fancy that when a bullet comes out of the barrel of a pistol, it has a certain person to hit or no one to hit; so it's no use getting out of the way,"

Claude dismounted and stooped over the insensible form of the man, and then he said—

"By all that's uncomfortable, I do think he is dead!"

"Dead!" cried Jack and Dick.

"Yes. He looks so. Let us take him to some house. Ah, we shall see him better now, for the moon is peeping out again. There it comes. All's right. What's this he has got on?"

"A red waistcoat," said Dick.

"And what's this?" said Claude, as he took something from the pocket of the waistcoat and held it up.

"Why, it's an officer's staff. The fellow is a constable, after all, and that accounts for his being so uncommonly handy with his pistols."

"It does. I thought no ordinary person would be so well prepared with fire-arms, and so prompt in the use of them; but a thought strikes me, Jack, and you, Dick, which I think is a happy one."

"What is it, Dick?"

"Suppose I put on this fellow's red waistcoat, and take this little gilt staff in my pocket, and then we can all three go to the residence of this Sir Felix, of whom we are in search, and pass ourselves off for officers, giving him a sham account of how there is to be an attack made upon his house to-night by housebreakers, and so getting possession of the premises, and effectually protecting the young girl, who has been forced into a marriage so very much against her inclination. What say you?"

"Agreed," said Dick.

"And it's a good plan," said Jack. "But what shall we do with this man, or his body, if he be dead?"

"He is not dead."

"Not dead? I am glad of that."

"No, he is not dead. I have had my hand upon his heart for the last five minutes, and there is plenty of life in him yet. He is only stunned, and the longer he remains so the better it will be for us, you know. Suppose we take him to some road-side cottage, and leave him there for safety? for the poor devil will get ridden over in the road-way, here, and if we put him in the hedge, it won't do him much good. Where's his horse, Jack?"

"Oh, that started off London-way some time ago."

"Come on, then. I will place him upon mine till we come to a place of safety for him, and there we will leave him."

They took away the red waistcoat from the officer, and the staff, and then buttoning his coat closely round him, they laid him on Claude's horse, and went in search of some little inn or cottage at which they might leave him, and where he might get, at all events, the little attention that his case required. They were not many minutes in finding a cottage, and then after a little debate among themselves, they thought the best way was not to disturb the people if they could help it, but to prop him up against the door of it, and leave them to find him out.

This was an idea that they lost no time in carrying out. Claude took the officer by the head, and Jack took him by the legs, and so they, between them, very quietly placed him against the door of a cottage, within which they could hear the people talking, but to whom they gave no sort of disturbance by this proceeding.

When they had all mounted again, Jack said—

"I suppose, Claude, you have no objection to the people being let known that some one is at the door?"

"Not in the least, if you can do it, Jack, without our being delayed by getting into any talk or altercation with them about it—That is all that I wish to avoid."

"Oh," said Jack, "I have provided myself with a means of accomplishing all that, I think."

Jack had picked up from the ground a good sized, round pebble; and being a tolerable marksman with a stone, he threw it right through one of the little diamond-shaped panes of glass in the cottage window.

"Let us see if any one comes out," said Dick.

They all paused a moment or two, and then they saw the door of the cottage opened suddenly, and a woman rushed out with such precipitation, no doubt to try and catch the individual who had thrown the stone, that over she went into the road-way over the insensible officer.

"That will do," said Claude.

"Yes," said Jack, "but she will rouse the whole parish, if she goes on bellowing in that sort of way. Confound her! what on earth does she mean by it?"

"Only that she will call herself hoarse in a few moments," said Claude. "Come on, Jack. You cannot stop a woman's tongue; you ought by this time to know that well enough, and that it is of no use your trying so to do."

"Why, Claude," said Dick, with a laugh, "surely that is a singularly ungallant speech for you to make; I thought that you were the greatest possible favourite with the ladies."

"And so I am," replied Claude, "but it is not by praising them for virtues they don't possess. It is by telling them their faults, and then showing them that I love them in spite of all those faults. Then they know I am sincere."

"I am answered, Claude."

They all trotted away, and soon left the cottage and the insensible officer behind them; and the shouts of the woman who had tumbled over him upon the little door-step, likewise faded away from their hearing. Claude put on the red waistcoat of the officer. Our readers are well aware, no doubt, that in old times—indeed in not very old times—the red waistcoat was the distinguishing mark of the Bow-street officer, or runner, as he was then called.

From their peculiarity in that respect, they got the sobriquet of Robin Redbreast; and if a thief only saw the tip of a red waistcoat, he knew his danger

directly. The officers of the present day are a little more scientific, and do not carry about with them such an insignia of their profession, to warn evil-doers not to leave off being evil-doers, but get out of the way of the consequences.

"Now for Lime Grove," said Claude; "and as we, none of us, know where it is, we had better trot right into Southal, and ask the first person we meet for the place."

They accordingly trotted on at a good pace, and were soon in the village. The next morning was market morning, so that amid other sounds in the village there was a plentiful assortment of noises, incidental to turkeys, geese, pigs, sheep, and other creatures of the farm. Our friends drew rein at the door of the Old George Inn; and having indulged themselves with a glass of something strong each, Claude asked the landlord which was Lime Grove.

"Oh, sir, it ain't to say exactly in Southal, but about a quarter of a mile on the London road. You will know it in a moment by a large iron gate, and an avenue of trees, and there's a sheet of water close by it."

Claude had noticed this place as they came along without at all suspecting that it was that of which they were in search; but he was better pleased that it should be out of the village than in it, and they turned their horses' heads again in the direction whence they had come.

"There it is," said Claude. "There's the iron gates, and there's the water, don't you see it?"

"Yes," said Dick, "and a goodly place it looks. After all, I think our friend, Miss Cora, might get a worse home."

"There is no worse home in all the world," said Jack, "than the home you don't love."

CHAPTER CCXIX.

SIR FELIX FINDS HIS NEW FRIENDS VERY TROUBLESOME.

Lime Grove was rather a considerable estate to all appearance, and the iron gates which stood at its entrance were rare specimens of the ancient art of casting in metals. They were supported by stone buttresses of great strength and solidity, and beyond these, sure enough, was the avenue of lime-trees.

Those limes looked extremely beautiful by the moon-beams that were just gently silvering the edges of the leaves, while the slight night-breeze that was up was just sufficient to give them a stirring motion and to break up the moonlight into silvery particles.

It was a beautiful scene.

By the right hand side of the large iron gates, there was a pretty picturesque lodge, and a light shining from one of its windows showed that some one occupied it.

"I suppose," whispered Jack to Claude, "it won't do to gallop right on if we could even open the gates? It will be best to speak to the people at the lodge first?"

"Oh, yes," said Claude. "Let us do everything quite regular—as we are officers, you know."

"Oh, oh! yes, to be sure."

"Hilloa—lodge! lodge!" cried Claude.

A man made his appearance, with a lantern, in the course of a couple of minutes.

"What is it?" he said.

"Is Sir Felix within?"

"Yes, sir, he is within; but I think he is rather busy, if you please, sir. Perhaps you don't know, sir, that he has been married to-day; and so you see, sir, perhaps you will call again?"

This speech of the lodge-porter was so far satisfactory, that it quite put at rest

any doubts, however slight, that Claude and his friends might have regarding their being at the right place, and Claude made answer at once—

"If he were even so busy, our business with him is of a nature that he will not be very well pleased to have delayed. I am an officer of police, and so are these two gentlemen. We have ridden from London on purpose to see Sir Felix, on a matter of the very greatest importance to him and to all of you."

The lodge-keeper looked rather aghast at this news, for Claude spoke in a solemn and earnest tone, so as to induce in him a firm belief that it was a matter of the greatest importance upon which he came.

"Oh, Lord!" said the man, "it isn't any danger, is it?"

"Yes,—serious danger."

"You don't mean to say so, sir? I'll run up to the house and see if master will speak to you, sir."

"Open the gates. We will walk inside."

"Oh, yes, of course. It's all right to officers; and now I look at you, sir, I see your red waistcoat."

"Yes, my friend; and you may be still further convinced by this. You recognise this little emblem of authority, no doubt?"

As he spoke, Claude produced the little staff with the gilt crown at the end of it; and if the porter at the lodge of Lime Grove had had the smallest lingering doubt respecting the character of the guests, it was thus removed. He opened the gates, saying,—

"Come in—come in, gentlemen. You had better ride up with me to the house at once. Wife—wife!"

"Yes, Joseph?"

"Look to the gate."

"I would advise you, my friend," said Claude, "to lock the gate and give me the key. The fact is, that if we had not ridden down here to-night, you would all have been brutally murdered before the morning."

"Murdered?"

"Yes; but do not alarm yourself. We intend to stay here all the night, and to take care of the premises."

"Oh! do, do. Gracious Providence! Murdered! There's the key of the great gate, Mr. Officer. Wife—wife!"

"Well, Joseph?"

"Hide the spoons and the babby, directly. There's thieves and murderers a-coming. I'm only going up to the house with these three gentlemen I will be back directly."

"Where shall we put our horses?" said Claude.

"Why, gentlemen, the fact is that Sir Felix don't keep up a stable on the premises, though there's lots of stalls and room. He only keeps a couple of hacks for his carriage, and the landlord of the Blue Lion in the village contracts to keep them for him."

"Never mind; here, we'll put up our horses ourselves, if you will show us the stables, at once."

"Oh, dear yes, gentlemen, and it will be best to go there first. There's plenty of hay, for last year's stacks all stand close to the stables, you see, gentlemen, so you can pull down as much as you like."

"That will do—that will do."

It was quite clear that nothing now was so delightful to the feelings of Joseph as the idea that the three officers, as he fully believed our three friends to be, should stay all night, and the fact of their putting up their horses in the neglected stables was a strong supposition in favour of such a result, and quite delightful accordingly.

As Joseph said, there was plenty of stable accommodation, although the parsimony of Sir Felix prevented it from being used on his own estate; and the contiguity of the hay-stacks enabled Claude and his friends to get not only plenty of bedding for the horses, but plenty of sweet food.

"That will do," said Claude; "and now, Joseph, you will be so good as to take us at once to your master."

"Oh, yes, gentlemen, certainly, and very happy he ought to be to see you, and very much obliged indeed to think how you came all the way from London to save our lives. I just tell you, sir, that the wine in the cellar here is good, cos you see, Sir Felix pretends that it ain't, and he says 'that the wine is going to be changed, so that I can't offer you any of it. My wine-merchant has made a mistake, and sent the wrong stuff;' and then he will offer you some capital stout, as he says; but Lord bless you, it's only small beer, and oh! so small."

"Thank you, Joseph, for the hint."

Claude and his friends could hardly suppress their laughter at this character which Joseph gave of his penurious old master; but they thought it better to keep up a becoming gravity, and having reached the house, Joseph called to the only servant that was in it, and who was a venerable old woman, to open the door.

"And what for, Master Joseph?" she cried. "And what for is the hall door to be opened?"

"Here are some gentlemen for Sir Felix."

"Indeed! Just ask them if they have had their supper then, for they will get nothing here, I can tell them."

"Open the door directly, Emily. How can you keep these gentlemen waiting in this kind of way?"

Thus urged Emily, who was about seventy years of age, and had not a tooth in her head, and was nearly bent double with infirmities, made her appearance, with a miserable rushlight in her hand, and opened the hall door.

"Ha! ha!" said the old woman, "visitors to Lime Grove? Well, well, wonders will never cease, as King Solomon said; and the more you live the more you learn. Dear me—dear me. The idea of the old idiot bringing home a wife."

"Ah, Emily—Emily, you should not call master an old idiot, though he is, to be sure."

"You hold your tongue, Joseph. I suppose these are some fine friends of young madam, the new wife. Oh, dear, yes, old Emily wouldn't do to look after the house, but a wife must be brought. Oh, I only hope she will be choked, that's all."

"How kind," said Claude; "why, Emily, you are about as amiable as you are ugly, I do think."

This remark put the old woman into such a rage, that she was half strangled with caughing, and was forced to take herself off into the domestic regions of the house, to try and recover from the effects of this sudden ebullition of anger.

"It's a very good thing, gentlemen," said Joseph, "that you have got rid of her, for she would have worried you to death in a little while, if you hadn't, that she would. Just step into this room, and I will go and tell Sir Felix that you are here."

All this time Joseph had carried his lantern with him, and now he lit a solitary candle, that was upon the chimney-piece of the really handsome reception room, into which he ushered the mock officers, and left them to consider about what they would say to Sir Felix, when they should see him, as they doubted not doing in a very few minutes.

"You be spokesman, Claude," said Jack; "you can keep your countenance somehow much better than either Dick or I can."

"Oh," said Dick, "I am the worst in the world to do that."

"And I not the best," said Jack.

"Well, then, I'll do the speaking," said Claude, "but, of course, you will both of you take what opportunities occur of confirming what I may happen to say to the old man."

"Oh, yes—yes."

Joseph opened the door of the room, and in a loud voice announced his master, and then the old man came into the room all of a shake, partly from fear and partly from anger.

"What is this?—what is all this?" he said. "I don't want visitors—I don't see company. What's it all about? Go away—go away. It is some mistake. I am busy—quite occupied! What do you want here, I say? Why don't you speak?"

"Ah, sir, you won't let 'em," said Joseph. "Why, sir, you have all the talk to yourself, and the gentlemen can't get in one word even edgeways, sir. You hold your tongue, and then they will tell you all about it, and make your hair stand on end, sir."

"How dare you, you rascal, speak to me in that way? You villanous rascal, how dare you, I should like to know? Get out of my sight directly, Joseph. You get fat—fat, sir, upon my substance. My servants ruin me, with one extravagance and another; and oh, oh! I now and then only for a few moments forget how I have been robbed on the road! Oh, dear—oh, dear, forty guineas, at the least. Oh—oh—oh!"

Sir Felix was so overcome by the recollection of his encounter with Claude on the road, that he felt ready to faint, and was compelled to sit down to recover himself; but he soon got up again, and in a loud cracked voice, he cried—

"Go away—go away. I don't want any company. No company comes here. We are all poor. There is nothing to eat and nothing to drink. Good night! Joseph, show the gentlemen out."

"No—no, sir!"

"No? Do you say no to me, you villain?"

"Yes I do, sir. You hear the gentlemen."

"Sir Felix," said Claude, stepping forward, "I and my two friends are quite willing to go, if you wish it. We have ridden down here from London at no small inconvenience, expressly for the purpose of protecting you and your property. We are police officers. There is my staff."

"And there's his red waistcoat," said Joseph.

"The magistracy of London," continued Claude, "have become aware of a plot for the purpose of robbing your house to-night, and murdering you and all within it. We are sent down expressly to defend you and your property. There is one notorious rascal, who, on the highway, often wears a crape mask——"

"Oh, I know him—I know him!" cried Sir Felix. "He is in this neighbourhood. He robbed me, only two hours ago, on the high-road. A most notable rascal he is."

"In the neighbourhood already, is he?" said Claude, in affected amazement. "Joseph, make all the doors and windows fast. Comrades, look to your pistols. He has two companions with him who are very nearly as bad as he is."

As he spoke, Claude pulled a pistol from his pocket, and made quite a parade of shaking the powder in the pan, and of putting it otherwise ready for action.

Both Dick and Jack followed his example, and at these manifestations of sincerity, poor Sir Felix began to show the most unequivocal symptoms of alarm.

"Oh, dear," he said, "you don't mean really to say that there is any real serious danger, gentlemen?"

"A little," said Claude; "but it is just possible that when the villains find they have to fight the affair out with us, that they will retire, after the exchange of a shot or two."

"A shot or two?"

"Certainly. You may depend that anger at their disappointment, if no other feeling, will induce them to do all the mischief that they possibly can. I repeat to you, that their deliberate intention is to rob the house, and to murder all that they find within it. Of course, it is our duty to risk our lives in your defence, however harshly you may be disposed to treat us; and we cannot help thinking, Sir Felix, that when men ride twelve or fourteen miles, to save your life, they are entitled, at your hands, to some little consideration."

"Oh, dear yes, of course—of course."

"I am glad to see, sir, that you begin to appreciate our services in some

manner. This is your house, and we will go from it directly if you, now that you know who and what we are, choose to wish us to do so. We are too much in the habit of respecting the law not to know and feel that a man's house is his castle, and that he may order anybody out of it that he pleases."

"Oh, dear—dear, don't go on any account! I didn't mean what I said—indeed I did not! Oh, pray stay, I beg of you! Make yourselves quite comfortable, do! I am thankful you have come!"

CHAPTER CCXX.

A PLEASANT EVENING AT LIME GROVE.—THE YOUNG OFFICER.

It was now quite clear that poor Sir Felix was most thoroughly impressed with a notion of the danger he was running, and that he would not have had those whom he called his protectors go from the house on any account.

"Very good, sir," said Claude, "of course we shall stay with very great pleasure. I don't think that you need now much alarm yourself; but, at all events, we will not leave you until we are able to assure you that the danger is over."

"Thank you—thank you! Oh, I am very much obliged, indeed. It would have been a most shocking thing; for do you know, gentleman"—here Sir Felix lowered his voice—"I was only married to-day. Yes, I was, indeed."

"Married?"

"Yes, to be sure. It's only my fourth wife; and why not, I should like to know?"

"There is no reason on earth against it, sir. I am very much surprised, though, at your talking of a fourth wife. You could hardly have had time, Sir Felix, to contract four matrimonial alliances, for really to look at you, no one would at all suspect you to be more than about nine and forty."

"You don't say so, sir?"

"Indeed I do, and I think it likewise."

Old Sir Felix quite smiled at this compliment, and for a few moments forgot the danger with which he was threatened. It was quite evident that from that moment Claude was quite a special favourite with him. Perhaps at that juncture the personal vanity of the old man was more open to flattery than at any other.

"Pray walk this way, gentlemen," he said. "This way, if you please, and I will introduce you to my—Oh!"

The poor reluctant bride's mother at this moment opened the door of the apartment so abruptly, that Sir Felix got a smart rap upon the nose from one of its panels.

"What is all this, Sir Felix?" she said. "I hope you are not being imposed upon?"

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! My nose—my nose!"

"Your nose, Sir Felix, is of the smallest possible consequence; what I want to know is, if these persons are imposing upon you in any way? Pray, sir,"—to Claude—"who may you be?"

"I don't know, madam," said Claude, "what I may be—that is a secret of destiny; but I am a Bow-street officer, and I came here on business."

"Oh, gracious!"

"And," continued Claude, "as I have explained that business to the master of the house, I presume I have done all that is sufficient."

"Indeed, sir, I will beg you then to observe, that I consider myself to be the mistress of the house."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Impudence."

"Oh, don't—don't!" said Sir Felix. "This, gentlemen, is my young wife's

mother, you see; and—and so she is going to live here just to keep things in order a little, that is all, gentlemen. She is a very good woman in her way, and remarkably quiet, I assure you, gentlemen. My dear, Mrs. White, I beg you will allow these gentlemen to stay, for if you don't, I believe we are all to have our throats cut this very night."



CLAUDE SURPRISES THE OFFICIOUS COUNTRYMAN NEAR GUILDFORD.

"Our throats—cut?"

"Yes, my dear Mrs. White, or our brains blown out, which, to us, you know my dear madam, would be much the same thing. These Bow-street office have come down from London on purpose to protect us from being murdered.

"Oh, my poor heart! Oh—oh!"

"The mother-in-law showed symptoms of fainting; but as nobody seemed

inclined to pay any attention to her, or to fly to her aid, she thought better of it, and didn't faint at all.

"Can this be possible?" she said. "Oh, are you quite sure, Sir Felix, that it is not a horrid take-in?"

"If Sir Felix has any suspicions of that nature," said Claude, with well-acted indignation, "we will leave the house at once; and probably, now that you are all upon your guard against the attack that will certainly be made upon you, you will be able, without our assistance, to protect yourselves against it. I can say for myself, and I am sure I may likewise say for my two comrades, that we are quite glad to be allowed to go."

"Certainly," said Dick; "all that we shall then ask of Sir Felix is a note of dismissal, signed by him, so that whatever happens, the blame will not rest upon our heads."

"Oh, come along," said Jack. "Come away at once. We can take oath as to the mode in which our services were dispensed with."

"Oh, no—no!" cried Sir Felix. "Don't go, and by all means don't mind one word that this stupid old woman says. I am going to get rid of her as soon as possible, I assure you, gentlemen. She is only my young wife's mother, that's all, and I can't bear the sight of her. Don't think of going on her account, gentlemen, I beg of you. I will make you quite welcome to everything the house may contain."

"Oh, you old wretch!" cried the lady.

"Old? old? How dare you call me old?"

"Allow me to beg that there may be no quarrelling," said Claude. "Really no one can tell but that we may be all in another world before the morning; and as regards the word 'old,' I am sure it will be many years before either of you need trouble yourselves about it. This lady cannot be above forty."

"Oh, sir," said the mother-in-law, who had just passed her sixtieth birthday, "oh, sir, upon my word you are really a—quite—gallant. I own I am forty-five—indeed, I am. Now don't be contradicting me. I am forty-five."

"Oh, dear!" said Sir Felix, lifting up his hands. "She owns to forty-five, does she? What an admission!"

"Pray step this way, gentlemen. We will at least try to make you as comfortable as we can, while you oblige us by staying in the house. It's a great favour of you to come all the way from London to protect us—indeed it is. Of course, as a sensitive female, I feel naturally timid; and if wretches of housebreakers were to get into the house, who shall say what they might do?"

"Ah, who, indeed?" said Jack.

Peace being thus happily restored between Sir Felix and the mother-in-law, the whole party adjourned to a room, in which there was a fire, and where, with her face buried in her hands, sat the young bride, poor sacrificed Cora.

"My dear," said her mother, "here are some police-officers come to watch the house, for they say that some thieves were going to break into it to-night, and murder us all."

"Happy death!" said Cora.

"What does she say?" cried Sir Felix, sharply, "what does she say? I am sure she said something."

"It's of no consequence, my dear sir," said the mother. "It's not of the slightest consequence, I assure you, sir."

"I promised," said Claude, aside to Sir Felix—"I promised to let a magistrate, as far off as Ealing, know of our arrival here, Sir Felix. Will you allow your servant at the lodge to ride as far as there with the message from me? otherwise one of us will have to go, and the effect of that, of course, would be rather to weaken our strength here in the house."

"Oh, yes—yes," said Sir Felix, "Joseph will go. He will go at once. Joseph is the man. Don't either of you stir, gentlemen, by no means, Oh, dear, no—no. Joseph will go. Ring the bell, Mrs. White, for Joseph."

Joseph was duly summoned, and Sir Felix gave him orders to go when he

should be directed; so that Claude had that sagacious-serving man quite at his disposal. He put a couple of guineas into Joseph's hands when he got outside the room door with him, and then he said—

"Joseph, get me some sealing-wax and a candle."

The couple of guineas acted like some potent charm upon the spirits of Joseph, and the sealing-wax and the candle were both quickly produced. Claude enclosed the letter from Cora, that had been picked up in the road, in an envelope, in the inside of which he wrote the following words:—

"Cornet Tarlton is advised to come at once to Lime Grove, and take Cora away with him. He will find friends there who will assist him, and Cornet Tarlton is warned to place no reliance upon any odd story the bearer of this may tell him."

"Now, Joseph," said Claude, "you will get the best horse you can in the village, and ride to the barracks at Knightsbridge, close to Hyde Park. There you will ask for Cornet Tarlton, and give him this paper, and when you come back, another couple of guineas will be waiting for you, Joseph. Do you understand?"

"Lor, yes, sir. That's as clear as clear can be."

"Very good; now be off, Joseph, as quickly as you possibly can. Don't risk your neck by any outrageous speed, but go as quickly as may be convenient to you, sir."

"I will, sir—I will."

Claude retired to the sitting-room, and the moment he seated himself, Sir Felix said—

"It would give me, do you know, gentlemen, such pleasure to offer you a glass of wine; but the fact is, my wine merchant has made a mistake, and sent in the wrong article, so that it has to go back and be changed, you understand; but I have some capital stout in the house, if you can manage a little of that, gentlemen."

"The wine is sour, I presume?" said Claude.

"Oh, quite—quite."

"Well, do you know I am glad to hear that; for although you may think it a very odd and vitiated taste, yet I prefer a glsss of sour wine to anything else."

"And so do I," said Dick.

"And so do I," said Jack.

"You really don't mean it, gentlemen?" said Sir Felix, looking dreadfully alarmed. "You don't mean that you like scur wine?"

"Yes, we do. So I beg of you to get up a bottle or two of it at once for us. We shall be quite delighted with it, I assure you. Sour wine is just the thing for us."

Poor Sir Felix, who kept always the key of his own cellar, was upon this compelled to go for the wine; but such a fear had got possession of him concerning the probable attack upon the house, that he begged Claude to go with him, upon which both Jack and Dick likewise started up, crying—

"We will all go, for it would be a thousand pities for you, Sir Felix, to be cut off in your prime."

Sir Felix carried the light, and they all went into the cellar together. The old man picked one bottle out of a rack; and then, with a sigh, he said—

"This will be enough, I dare say, gentlemen, for I do think it will give you the stomach-ache."

"Oh, yes, quite enough," said Dick and Jack; and while his back was turned, they each possessed themselves of a couple of bottles of wine, and Claude did the same.

The amazement and vexation of Sir Felix when he found that no less than seven bottles of wine was placed upon the table in the sitting room, was perfectly ludicrous. He groaned again, but he could not help himself, as it would not exactly have done to send the wine back again.

A couple of the bottles were speedily opened, and as Claude had been informed by Joseph, the quality was found to be excellent; but they all three declared that it was sour, very sour, indeed, but yet that they liked it; and poor Sir Felix kept drinking away at it in order that while it was going in such a dreadful manner he might have as much as possible of it himself.

Mrs. White, too, was by no means behind-hand in taking her full share of the rare old wine, which had been in the cellar for many a long year, and was of first rate quality.

CHAPTER CCXXI.

CLAUDE TELLS A GOOD STORY—AND THE CORNET ARRIVES.

The evening wore on in this way very pleasantly indeed, and Sir Felix was really so pleased that he almost forgot that his wine was going at a great rate down the throats of his guests. He even had the temerity to offer a toast or two, to tell an anecdote of how, when he was in the yeomanry once, many years ago, he had fallen off his horse; and how the Colonel said:—"Hilloa! there's one dead man," and how he, Sir Felix, said, as he got up again, "Not yet, Colonel."

This was not a very brilliant joke, but the old man told it as if he thought it one of the most exquisite that could be imagined, and Claude laughed at it immoderately.

The old lady, however, was certainly not at all pleased. She was on the fidget the whole time, and although Dick plied her with wine it did not seem in the least to ameliorate her condition; for if it had been really as sour as old Sir Felix had pretended it was, it could not possibly have made Mrs. White more cross than she became.

"I really don't see any danger, Sir Felix," she said, "and I do think that we are detaining these gentlemen quite unnecessarily at this time of the evening."

"Oh, don't mention that, madam," said Claude. "The pleasure of your's and Sir Felix's society is ample recompense for anything of that sort; and if Sir Felix has no objection, I will just recount to you a little anecdote that happened to me once when I was in pursuit of a celebrated character."

"Pray who was it, sir?" said Mrs. White. "I hope it was no improper character, sir, as I am present?"

"Oh, dear, no. It was only Claude Duval the highwayman."

"And do you call him a proper character, sir?"

"At last, madam, I am not aware that there is anything in the career of Claude Duval that should be particularly bad for a lady to hear; and if Sir Felix pleases, I will tell the story."

"Oh, dear, yes, by all means. Let us hear it."

"Very good, sir. It happened thus:—Claude Duval, sir, probably feeling that some events in his life were not just what a very strict moralists would approve of, determined now and then to try and do some good; and feeling quite confident that a good deal of villany was going on against the fairest and best portion of creation—of course I allude to lovely woman."

Here Claude bowed to Mrs. White, who looked rather gratified at a compliment, the like of which she had not met with for the last thirty years.

"Being, as I say, convinced that the fair sex were very much imposed upon, he resolved to do them all the good he could; so, you see, Sir Felix, as he was going along the road one day—"

"But my good sir," said Sir Felix, "this story seems to be about Claude Duval and not about you."

"Exactly, sir. That's the beauty of it. But you will soon see how I shall come in at the end of it."

"Oh, very well—very well. Pray excuse me for interrupting you. I daresay it is a capital story."

"You may depend upon that, sir," said Dick; "and I can answer for it, it won't be one word too long."

"Not one," said Claude. "And so, as I was saying, Claude Duval, you see, was very much averse to any young girl being sacrificed in consequence of the cupidity of her relations to any old rascal, whose sole recommendation might be that he had plenty of money."

"Oh!" said Sir Felix.

"Humph!" said Mrs. White.

"And so one day as he was going along the road, he found a piece of folded paper, which stated that a young lady had been cajoled into matrimony by her mother to an old man, quite old enough to be her father; but she had a lover whom she wished to be informed of her situation; and she hoped that whoever found the note would forward it to him in the hope that he would arrive in time at the house of the old husband of a few hours, and rescue her from so dreadful a fate as remaining with him."

Sir Felix's young bride had retired to the next room; but as Claude spoke, he saw her shadow in the doorway, and he felt that she was listening to his recital.

"And what did the highwayman do, sir?" said Mrs. White, with a toss of her head.

"Why, he sent the young lady's note to the young officer, whom she wished most particularly should hear it."

"Thank God!" cried the young bride.

Mrs. White rose directly.

"What was that?" she cried. "Oh, what was that? Did you hear that, Sir Felix?"

"I—I heard something."

"It was me," said the young creature, coming timidly into the room. "It was me. I nearly fell over a chair, and I am sure I should have seriously hurt myself. Perhaps it was rather a trifle to thank God about that I escaped from the fall that I spoke."

"It's rather odd," said Mrs. White, with a thoughtful look. "It's very odd."

"Allow me, madam, to go on with the story," said Claude. "The fact is that the old husband, with the assistance of the poor girl's mother, had taken her to that home which, with all its advantages, would have been to her only a gilded cage; but Claude Duval, the highwayman, had forwarded the young lady's hurried appeal to her lover."

The young creature burst into tears, and Mrs. White got up from the table in a rage.

"I don't understand this," she said. "Sir Felix, I am rather an old stager, and I begin to suspect something wrong."

"An old stager are you, madam?" said Claude.

"Yes, sir; and I begin to smell a rat."

"Then I would strongly advise you to call the cat, madam, as the best possible means of catching it. I cannot understand what it is that alarms you. You are beginning to get quite red in the face, I assure you, madam."

"That's a melancholy truth," said Dick.

"Very," said Jack.

"How dare you remark upon my appearance, you low fellows? Sir Felix, if you are a man, rouse yourself, for I am very much afraid that something is amiss. I don't believe one word that these men say. It's all a delusion, Sir Felix—quite a delusion, sir; and I desire you to turn these people out of the lodge, sir."

"Well, but the thieves, Mrs. White! The thieves, you know. We don't want all our throats cut."

"I don't believe there is any danger, Sir Felix."

"Hark!" said Claude.

He held up his hand, and at the same moment the sound of horse's feet was heard upon the winding path that led up to the house. The horse that was ap-

proaching was evidently at a hard gallop, and the stop at the hall door was very sudden.

"Murder!" cried Sir Felix. "We shall be murdered!"

"Help! help!" said Mrs. White.

"Be under no alarm, let me beg of you," said Claude. "I will do what I said I would do, namely, protect you against all violence, let it come from whom it may. I am well armed, and so are my friends, and we never make a promise of protection without meaning to keep it, and taking care that we do keep it."

Mrs. White flew behind the chair of Sir Felix and looked rather alarmed, even through her rouge, and that had been rather liberally supplied to her countenance. She crouched down behind the chair, and was hidden completely from observation.

Poor Sir Felix looked the picture of bewildered dismay, and his young bride came from the inner room again, and held by the back of a chair for support, looking very pale and full of fright.

A hasty footstep sounded through the house, and was evidently approaching the door of the room, but it paused, as though the person to whom it belonged, being a stranger, did not feel quite certain of his way.

Jack went to the door and flung it open. Claude Duval had given him a hint to do so; and the gleam of light that went out into the corridor was a sufficient guide to the stranger. In the course of a few moments a singularly handsome-looking young man, in the regimentals of an officer, but splashed from head to foot by riding hard, strode into the room.

The moment the young bride observed him, she flew forward, and with a shriek of joy flung herself into his arms.

"Saved—saved!" she cried. "I am saved!"

"Gracious Heaven! what is the meaning of all this?" he cried. "Let me know what has happened! Are you the wife of another, dear one, or are you mine still? Oh, answer me."

"I am, and—and I am not," she sobbed.

Sir Felix turned of a purplish hue, and slid off his seat on to the floor of the room.

"You are, and you are not!" cried the young soldier. "Oh, why rack my brain by such words? Will no one take pity upon me and tell me what all this means? A man in hot haste rode into the barracks, and handed me a note. I am here in consequence, but yet I feel that I do not know all. Who will explain it to me?"

"I will," cried Claude Duval, stepping forward. "I will explain to you, sir, all that at present appears to you so inexplicable, and I hope and trust, satisfactorily to you."

"And who are you, sir?"

"That I don't think matters much. Suffice it to say that I was the means of sending to you the paper which has brought you here, and that I now give you an opportunity of action, which otherwise you could not have had possibly."

"Then I do not indeed ask you who you are, but know you as a friend. And now, dear one," added the young officer, addressing the bride, "will you fly with me from this place, or do you feel that you ought to remain in it?"

"With you—with you, to the world's end, if need be."

"I am content, then."

"But goodness gracious, sir," cried Sir Felix; "are you at all aware, sir, that that is my wife that you are hugging in that very affectionate kind of way?"

"Pho! pho! sir. Think yourself well off that I don't take some personal chastisement of you, sir."

"The best way," said Dick, "it there should be any cavil about the marriage that has taken place, would be to make the young lady a widow. Perhaps Sir Felix has no objection to fight it out."

"A capital thought," cried the young officer. "I will fight you immediately, sir, in any way you think proper."

"Oh—no—no!—Oh, dear no!"

"Then, perhaps," said Claude, "rather than fight, Sir Felix will give up all right and title to the hand of the young lady?"

"I will give up all right and title to a thousand young ladies," said Sir Felix, "rather than I would run into any personal danger. It is all very well for people to fight who have got nothing to lose; but I have a good estate, and every comfort about me, and that makes a vast difference."

"And a good cellar, too," said Duval.

The old man uttered a groan at the recollection of how his wine had gone down the throats of people who, after all, had come for his confusion, instead of for his protection, to the house; but Claude, seeing writing materials on a side table, at once drew up a short renunciation of all claims to the young lady on the part of Sir Felix, which he signed at once.

"There," he said, "take her, sir; I have done with her."

"It's the wisest thing you could do, Sir Felix," said Jack; "but where is Mrs. White? She ought to be something like a witness to this transaction. Where is she?"

"Ah, where is she?" said Dick. "Not here."

"Then she means mischief," said Claude, "and the sooner we now get away the better it will be for us, I am certain. We will leave directly, my friends."

"And so will I," said the young officer, "although I cannot see what you can have to dread from Mrs. White."

"I am sorry to say though," said Claude, "that I and my friends see it very well, and perhaps when we get outside this house I will tell you?"

"I can tell you now," said Sir Felix, pointing at Claude; "I can tell you at once, if he won't be angry at it."

"I don't want to know," said the officer. "If this gentleman and his friends have any secret to keep, it would be very ungenerous upon my part to seek to know it."

"Speak freely, Sir Felix," said Claude, "I don't care what you say. Who do you think I am?"

"I don't think at all about it," said the old knight; "but after all that has passed, now, I know that you are Claude Duval the highwayman, and you won't deny it."

"Claude Duval!" said the officer. "Is that possible?"

"Sir Felix says so," said Claude, "and I would advise you to believe him, sir. Do you think it quite out of the course of nature, that Claude Duval should do a kind action?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Then do not be surprised at my name. It's probable enough that you have heard more bad than good of me; but when you hear me spoken of again, you can say, that even the worst persons have, now and then, a kindly feeling, even towards strangers; and so I will bid you good night."

"No, no," said the young lady; "we will not—we cannot part thus with him who has done us so much kindness."

The young officer took Claude's hand, and said,—

"Were you ten times a highwayman, you are my friend, and only say in what I can serve you."

At that moment, and before Claude could reply, there was heard a great noise in the hall, and Jack, who for the last few moments had been to the door to listen if any danger were at hand, said immediately,—

"It is Mrs. White, and she brings with her an armed force. We are in danger indeed, now."

Sir Felix, full of dread of the conflict that he fancied was about to ensue, crept under the table at once, and there hid himself, while Claude and his companions drew their pistols, and were resolved to defend themselves to the very last extremity.

CHAPTER CCXXII.

THE REFUGE AMONG THE PLAYERS.—CLAUDE'S DISGUISE.

Dick glanced around him, and pointing to the inner room, in which the young bride had remained for the greater part of the evening, said,—

"Where does that room lead to?"

"To a staircase," said the young lady, "but that is all I know of it. Oh, fly from here, and we will stop your pursuers."

"We will try it, at all events," said the officer, drawing his sword; "they shall not pass me without a fight for it."

"My good sir," said Claude, "let me beg of you not to draw down upon yourself mischief—it cannot help us; you had much better seem to be our foe, and yet in reality be our friend. Come on, Dick and Jack, and we'll soon find where the staircase leads to."

Claude snatched up a light from the table, and dashed into the adjoining room, followed by his two friends; and it was well that they did so so soon as they did, for hardly were their backs turned, and the door of communication between the two apartments closed and locked, which Claude had the presence of mind to do, than Mrs. White, with eight well-armed men belonging to the constabulary, rushed into the apartment so lately occupied by the three friends.

"Where are they? she cried, "where are the three wretches? Take them into custody at once, my good men; they are arrant thieves, I assure you. Knock them down, and if they resist ever so little, I advise you to shoot them. Oh, they are gone!"

"Quite gone, you see, madam," said the officer.

"Oh, you low, poor wretch! I know you well," cried Mrs. White; "you have not one penny piece to scrub upon another, except your pay, you know that well enough. How dare you interfere with me, sir, and my family arrangements?"

"You may make what family arrangements you like, madam," said the cornet, "so long as they only include yourself in their results and consequences; but I certainly object to your making arrangements that involve your daughter's happiness."

"You puppy!"

The officers who had come into the room along with Mrs. White paid not the remotest attention to the little family squabble that was going on, but with great tact and skill, they began to search the room for the parties they came to apprehend. After a little time, they espied poor Sir Felix under the table; and the principal officer seizing him by the leg, cried in a loud voice of exultation to his companions,—

"Here's one of them! here's one of them! I'll have him out in a minute—Come, come, let's have no resistance, sir! that's a sort of thing that won't do here."

With this, poor Sir Felix was dragged out so roughly that he was for the moment deprived of the power of speech; but the moment Mrs. White saw him, she screamed out,—

"Why, that is Sir Felix! That is the master of this house. Let him go instantly, you wretches!"

"The master of the house!" said the officer, who was much disappointed that he had caught nobody. "Why, what the deuce does he mean then, by hiding under his own table?"

"That's no business of yours," said Mrs. White, who guessed very well that was the fears of Sir Felix that had taken him to so ignoble a place of refuge, and was quite willing to come to his rescue. "You find the highwaymen; and if the officer, as he calls himself, who is as poor as Job, and as proud as Lucifer, don't be off directly, I will give you a guinea to turn him out of the house. Come away, you slut," addressing her daughter. "You know that you are Sir

Felix's wife, and you have no sort of business to be in the arms of another man. Come away, this moment."

"But Sir Felix has given me up, mother."

"Oh, dear, yes," said Sir Felix, "I don't want to have my throat cut, or my brains blown out, for a little chit of a girl, not I. If there's to be continual squabbling and fighting about her, let her go: I don't want to see her face again."



AN ADVENTURE WITH THE PLAYERS AT GUILDFORD.

Mrs. White gave a slight scream at this and flung herself upon a couch, as though she at least had made up her mind not to leave the house of Sir Felix if her daughter did; and the officers, finding they were disappointed of their prey, and being quite convinced that no one was concealed in the room, tried to open the door of connection with the next apartment, but in vain.

"Where does this lead to?" said one.

"Why, to where the people you want have gone, to be sure," said Sir Felix, "and I only hope you may catch them, for I shall feel no peace of mind until they are all three hanged."

The officers, upon finding the door locked, did not stop long to talk upon the matter, but proceeded with violent precipitation to break it open, in which, despite the remonstrances of Sir Felix, they in a few moments succeeded. The room was empty.

The fact was, that Claude, the moment he and his two friends got into the next room and had locked the door, spoke to them in a low tone of voice, saying—

"Let us pause a moment here, and listen; one of our great objects will be to discover who they are that are after us. If they consist merely of some of the blockheads of the neighbourhood, our danger is by no means great; but if they are professional officers, we had better know it at once."

With this view, in the propriety of which both Jack and Dick fully concurred, they all listened at the door of the room, and they soon heard enough to convince them that the men were officers, or at least the greater part of them.

"Come on, then," said Claude; "frightening will have no effect upon them. It is only killing that would do, and that is what we don't like to have recource to, except at a last extremity; so let us be off at once and see if we cannot get out of the house by some means."

"Our horses!" said Dick.

"Ay," said Jack, "I fear for them. I am half afraid to think of them, and I shall not believe that we shall ever possess them again until I feel myself mounted."

"Do not speak of the horses just yet," said Claude; "let us hope for the best, and that we shall find them all right in a little time. At present, what we have to do is to get out of the way of the Philistines."

As he spoke, Claude, with the candle still in his hand, went towards a door at the farther end of the little room, and upon opening it, he found that it at once opened upon the staircase that had been mentioned by the young bride.

"It is of very little consequence to us," he said, "where this staircase may lead to; our only chance of escape is by it, so down we go."

"Very good," said Dick. "We will follow."

Claude ran down the stairs, and found that they led to a room below, that seemed as if it had once been a library, from the shelves that were all around it, although some old moth-eaten, mouldy-looking books, lying huddled together upon the floor, were now the only evidences of its being devoted to such a purpose. Still, as it was upon the ground-floor, it offered some facilities to leaving the house, or at all events, it ought to do so.

"Come on," said Claude, after taking a brief glance round the room. "Come on. We will get out of this. Here is a door."

The door through which he passed led into a kind of passage, and at the end of that was another door that had the upper portion of it made of glass. Through that was the open air; but they found themselves in a part of the grounds of the house that they were strange to. The most unlucky thing was, that the moment that door was opened, there came a puff of wind through it that blew out the candle, so that they were in comparative darkness, although the night was rather a lighter one than ordinary.

"What in the name of all that's perplexing, are we to do now?" said Dick. "It's like being set down in the moon."

"Not quite so bad," said Claude.

"Very nearly, though; but we must go round the house till we find the stables. Oh, that we were but mounted once again! That would be the thing for us. Then we should laugh at all this."

"The time will come," said Claude. "Let us keep here under the shadow of the house. We must get to the stables soon."

"Hilloa!" said a voice.

They all paused; and Claude, as he levelled a pistol in the direction whence the voice came, said in a low but perfectly clear voice—

"Whoever you are, if you don't come forward I will fire at you."

"Don't do that," said the voice. "It's me, Sir Felix's man. Don't you know me, gentlemen? Lord bless you, don't shoot me."

"Oh, it is you, is it? You have got back from London tolerably quick."

"Yes, and I advise you to leave this place tolerably quick. I know who you are now, and what you are; but you came here on a good errand, and I'm as glad as possible you have saved that poor girl, and got the better of the old woman. Do you know that there is a party of officers in the house looking after you?"

"We do."

"Very good. They have told me to take the horses out of the stable, and send 'em loose in the paddock, so that you may not get 'em; but I saddled them all three, and got 'em nice and comfortable for you close at hand. Come after me, and I'll soon take you to them."

"How can we thank you?" said Claude.

"Oh, don't mention that, only come on, and don't lose any time about it, for there's no knowing how soon they may come down, and be about our ears."

"Dare we trust this fellow?" whispered Jack.

"Yes, implicitly," said Claude. "Come on. What money have you, Jack, about you?"

"About thirty pounds."

"Give it to me. Thank you. We can supply ourselves again, you know. Now, my good friend, go on towards the horses as quick as you can, and we will follow you."

The man went on rapidly, and came in a few moments to a fence made of oak pailings. There was a door in it, but no one who had not known of its existence could have observed it in that dim light. He, however, wrenched it open at once, and said—

"This way—this way! Here are the cattle."

It was all right, for immediately upon passing through this little gate or doorway, they found the three horses ready for the road, and fastened to a ring in a post that was there for the purpose,

"Now I tell you what it is," said the man, "I don't want to get into trouble, so you will be so good as to knock me down, you know, and pull this little oak door off its hinges, and then you can mount and be off, and all I can say is, good luck go with you."

"When I knock you down," said Claude, "I hope somebody may serve me the same way. Take this as a small testimony of our gratitude to you for the efficient aid you have give us to-night."

As he spoke, Claude placed in the man's hands the thirty pounds that Jack had given to him. Dick and Jack had already mounted, and Claude was in the act of doing so, when a blaze of light flashed into the place, which was a little enclosed straw-yard, and a voice cried—

"There they are!—there they are! Blaze away!"

A couple of pistol-shots were fired at them, but did no damage, for nothing like an aim could be taken at such a time; and Claude at once closed the little oaken door.

"Stoop in your saddles," he said, "stoop—stoop, so as to keep your heads below the pailings."

"That's impossible," said Dick, as he rapidly dismounted. "Get down, Jack, or they will pick you off. The pailing is not near high enough to stoop below it. All's right."

Bang! went another shot just as Jack got off his horse; and then Claude, whose anger was roused, said—

"I am not going to stand thus to be shot at in this place, by a parcel of ragamuffin's, as if one were a carrion. Is any one hurt?"

"No—no!" they all said.

"Very good. Then I promise those fellows that at the very next shot they favour us with, they shall have my double-barrel in return, and then they will find out how they like it."

"Pepper the rascals!" cried a voice. "I daresay you have killed some of them, my brave fellows."

Claude found that this voice came from an open window some distance off, at which, in the uncertain light, he saw a head just a little way projecting. The officers that were outside the pailing had a large stable lantern with them; and now two more shots were fired at Claude and his friends, that came crashing through the oak pailing.

"I'm hit," said the servant.

"And my horse is, I think," said Dick.

Claude was infuriated at this; and taking aim at the head that projected from the window with one barrel of his double-barrelled pistol, he fired at it. A loud shriek testified to the success of the shot, and the head disappeared. The other barrel Claude discharged through the pailing at those who had the lantern.

"Murder!" cried a voice, and then all was still.

"I wonder how they feel after that?" said Claude. The silence that ensued now had quite an ominous kind of feeling with it; and Claude endeavoured all he could to pierce into the darkness, for the purpose of observing what his foes were about. Presently a voice said—

"Claude Duval, this is a foolish resistance to make to your capture. We know you well, and you have got Dick Turpin with you, and some one else. You must be taken, and you will only make your case worse by resisting. We have already sent off for more assistance."

"So have I," said Claude.

"Come, come, don't be foolish. Do you know that you have killed Mr. Smith, the officer?"

"Really, you don't say so?"

"Let me advise you, as a friend, to give yourself up, and advise your two friends to do so likewise; for if you don't, you won't live another hour, for we have made up our minds to have you, dead or alive."

"Come and take me, then," said Claude.

After this, there was evidently a rather uneasy kind of consultation among the officers to know what to do, and Claude said in a low tone—

"Did our friend say that he was hurt? Speak—speak!"

CHAPTER CCXXIII.

THE ESCAPE TO THE ROAD, AND THE VIGOROUS PURSUIT.

These last words of Claude's were addressed to the servant who had played so kind a part towards them; but they were answered rather cheerfully.

"I am hurt, but it ain't much. It's only a touch on the arm, that won't do much mischief. Keep them in talk, Claude Duval, and I will get you out of this mess."

"Can you?"

"I can and will, if you will trust the cattle to me."

"I would trust you with my life."

"Then you three hold this place against the officers, if you can, for the next five minutes, and I warrant to take you comfortably out of it by another route. I will pull down an iron hurdle here, and then we can get into the garden—the kitchen garden, I mean."

"I will help you," said Jack.

"Do; for I don't think, with my arm rather queer, that I could get the hurdle up alone."

Jack went with this man, who now behaved in so bold and generous a manner, and between them they went to work capitally. Claude, then, to cover what was going on, thought it would be better to parley with the officers a little, so he said—

"Of course, if we were to give in, we could only expect the very worst treatment from you."

"Oh, no—no—you are quite mistaken," was the reply. "We will say as little as possible of the resistance you have made."

"But this Mr. Smith's death?"

"Oh, we will pretend that it was rather accidental than otherwise. Only give yourselves up, and you may depend upon the best of treatment from us. We are not at all vindictive; but you know as well as we do, that we must do this duty."

"Yes, I am aware of that."

"And you should think, too, what a poor chance you three have against eight of us, who are quite resolved in the matter, and must have you, dead or alive, somehow. Besides, we have sent for more help; so you had better give in while you have a whole skin, than when you have a broken one. Come, come, be wise, and give in."

"Well, I will consult my friends for a few moments. As regards myself, I am always favourable to doing the best I can."

By this time, the man-servant of Sir Felix had taken away the three horses, and now he came close to Claude, and whispered in his ear—

"Follow me quietly. They are all right."

Upon turning suddenly round, Claude saw that both Jack and Dick were gone, and at the moment a rather uncomfortable feeling of loneliness came over him.

"Are they safe?" he said.

"Oh, quite, quite; follow me."

"I will do so."

Claude followed the man. It was, perhaps, rather a risk to run, to put so much faith in one who was merely an utter stranger; but then, no one was more in the habit of trusting to others than was Claude Duval; and he had found, by long experience, that it was the very best way of procuring their best services.

The man led him through the gap that he had made in the iron-hurdle fence, and then, by the tread, Claude felt that he was upon garden ground, for his feet sunk in at every step up to the ankles, and he said—

"Have we far to go?"

"No. This way—this way."

Claude went on, and in a few moments he heard the voice of Dick saying—

"Is that you, Claude?"

"Yes—yes."

"I was afraid the Philistines had got you, and so was Jack. I have had the greatest difficulty in keeping him quiet. Here we are, all among the cabbages in the garden, mounted, and Jack has got your horse by the bridle. I do think we shall give our friends on the other side of the pailings the go-bye yet."

"I'm sure we shall," said Claude.

"Thank God I hear you speak again!" said Jack.

"Ah, Jack," said Claude, "you are always expecting the worst to come to us; but I have great faith in my good luck. Now, which way are we to go, and what are we to do?"

"Let me lead your horses clear of the garden," said the man, "and then you may all three go off at a gallop, if you like, as soon as possible; for it will be in the main road that I shall lead you to, and all the mischief will be a little knocking about of the vegetables, which won't much matter."

As he spoke, this man—without whose aid the escape of Duval and his friends from that place would have been a very dangerous and critical affair—took hold of the bridle of Claude's horse, and led the creature over some of the beds in the garden, totally heedless of the crushing and displacing effects the horse's hoofs upon the various vegetables that were growing there. This kind of progress lasted about five minutes, and then they came to another oak pailing.

"Wait a moment," said the guide. "There is a door here that I will open for you directly."

He did so, and then Claude, as he passed out of the garden, found, by the firm, hard tread of the horse, that he was on the high road. A feeling of intense satisfaction came across him upon being assured of this fact, and he said—

"All's right at last. Let me but be mounted, and upon the road, and I look upon whatever may happen as only in the regular course of events. Come on, Dick and Jack."

They both emerged from the garden, and then Claude turned to the man, and said—

"I hope, my friend, that we shall meet again. Let me have the pleasure of shaking hands with you."

"Excuse me offering you the left one, then, for the right don't feel very comfortable just now."

"Ah, it is in that you were wounded?"

"It is; but I have stopped the bleeding, I think, with my handkerchief, so it won't do me much harm."

"I sincerely hope not. Good-by."

"Good-by to you all. Don't wait. All's right, you may depend, in the house; so be off at once."

Claude gave the reins to his steed, and off he went, closely followed by Jack and Dick; but they had not gone far when they became quite conscious that some one well mounted was pursuing them, or if not pursuing, was coming sharply upon the same road.

"Do you hear that, Claude?" said Dick.

"I do. Let us listen. Just draw up half a moment."

They did so, and then Jack cried—

"There are two."

"Yes," said Claude, "I hear the tread of two horses. I don't like a race. I propose that we draw up to the road-side and listen. We will wait for the comers, be they whom they may; but don't do anything hastily, whatever you do—I mean as regards the use of your pistols, Dick. We have had fighting enough, I think, for a day, or rather night, already."

"Quite enough."

The two horses came rapidly up, and although our friends were quite in the shadow of some trees, yet, as we have said, it was rather a light night, so that those who were riding upon the road could hardly miss seeing them, if they were looking about at all.

"Hilloa! who is there?" cried a voice.

"A friend," said Claude, "if you like to think so, and pass on; but a foe if you like to make him one."

"Ah, I know that voice surely."

"And I," said some one in female tones; "it is our gallant friend, Claude Duval, I feel assured."

Upon this, Claude and his friends emerged from the shadow, and they saw that the mounted persons were none other than the young officer and his lady love.

"I am quite pleased," said the officer, "to find you safe upon the road. I was, indeed, afraid that your enemies would prove too many for you. I trust that you are not hurt at all?"

"No, we are pretty well; but, you see, we have left our foes the field all to themselves, preferring a prudent retreat. Are you for London?"

"Yes; and if you are for that road, pray ride with us. Sir Felix, after you were gone, tried to fight it out with me, and I am afraid he has done himself no good by the attempt. I have had some trouble, too, with Mrs. White, who would interfere. But here we are at last, safe and sound, and I don't think they will find it very easy now to get their loved one away from me again."

"I don't think they will. But pray ride on, sir, and take with you our good wishes. You will not find that our company upon the road will redound much to your credit."

"But I am, I hope, far above paltry feelings of that sort. You and your friends have done me a great service, and I will not fail to acknowledge it in all places, and under all circumstances, that may require. So ride on with us, I begof you, without further scruple, or we shall take it amiss if you don't."

"Oh! listen, listen," said the young girl, "I hear some people coming; do you not?—Listen now! the regular tread of horses' feet comes plainly on my ears."

"And upon mine, too," said her lover. "I am rather surprised, but it strikes me I can hear the clank of military accoutrements too; how can that be, though? There is no barracks or military station nearer than Hounslow, I think."

"That is not very far off," said Claude; "we have even reason to believe that the officers who thought fit to beleaguer us at the lodge, finding we made a stouter resistance than they anticipated, sent for some help, and it is likely enough that it has been to Hounslow Barracks."

"If so, then," said the officer, "this party that is approaching is a sergeant's guard of cavalry, that the commanding officer at Hounslow has thought proper to send in aid of the civil power."

"There's very little doubt of it," said Dick.

The young officer mused for a moment or two, and then he said,—

"Keep by me; you have done me a great service. Without her who is now with me, and from whom I will not part while life remains to me, I should have passed but a miserable existence. I will now endeavour to repay some small portion of the debt of gratitude that I owe you."

"What would you do?"

"I would, and I will save you from a contest with these soldiers, if they are bound for the lodge. Trot gently on, and be under no sort of apprehension: I can and will do it."

"We should be sorry," said Claude, "if you did yourself any personal injury by interfering in our behalf. We have a thousand chances of escape. Ride on, sir, and leave us to our own resources."

"Oh, no, no!" cried the young lady, "that must not and shall not be done. You shall be protected. I wish it with all my heart."

"And your wish is a law, my darling," said the young officer; "so I am sure our friends will not say another word about it, but permit me to act as I wish, and as you wish, in the little affair."

"It would be absurd and ungrateful of me," said Claude, "further to refuse so great a kindness."

"Hush—they come!"

Clattering on in the middle of the road, came five mounted dragoons, and a sergeant. A very few moments would have brought them close to Claude and his friends. By the side of the sergeant rode a man in plain costume. This was no doubt the officer who had been sent by his comrades to request the aid of the commanding officer at Hounslow. The young cornet rode up to the troop, and in a loud clear voice cried—

"Ha't!"

The soldiers drew up in a moment.

"Sergeant, what is this party about?" said the officer. "I think you belong to my regiment, do you not?"

The sergeant at once saluted the young officer, and riding up to him, he looked at him as well he could in the dim light, and saw quite enough of him to convince himself that he was one of his officers.

CHAPTER CCXXIV.

THE THREE FRIENDS FAIRLY ON THE ROAD AGAIN.

Upon the discovery that this was an officer in his own regiment, the sergeant at once gave up all authority in the matter, and was ready to act upon any orders he might name.

"I have no wish to interfere with the duty you are upon," said the officer. "Go on at once, sergeant."

The sergeant saluted the officer, and then gave the word to the guard to pass on. The officer looked as as though he were rather mystified at what was going on, and pointing to Claude and his companions, it was evident that he said something to the sergeant concerning them; but the latter only shook his head, and went clattering on.

"We are indebted to you, sir," said Claude, "for our escape from this danger. It was a serious one."

"How much more am I indebted to you!"

"Well, if you think that, we are even, so be it; but we must positively not embarrass you any longer by our presence. I can easily comprehend the kind and honourable feeling you have towards us, but it would be very base upon our parts to take further advantage of it, to your, perhaps, great prejudice. We will now bid you adieu."

"If you will, at this juncture, bid us good-by," said the officer, "I cannot say anything that ought to stay you; but you now know my name, and you know my regiment, so that you can have no difficulty in finding me; and let me hope that you will not scruple to do so, if I can be of any service to you."

"I will remember that. Farewell!"

Both Dick and Jack cried "Farewell!" and then, without waiting for another word from the young officer, they all three dashed down a lane that was close at hand.

The entrance to that little lane—it was so very dark—looked like the entrance to some cavern.

"Well," said Dick, "we are well out of that affair, at all events; and there is one great satisfaction connected with it, that we did not go into the adventure for any mercenary motives."

"Certainly we did not," said Jack; "but I should like very well to know where this lane leads to. Can you enlighten us at all upon that rather interesting subject, Claude?"

"Not I."

"Humph! Then, perhaps, the sooner we get out of it the better."

"Every lane, Jack, has an end of some sort, and no doubt this one is no exception to the rule. I was particularly anxious to get out of the high road, for I could not help feeling that we were a very serious encumbrance to that young officer, although his gentlemanly and grateful feelings prevented him from saying as much; so I really took the turning just because it presented itself, without having the smallest idea of where it lead to."

"What's that?" said Dick, suddenly.

"What's what?"

"Oh, it's a light a little way on in advance, I see. It is having quite a fight with the coming daylight, to make itself visible. It seems to proceed from some cottage window, don't you think, Claude? Just take a good look at it."

Claude paused, and shading his eyes with his hands, he gazed earnestly in the direction of the light, and then he said—

"It is the reflection of a fire-light, I think, darting out into the air, through a little latticed window. At all events, it shows that somebody is up and stirring from whom we can ascertain where we are."

"Push on, then," said Dick.

In about five minutes they came to a pretty-looking cottage; but whether it

was the lodge entrance to some estate, or a cottage of itself, merely built in the lane, they could not decide. Claude, however, raised his voice, crying out—

"Hilloa!—hilloa! Anybody at home?"

An old woman appeared at the door of the little dwelling, and, to the surprise of Claude, she said—



THE SCUFFLE WITH THE CROWD IN THE VILLAGE OF EALING.

"A, B, C. One, two, three, and take it out of that."

The three friends looked at each other, and then they looked at the old woman, after which Claude said—

"Perhaps it's rather an ungracious question to ask you, old lady; but, are you mad, or have you had a little drop too much very early this morning?"

The old woman immediately retired into the cottage, and closed the door with a bang, without deigning to say another word to Claude and his companions.

"This is rather funny," said Dick. "What do you make of it, Claude? What does it mean?"

"I don't know—I suppose she is cracked."

"Possibly," said Jack, rather drily.

"At all events, I will have her out again," said Duval, as he leant from his saddle, and began banging at the door with the handle of his riding whip.—"Hilloa, old dame! Hilloa! your society is so delightful, that we want a little more of it—Hilloa! House—house! Come out—come out!"

Rap, rap, rap, went the heavy handle of the riding whip, and then the window was opened suddenly, and a jug of water was dashed out, which missed Claude, and fell right over Jack.

"Take that," said the old hag, "and perhaps you will get a little worse, if you don't be jogging while you may."

"Come, come, old lady," said Claude, "you have got hold of the wrong customers to try any threats upon. We have made up our minds to ask you a civil question, and we will not only ask it, but we will have an answer to it likewise, or we will have your cottage down about your ears."

"Confound the old hag," said Jack, "she has drenched me."

"What's your question, idiot?" cried the old woman.

"Ah! now you are talking to yourself, old girl. Why, I suppose, you were with Noah in the ark, you are so old and hag-like, or are you one of the original witches in Macbeth?"

"I only wish I had a gun, I'd soon let you know what I am, and what I was, too."

"Oh, you can threaten, can you? Well, as you are such a nice comfortable old girl, we will dismount and step inside the little cottage for a while. I want a rest."

"You shall not—you dare not!"

"Oh, but we will; and as for daring, we are rather used to that, as you will see. Come, comrades, let us bestow a little of our company upon this sour crab of an old woman. It will be quite a piece of christian charity to do so, I feel assured."

"You wretches, what do you want here? Do you fancy I keep open house for such vagabonds? I do believe you are highwaymen."

"You don't say so?" cried Claude, as he dismounted, and fastened his horse's bridle to the branch of a walnut tree that grew close to the hedge-row. "Why, you must be quite a witch, old lady. Now, to my mind, there is nothing in nature half so well worth the studying as a real good old-fashioned, vicious, carping, snarling, old woman."

As Claude advanced, the old hag retreated into the cottage, and with a passionate vehemence, which showed how ill-regulated the disposition of that aged female must have always been, she commenced throwing at Claude and his friends everything she could lay hands upon in the cottage, quite heedless of whether they were articles that would break or not.

"Oh," said Claude, "that's it, is it? You want to get the crockery all outside do you? All's right. Let's help her, my friends. We ought always, you know, to lend a helping hand to the aged."

Jack, who had already had a taste of the old woman's passion, in the shape of the jug of cold water that had been thrown over him, had no objection to revenge himself a little, and Dick entered into the affair for the fun of the thing. They all three set to work, and in about five minutes they had cleared the cottage, and the lawn was strewed with the fragments of crockery of all descriptions, and broken articles of furniture. The last things that Claude threw out was a large earthenware pitcher, and that he sent slap though the latticed window.

Saucepans, pots, kettles, a warming-pan, all followed, and at the last, the old

woman got desperate, and feeling herself fairly conquered, she sat down on the floor, and shrieked with passion.

"Now," said Claude, very gently, "you will, perhaps, answer me the quiet civil question I wished to ask you at first?"

"Oh, you odious wretches!"

"Where does this lane lead to?"

"I'll have you all hanged, I will!"

"Where does this lane lead to?"

"I won't tell you!"

"You won't? Very good. I didn't see those few little glazed prints on the wall. Out with 'em, Jack."

"There they go."

The old woman sprang to her feet, and catching up the fender, she began to lay about her with it with savage fury. Claude got out of the way as best he could, and then, watching his opportunity when she was near to the window, he tilted her out of it, fender and all, on to a little flower border that was underneath it. Then, resting his arms on the sill, he said—

"Now, old lady, where does this lane lead to?"

She scrambled up again, and seizing a garden rake, she began to poke it in at the window, with the hope of doing them some injury, but Claude quickly disarmed her of it, and then said, quite gently, and in a soft, gentle tone of voice—

"Old lady, where does this lane lead to?"

"Why, what's all this?" cried Dick, suddenly.

"All what?" said Jack.

Claude glanced round, and he saw that Dick had opened a cupboard in the wall, from which had tumbled out to the floor of the cottage a quantity of costly dresses for females. There were shawls, mantles, slippers, flowers for the hair, bracelets, girdles, and, in fact, every description of wearing apparel; and among the lot, a quantity that seemed to have belonged to mere girls.

At the sight of this discovery, the old woman uttered a cry of dismay, and fell flat upon her face.

"What is the meaning of it all?" said Claude; "is the old devil a fence, after all?"

"No; surely not," said Dick; "she would get no business out here, and, besides, this is not the sort of property. This looks as if all the young girls in the parish had been robbed of something. It's quite past my comprehension altogether."

"And mine," said Jack.

"And, I am afraid," said Claude, "I must say mine. However, this discovery seems to have quieted her down a bit, at all events. She has fainted, I do think. Let's pick her up and bring her in; at all events, she has made a grand fight of it, and considering that she must have known that there was not a very good chance for her against three men, she carried on the war pretty well."

"It was all temper," said Jack. "But I could have forgiven her everything but the cold water business."

"Ah, Jack! that seems to have thrown cold water upon your feelings in the matter. Bring her in, Dick, for let her be what she may, in temper or in conduct, she is yet a woman, and as such, entitled to some care from us."

"Agreed," said Dick; "and all she has done is her own violence. We have been careful not to touch her, I am sure, the stupid old pump! How the deuce she became possessed of all these clothes is a mystery to me. They are far beyond anything one might expect to find here."

Dick, however, picked the old woman up and brought her into the now dilapidated cottage. They placed her as comfortably as circumstances would admit upon the little miserable truckle-bed, which was about the only article that had not been thrown out into the lane; and then Dick dashed some water upon her face, and she slowly opened her eyes.

"Hilloa," he said, "are you better?"

"Yes. Oh, God, yes!"

"Do you know where you are?" said Claude.

"Yes—yes, I do now."

"Then where does this lane lead to?"

Neither Dick nor Jack could restrain their laughter at the pertinacity with which Claude stuck to his question; and the woman, after looking at him for a moment or two in silence, said,

"To Wooksom."

"Oh, I know that," said Dick. "It is a little village of not much more than a dozen houses."

"Very good," said Claude. "Now that she has answered me, I am quite content; but if I had worried her for the next hour or two I would have made her tell me. I shall be off now, for to tell the truth, we have wasted too much time here already."

"Shall we ask her about the cupboard full of clothing?" said Dick in a whisper to Jack.

"Ah, do."

"I say, old girl, how came you by all these things that seem to belong to young ladies' wardrobes, eh? We are rather curious to know; and if it is a secret, we won't let it go any further."

"Mercy! Mercy!" said the old woman, "I suffer enough. Oh, do not drag me to a prison. Oh, have mercy upon me! If you are, as I suppose you are, the officers of justice, spare me or kill me. But I cannot tell: I am bound by such solemn oaths, that it would be perdition to break them. Oh, no—no, I can die, but I will tell nothing."

"Oh, she is mad—quite mad," said Claude. "Let us come away. If she were to tell us any long story, I should not believe it. Come along, my friends; the best thing we can do is to leave her to herself."

"Hark!" said Dick. "A horseman is coming at full speed down the lane. Do you not hear it?"

"I do," cried Claude, as he rushed into the lane just as a horseman drew up at the door of the cottage.

"Well met," he cried; and then Duval saw that it was the young officer to whom he had done such good service. He handed to Claude a small folded paper.

"Take this," he said; "it is from her whom you rescued from a fate worse than death, and I have to tell you that the whole country-side is now up in arms against you. If you follow the directions contained in the paper you now have, you will find a secure asylum for a little time. Adieu; I must be off again."

Without, then, waiting for a word of thanks, the young officer put his horse to a gallop, and went towards the high-road again.

CHAPTER CCXXV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE COTTAGE REMAINS A MYSTERY FOR THE PRESENT.

"To horse!" cried Claude. "I think that the sooner we get away from here the better. There is much danger now in this neighbourhood, and the daylight has all but fairly come."

When he was mounted, Duval looked at the folded paper, and found upon it, written with pencil in evident haste, the following words:—

"To my friend, C. D.

"I have abundant reason to know that you are environed by danger, and that more than ordinary means will be used for the purpose of capturing yourself and friends. My mother and Sir Felix will use every means for the purpose o destroying you. I, therefore, beg that you will take special warning, and do as

I ask you. Go to Guildford, and when you get there, inquire at the theatre for Mr. Clare. He is my brother, and for my sake will do anything he can for you. You may be quite certain, at all events, of getting with him an asylum that will provide you against any immediate evil consequences. I need not subscribe myself anything but one who feels how much you have befriended her."

Claude read this note to his friends, and then added,—

"What do you both advise upon this? Shall we obey its counsel?"

"I would," said Jack; "she cannot for one moment mean otherwise than for our good; and the young officer would assuredly not have ridden back to bring you that message, Claude, if he had not felt well assured of the emergency of the case."

"That I believe. What do you think of it, Jack?"

"I vote for Guildford."

"Very well: I own that my own inclination likewise points that way. Be it so. This Mr. Clare may assist us for his sister's sake. At all events, if we go among the players, it will be a new phase in our existence, and promises a little change to us. The only question is how to get there, for I must confess that I don't know the way."

"Nor I," said Dick.

"But I do," said Jack; "after the name of the little village, which the old woman mentioned, I know pretty well where we are; and I think if you both follow me, I can lead you to Guildford."

"Lead on, Jack, then," said Claude, "although I do think it is a pity to leave this place without ascertaining all about the mystery of that old woman in the cottage, for that there is some great mystery connected with her I feel assured."

"Not a doubt of it;" said Dick, "but if I mistake not, it is one of those mysteries that will keep; and I shall be the first to propose a return to her cottage when this hot pursuit of ours is over, even if we should be at the trouble of throwing all her crockery into the lane again."

"Or of buying her a new lot," said Claude. "We will follow you, Jack, if you please."

The old woman had recovered from her swoon, but she did not stir off the bed upon which they had laid her, so that they had no interruption from her, but off they went at a good pace down the lane in the direction of the little village that she had mentioned in answer to Duval's inquiries, which he had persisted in under such extraordinary circumstances.

At the pace they went, they were very soon quite clear of the lane, and then, upon turning an angle, formed by a splendid group of chestnut trees, they came at once upon the little village which had been mentioned. From that point, there was a capital view over the surrounding country for a very considerable distance.

"There's our road," said Jack, pointing in the direction of a clump of trees that stood by the edge of a winding road that the morning sun was just faintly shining upon.

"All's right, then," said Claude. "We can push on. How far is it, Jack, do you think, to Guildford?"

"About eight miles," said Jack "But hold my horse, Claude, and I will get upon yonder bank and take a long look round the country. I think if there are any persons in sight, one will see them for some miles off in the clear morning air, from such a height as yonder is. It will be as well to know."

Claude accordingly held Jack's horse, while he clambered up to a bank that rose some fifteen feet above the level of the road, and then, while he steadied himself by a good grasp upon the lowest arm of a stunted oak, he took a long look around him.

"Do you see anything?" said Claude.

"I do—I do. There are two distinct parties coming down separate roads. They look each of them strong enough, too, to give us some trouble; but they are a good mile off yet."

"Only a mile? Are they mounted, Jack?"

"Yes; and well mounted, too."

"Then, we have not a great deal of time to spare. Come down, Jack, and let us be off at once, for I have no fancy to be taken nor killed upon this fine fresh morning."

Jack was in the saddle again in a moment or two, and without another word of hesitation, off he went in advance, putting his horse to a sort of half gallop, while Claude and Dick kept close after him.

At the rate at which they rode, they got over the ground well, at the same time that they did not so much distress themselves to prevent them from making a grand start for a mile or two upon any emergency that might arise to call for such an exertion. The road wound round the little village; but after that, it was straight and clear, and for the most part bordered by tall banks upon either side, down which was a luxuriant growth of shrubs.

In this way, without exchanging a word, they went about two miles, and it was no small satisfaction to Claude to see that Jack did not for a moment hesitate, for that to him was a good proof that he knew the road perfectly well.

Then, Jack drew in a moment, and looking round, he said—

"The nearest way is over a hill. It makes a difference of more than half a mile to skirt it, but then we are out of sight in the hollow, and in sight on the rise."

"Skirt the hill, then, by all means," said Claude.

"Very good. I think, myself, it is the best; but I thought I would mention it to you, that's all."

"All's right, Jack!"

Jack now abruptly turned to the left, and plunged down a narrow lane, that was so thickly studded with trees on each side, that they met overhead, and, although it was really then broad daylight, involved the place in a kind of dim and dubious twilight. The road was very damp and sloppy, too.

"This," said Claude to Dick, "is, no doubt, a pretty and romantic spot in the mid-day heats of summer."

"Delightful enough! But what's the matter with Jack? He has come to a dead stop."

They were soon by the side of Jack, and they found that the obstacle to his further progress consisted of a hurdle, drawn right across the middle of the lane. On the other side was a man in a smock-frock, with a pitch-fork in his hand, which he held in a threatening attitude.

"What's the meaning of this?" cried Claude.

"Why just that you may go over the hill," said the fellow. "This here lane, you see, goes through a part of my farm; and I and my missus have made up our minds to stop it up. The parish say as how they will go to law with I, but I don't mind; I'll go to law with the parish."

"Come—come, don't be a fool."

"Yes I will: I have put up thesen hurdles here, and out yonder I have put up thosen hurdles there, and here I stands; I means to do what I likes; and here's my muck-fork, and danged if I don't put it into anybody as comes here."

"Come—come, my friend, here's a guinea; get out of the way at once like a good fellow."

"I bean't a good fellow, and I don't want a guinea."

"Oh, then, you will be a fool?"

"Yes, I will."

"Then, my friend, I have to tell you that we intend to pass this way, whether you like it or not."

Upon this, the countryman put himself into a ludicrous posture of defence with the pitch-fork, so that Claude and his friends could hardly forbear laughing at him, although there was really no time to lose, as they wished to make what progress they could in as short a time as possible.

"Once more I ask you," said Claude, "in a civil manner, to move aside. Letting us pass will not affect your quarrel with the parish; for we are perfect strangers in this neighbourhood, and may very likely never be in it again."

"No—no, I know better; you have been put on this here job by Muster Nicholls the overseer; but here I be, and here's my muck-fork, and I'm danged I'll give thee a poke with it as thee won't like if thee comes here."

"Very good, then, as we are determined to pass, I will shoot you; I am very reluctant to do it, having already shot a man this morning who offended me; but if you will have it, it is your own fault."

With this, Claude took a pistol from his pocket, and without waiting for the astonished farmer to say a word upon the subject, he fired at him, taking care only just to miss his head.

The effect of this was so astounding, that for a moment or two the fellow stood with his pitch-fork in an attitude as though he had been transformed to stone, and then, with a roar like that of some bull-calf, down he fell flat upon his back.

"We can jump it," cried Claude, and giving his horse his head, away he went over the fence.

Jack and Dick followed quickly; and leaving the farmer speechless upon his back with his pitch-fork above him, they went at the next hurdle-fence which he had put up, and cleared that likewise.

They were now half way round the hill over which the conservator of the rights of his farm had been so anxious that they should pass, and they enjoyed a hearty laugh at the consternation of the farmer. Claude, when they got right round the hill, got half way up a tree and found that they had distanced the parties that were in search of them; but he fancied that there was a suspicious collection of people a little way in advance of where they were.

"Jack," he said, "is there no way to Guildford but by the high-road? Can we not get there in any other way than by going right on, for there are people that I think we may as well avoid, in advance of us?"

"Then we must try the meadows, Claude. I know we can get across them, although the horses may give us some little difficulty. We can but try it, though."

"We will, Jack. We can surely make our way through a hedge, if it should be absolutely necessary so to do. Come on; I am for the meadows, if you can act as a guide to us across them."

"I can do that."

"Then, do it by all means; for the more I look at those who come in advance of us, the more I dislike them. There is certainly some consultation going on, and as we are very likely to be the subjects of discourse, I should like to get as far off from the council as I possibly can."

"And I," said Dick.

Jack, without more ado, now began to unfasten the first gate they came to, that upon the side of the road upon which lay their route, and by the aid of one of his picklocks, he soon succeeded in opening the padlock with which it was secured, and swung the gate open.

"I don't think," he said, "it is above a mile-and-a-half now across the fields to Guildford, if it be so much. Come on, Claude. This will, after all, perhaps, be the very best way of reaching that town, if we can do it sharply."

"Every place has its disadvantages," said Dick, "as well as its advantages; and we cannot expect this one to be without them. We certainly avoid our foes who are in advance; but, I think, we give those who are in our rear a little chance of observing us."

"Doubtless," said Claude; "but, I think, we may, having such a start of them, outstrip them tolerably easy; so that, after all, their progress through the meadows, has, I think, its good features to a greater extent than its bad ones."

"That's likely enough. Speed will be everything."

They now got on in a very peculiar manner, indeed. When they came to a meadow that was of sufficient extent, without a fence, to enable them to do so, they went at a gallop across it, and where the fence was not a particularly bad one, they leaped it, and went right on without pausing. Upon occasions, however, where the fence was high and straggling, and beyond the power of a horse,

with his rider, to go over it, they rapidly dismounted, and soon oroke away sufficient of it to enable them to get the horses through a gap.

By this means, and by not pausing for a moment to consider how they were getting on, they made good progress, and upon arriving at the top of a little hill, Jack pointed in advance, and cried —

"There's Guildford."

"Why, we have not above two or three meadows to cross," said Dick. "It will be awkward now if we come plump upon somebody's garden at the end of these fields."

"If we do," said Claude, "the somebody will have to put up with the inconvenience of our going through it, for now it would be madness for us to turn back."

"If we did," said Jack, "it would be into the arms of our foes, for behold! they, too, have taken to the fields, and are making what speed they can towards this point."

CHAPTER CCXXVI.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS FIND SAFETY AMONG THE ACTORS AT GUILDFORD.

As Jack spoke, he pointed to the portion of the fields where the officers were actually coming on as quickly as possible, and in the course of a very few minutes must have reached them.

"Ah, indeed," said Claude, "there is no time to lose."

"Not a moment," said Dick.

The next fence they came to was one which, if they had not been in so great a hurry, they would have found it the safest thing to dismount at, and make a gap through; but now Claude resolved to put his horse upon its metal, and try the leap. He did it successfully.

It is well known that nothing induces a horse to do anything half so well as seeing another do it, and the consequence was, that both Jack and Dick likewise succeeded in clearing the fence in good style, although it is probable enough that under less urgent circumstances they might not have succeeded in doing so.

"All's right?" asked Claude.

"Yes—yes."

"Then we are tolerably safe, I think; for if they can get over that they are much better mounted than I think them."

"It is not likely," said Dick. "While they are making a gap to get through, we shall be off and away."

There was but one field now between them and the outskirts of the town of Guildford. Claude had rather dreaded that their course might take them to some enclosure which they might not be able to pass through, and to skirt it might indeed be a serious waste of time; but luckily for them, such was not the fact. They merely found a straggling wooded fence thrown across the end of a half-finished street which led directly into the town.

"Is this our place of destination, then, Jack?" said Claude.

"It is; this is Guildford."

"Good. It strikes me that we have about ten minutes to spare, and it is to be hoped that will suffice to reach the theatre, which I presume there will be no great difficulty in doing."

"There ought to be none. Let us ask this boy. Hilloa! my lad—where is the theatre?"

"Lor!" said the boy, g'aring at Jack wi h all his eyes. "Be ye player folks, eh?"

"Yes, my boy. All's right."

"Why then, it is down along side o' the White Horse, and then you turn round by Green's piggery, and you comes bump agin it."

"Why, what a dear lad you are. If you will run on before, and find out for us the White Horse and Green's piggery, I dare say we shall muster a few halfpence among us."

"Oh, won't I!"

At this moment a young man stepped up, and said—



CLAUDE FINDS THE INSENSIBLE BOY NEAR THE HAUNTED MANSION.

"Pardon me, gentlemen; but I think I heard you ask for the theatre just now. Is it so?"

"It is," said Claude, interposing, "and we want a Mr. Clare that belongs to it."

"Mr. Clare, gentlemen? Why, I am that person. My name is Clare.

What can you possibly want with me? Pardon me for being so abrupt; but I really did think I was quite unknown in this part of the country."

"So you are, probably; but if you will cast your eyes on that note, you will see that we have been sent to you."

With this, Claude handed the young man the note which the officer had brought to him in the lane.

"Good Heavens!" he said, "it is from my poor sister. I heard that she was being forced into a most unwelcome match by our mother, who, I grieve to say, is not all that a mother should be. By this note I see, gentlemen, she recommends you to my care. In what possible way can I aid you?"

"By protecting us for a few hours only. We have had the good fortune to perform a signal service for your sister, the particulars of which I will inform you of at greater leisure. Let it now suffice, that on account of that service we are hotly pursued, and that, if taken, our lives are not worth much. Can you by any means hide us, or disguise us, until the men who are on their route to Guildford have left it, and given up the idea that we are here?"

The young man paused for a few moments, during which he was in deep thought, and then he said—

"Yes—yes. I can and will. I am the poor manager of a very poor company of players; and that circumstances, not my poverty, but the fact of my being the manager, will enable me to do something for you. Follow me at once. We will first of all get your horses put up, and then we will to the theatre."

"Let me assure you that every inquiry will be made for us," added Claude. "This is no common danger. If our horses go to any inn, we are lost, for our enemies know that we are mounted, and will leave no stable unsearched."

"That is awkward."

"It is; but if you have any place about the theatre in which you can possibly bestow our steeds, let it be ever so rough, it will be better than going to an inn with them, for that would be at all events to insure their loss, if not our own destruction as well."

"Yes—oh, yes. Come on. There are actual stables at, or I ought rather to say underneath, the theatre, for it has at one time been used as a circus for horsemanship. We will manage all that, no doubt. Come on. I will take you by a back way, so that you may avoid observation as much as possible."

"Do so, sir," said Claude, "and as quickly as possible, for according to our calculations, our foes must now be very close indeed to the outskirts of Guildford."

The manager of the little travelling company that had taken up a resting-place for a week or two at Guildford, at once led their friends down a narrow court, in which they led their horses, and then crossing a piece of waste ground, they made their way to the back of the theatre. There there was a door that by a gentle slope conducted to some old stables beneath the stage. The door was fast, but Jack soon got over that difficulty by picking the lock, and in the course of a few minutes the three horsemen were safely bestowed beneath the Guildford theatre.

To be sure, it was but a very gloomy place, indeed, into which they were led, but it was, in comparison with the inns in the town, a safe one, and the creatures were sufficiently docile to allow their masters, with whom they were in such constant companionship, to take them where they pleased.

"We are much beholden to you," said Claude.

"Oh, no—no. But tell me. Do you really now anticipate any very immediate danger? I mean, do you think there will be an active search made for you in the town?"

"I am afraid there will."

"Humph! Well, at ten o'clock we have a rehearsal of Hamlet. I will order that it shall be a dress one, and if you will allow me to rig you out in costume from our wardrobe, I will defy your most intimate friends to know you. You of course know nothing of the parts, so you must be content to appear in a very

inferior condition. We can easily make you into supplementary lords in waiting about the Danish court; or what say you to representing yourselves to be three stage-struck gentlemen of the neighbourhood, who are willing to pay handsomely for being permitted to appear? In that case, I will put up a play for you, and you can appear at the rehearsal in full dress of distinguished characters."

"That will do well," said Claude, "and it shall be no delusion, for we are willing to pay, and will pay well."

The young manager changed colour.

"Ah!" he said, "now you suspect that I was angling for money. You are wrong, on my soul you are, gentlemen. I will not take one farthing."

"Believe me," said Claude, "I had no such suspicion; but you will permit us to put your company in good humour with us, at all events, by our paying them. Do not fancy that we have the remotest idea of accusing you of any unmercenary motives, but you will see that it is the best plan. We can easily do it, so let me beg of you to allow us the gratification of so acting."

"You shall do so, gentlemen, if it so please you; but do not overdo it. A small sum will amply suffice. And now come with me to the wardrobe, and I will do my best to equip you."

They all three followed their new friend, the manager; and since it was not to be thought likely that stage-struck gentlemen would perform any part but one of importance, Claude was equipped as Hamlet the Dane; Dick was accommodated with a royal suit in which to play the king; and Jack, of his own free will, insisted upon dressing for the friar, who has a few words to say upon the occasion of the funeral of Ophelia.

They had all, by the kind assistance of the manager, got on their dresses by the time the players reached the theatre for the rehearsal; and the manager then, leaving them in a private room, said to them just before he did so—

"You will be able from where you are to hear what I say to the company concerning you. They will be upon the stage, and you must give me credit for saying what I consider it to be politic to say, not what I think."

"Say anything you please of us, my good sir," said Claude, "so that you manage to make things agreeable to yourself and to your company. I trust that we shall not be compelled by circumstances to intrude for long upon you."

"It is no intrusion; and the moment they find that you are willing to pay them, you will be most welcome, for that is more than the good folks of Guildford seem inclined to do."

"Do they not, then, patronise the drama?"

"Patronise it, sir? they are brute-beasts—mere animals, sir. They don't know what the drama is. It was only the other night in the middle of Macbeth, that a wretch got up in the boxes, and said—'I'm sure it would be agreeable to the company to have a comic song,' and the proposition being hailed with great delight, I was forced to sing one in the character of the Scottish tyrant. What do you think of that, sir?"

"Why I certainly think that the drama must be at a low ebb, indeed, in Guildford."

"You are right, sir—you are right; but I will now go, and prepare the company for your reception."

With this, the manager went upon the stage, and in a loud voice he said, addressing the company—

"Ladies and gentlemen, we have caught three gudgeons. They are willing to pay ten pounds into the treasury, which shall be equally divided; but they want to play in Hamlet. Has any lady or gentleman any objection?"

"Objection?" cried everybody in chorus. "Objection? Oh, gracious, no! Give us the money."

"I have not got it just at present, but I pledge you my word that it will be forthcoming soon, and that, as regards the equal division of it, there shall be no cavil. The three gudgeons are in the house, and they are dressed, one as Hamlet, the other as the king, and the third as the friar, so you will be so good as to go

through the rehearsal with them, gentlemen, with as much gravity as you possibly can."

"Oh, leave us alone for that," said one; "we'll do it. Only think of ten pounds dropping into the treasury, when all we have had for a fortnight has been eight-and-twenty shillings among us."

"Oh, it's quite delightful," said a young lady, who played Ophelia. "The people where I lodge are quite dunning me for three-and-eight-pence, I declare, and how could I pay it?"

"And only think of the predicament I have been in," said the principal tragedian. "I make it a rule to board and lodge wherever I go, and thus save getting into debt to a lot of people, and you only make one enemy when you go away without paying, you know."

"A good plan!" cried everybody.

"And," added the tragedian, "they threaten to cut off the supplies if I do not pay the two weeks that are owing."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" said the manager, "not so loud; I am afraid our three friends may overhear us. Shall I call them on, and give them a book each for to read their parts from?"

CHAPTER CCXXVII.

AN ADVENTUROUS OFFICER FALLS DOWN A TRAP AT THE THEATRE.

This little conversation among the players was very amusing, indeed, to Claude and his friends, for they overheard every word of it, situated as they were so close at hand.

"Well," said Turpin, "we shall do some good by coming among these people, at all events; for I think, from what we have discovered, that we shall be the very best patrons that the drama is likely to have in this town of Guildford."

"Not a doubt of it," said Claude. "But here comes the manager; do not let him know that we have overheard the needy confessions of his company: it might sound ungracious."

The manager made his appearance with quite a smile upon his face.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have made every possible arrangement with the ladies and gentlemen of the company, and they will be most happy to see you all, and go through the rehearsal with you."

"That will do," said Claude; "we will attend you, sir."

"This way, gentlemen, if you please; you will not, perhaps, find our stage appointments exactly what you would wish and expect, but I assure you that from the front, and when everything is well lit up, the effect is exceedingly good."

"Not a doubt of it," said Claude.

The manager coughed loudly as a hint to the company that he was about to bring before them the three liberal amateurs, and they at once ceased the buzz of conversation that had been going on previously, and saluted the new comers with great taste and tact.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Claude, "I am very much afraid that you will find us so far behind yourselves in ability, that you will feel an inclination to laugh at us."

"No,—oh, no!" cried everybody.

"I have only to request," added Claude, "that if you do so, it will be before our faces, as then we shall consider it a useful lesson, otherwise, it might a little disconcert us."

"Laugh!" cried the low comedian, who was going to play the second gravedigger; "allow me, sir, in the name of the company, to state that we never laugh."

"Never, never!" cried everybody.

"That is very satisfactory," replied Claude; "and now I hope you will not feel in any way offended at what I am about to say, and I hope your worthy manager will be so good as to take it in good part."

"Oh, yes, yes!" said everybody; "pray proceed, sir."

"We are, as you see, three friends, and we usually travel together, and as our means permit us to do so, we take good care of ourselves in the eating and drinking way. Now, it so happens that this is the hour at which we usually lunch."

A look of expectation passed from face to face.

"Therefore," added Claude, "as we are here, and as we make it a rule always to lunch in as pleasant society as we possibly can, we hope that you will permit us here, not to invite you all to a stage banquet, but to a real one, compounded of what we usually lunch upon."

A murmur of satisfaction went through the company, and Ophelia told the queen that really he, meaning Claude, was a very nice man indeed, to which the queen, in the most feeling manner in the world, assented.

"Sir," said the principal tragedian, "It is an honour to have you amongst us. Quite an honour, sir."

"You are too good," said Claude. "Will you then permit me to order half-a-dozen bottles of champagne, and a guinea's worth of pastry, from the best sources in the town?"

"Oh, yes, yes," cried everybody, and the ladies of the company almost shed tears at the extreme niceness of Claude.

"Oh, it's too much," said the manager; "it's too much. A couple of gallon of half-and-half, now ——"

"Wretch!" cried Ophelia. "Oh, you low wretch. You nearly take my breath away."

"Well, well; I have nothing to do with it. Of course, if these gentlemen please to be so very generous, I am not the person to stand in the way of their very great kindness."

"Nor I," said the principal tragedian, advancing: "and I can only say, that knowing Guildford very well, I will take upon myself to order the little articles suggested, from the very best of places in the town. It will give me positive pleasure."

"It is very kind of you," said Claude, as he counted out seven guineas from his pocket and handed them to the tragedian, whose eyes brightened at the sight of the gold. "It is very kind of you indeed, to condescend so far; but I believe that will cover the order?"

"It will—it will! Way for seven guineas! way there—ha—ha! Champagne and pastry for the gods!"

The tragedian made a most magnificent exit with the money. Ophelia turned a little pale at the frightful idea that he might not come back again; but she did not like to mention any suspicions of so highly derogatory a character to the company. She only whispered faintly to the queen, who remarked in the same tone, that if he did play such a trick, she would—with her own hands—skin him the the very next time she had the fortune to meet him.

For the honour of the profession, however, nothing was further from the intentions of the tragedian, than to appropriate in any way the guineas to himself; and in the course of a quarter of an hour, he returned with a man behind him with the half-dozen of champagne. How delightful it looked in its well-wired bottles, and no less than two men and a boy with the pastry!

Ophelia shed tears again when she saw this.

A stage table was placed in the middle of the stage, and every description of chair and stool that the place afforded, was brought into a state of requisition. The chairs from the private boxes, covered with dreadfully-faded cotten velvet, were procured for our three friends, and Claude being placed at the head of the table, bowed to the company, and said—

"I hope that the toast I am about to propose, will be acceptable to all present. Jack, tap the wine."

"Yes," said Jack, and pop went one of the corks.

"Success to the drama!" cried Claude.

Bang went another cork, and then there was such a jingling of glasses, and hissing of champagne, as never was seen; and how Ophelia and the queen did eat the pastry, to be sure!

The toast was drunk with all the honours, and then the principal tragedian rose to propose a toast and sentiment.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "when I see myself surrounded by youth, beauty, and talent, like—like I don't know what; and when I observe upon the admirable countenances of those around this festive board a—a—a kind of you know—I feel that I ought to propose ——"

"If you please, sir," said a boy, making his appearance suddenly, and interrupting the speaker as he addressed the manager, "there's two gentlemen as say they is officers of justice, and they say as they has heerd as some gentlemen is here as they wants."

"The devil!" said Claude.

"Can it be possible," said the tragedian, "that the officers of justice are base enough to interfere with persons who can be so liberal?"

"Oh, impossible!" said all the company.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Claude, "the fact is, that this is a wager. We have bet a thousand pounds to a couple of noblemen in London that we would travel a thousand miles with a couple of police officers after us, upon a sham charge of our being highwaymen, which the officers were to be made to believe, so that they should not be lukewarm in their efforts to take us, without being apprehended. Will you help us to win the wager?"

"Oh, yes—yes!" cried everybody.

"Stop a bit!" cried the low comedian. "Stop a bit! I will open the long trap in the stage from below, and if you three stand on the other side of it, the moment the officers come to seize you, down they will go at once beneath the stage."

"Oh, yes, the wretches!" said Ophelia; "I don't wish to hurt them, but couldn't something jagged, and hard, and sharp, be put underneath, for them to fall upon? There's nobody in the world more human than I am, and I merely throw out the little suggestion!"

At this moment, a furious knocking came at the door that led to the stage of the theatre.

"Stop!" cried the manager, "it's just possible enough that disguised as these three gentlemen are, the officers may not know them, and in that case, it will be much better to let them go away again quite quietly as they came."

"We should prefer that," said Turpin.

"Yes," added Claude; "but there can be no objection to the little affair of the trap, notwithstanding; and we can take up such a position by the side of it as will protect us, if you will show us where it is on the stage."

"All's right!" said the comedian; "I will run down and unbolt it at once, and if there is any fuss afterwards, we can easily say that they had no business here, and that the trap was unbolted on purpose for Ophelia's grave."

"Exactly," said Ophelia. "Now you be off at once."

The knocking continued more violently than before, and the manager pointed out the place upon which Claude and his two friends might stand, so as to be quite clear of the trap, and yet so that no one could dart towards them without stepping upon it.

The six bottles of champagne were all drank out, and great havoc had been made with the pastry by this time, so that the tables were cleared away, and the manager, with a studied look of surprise upon his face, went and opened the door at which all the knocking had taken place.

In another moment, two officers, with pistols in their hands, rushed on to the stage.

"How came you to keep us so long at the door?" cried one, with a violent tone. "We shall complain to the magistrates of it."

"But, my good sir," said the manager, "who are you, now you are here? We were in the middle of a scene, and really could not leave off for the purpose of receiving visitors. Pray explain your business, and then be off, for we are engaged at rehearsal, and your presence here is very inconvenient indeed."

"And shameful!" said Ophelia. "You are the ugliest pair of wretches ever I saw in all my life!"

"Dear me, miss," said the other officer, who until then had not spoke; "if we are ugly, thank God our noses don't turn up like some folks, at any rate. That's a comfort!"

"Oh, you odious monster! Do you allude to my nose?"

"If you please, miss."

"Fiend! I appeal to all the world about my nose: I hold up my nose to general inspection. Does it turn up? I ask everybody of an unprejudiced mind if it turns up in the least?"

"That it certainly does not," said Claude.

"It is a vile calumny," said Dick Turpin.

"It is much more of a beautiful Roman nose," said Jack, "than a turn-up one, to my ideas."

"The villains," sobbed Ophelia, "to cast any reflection upon my nose, when all my family have been celebrated for the beauty of their noses; but he must have known that, and so thought he would hurt my feelings through my nose; but it won't at all succeed—brutal as the attack is upon an unoffending female's nose, it won't succeed. I rise superior to it, and I treat it with the scorn it deserves."

"Bravo!" cried the tragedian.

"Come—come," said the principal officer of the two, "this won't do for us. We are after three highwaymen, and some people in the town say that you have strangers here. It won't do, you know, to play any tricks with us, and you will find it rather a serious thing to tamper with the law when it is in pursuit of offenders."

"We tamper with the law?" said the manager. "I should think not. But just look about you, gentlemen, and if you think that any of us poor players are highwaymen, say so."

"Surely," said Claude, "we had better go on with the rehearsal. These gentlemen, while they are prosecuting their own business, cannot have any wish to interrupt ours."

"Who are you?" said the chief officer.

"Jonathan Grogs, sir, at your service."

"Indeed! I think I have seen you somewhere, my friend."

"Very possible."

"Perhaps you have seen me, too?" said Dick Turpin.

"And me?" said Jack.

"And all of us?" said Ophelia. "Perhaps you have seen all of us, you wretches!"

The two officers whispered together, and then one of them said—

"Our information is quite clear and complete regarding the fact of three persons having come here, and we shall be under the disagreeable necessity of taking the whole company before the justices, when there will be such an accurate examination as will either satisfy them or not that you are all what you pretend you are. Resistance is useless, as you will only bring yourselves into trouble by attempting it, and perhaps get personal injury, for we are men who will do our duty let the consequences be what they may."

"You don't say so?" said Claude.

"Yes we do; and insolence will do good."

"Well, I for one won't go," added Claude; "and it will be a bad day's work, to the first person who tries to take me."

"Will it, indeed?" said the officer. Then turning to his companion, he said,—"Watkins, let's have that one first."

"All's right."

They both made a rush at Claude, and stepping upon the treacherous trap, down they went below the stage, calling out murder as they proceeded to the dismal depths.

"Oh, dear," said the manager, "that was the trap for Ophelia's grave! I really hope you are not hurt, gentlemen?"

"Help!—help!"

"Coming—coming. You ought to have asked if all the traps were right, you ought, indeed."

"We will be off," said Claude, in a whisper to the manager. "You will do us the greatest possible favour by taking us to our horses now at once. We have no time to lose."

"This way."

Claude and his two friends darted through a little side-door after the manager, who led them by rather an intricate route to the back of the theatre again. The horses were got out in a few minutes, and Jack said—

"Good gracious, are we to go off in this costume?"

"I did not think for a moment of that," said the manager. Come on, you must change. This way. And yet, I must stay and mind the horses. It's the first door to the left."

"I know the room," said Claude.

They all three made their way to the dressing-room where their own clothes were, and with a marvelous rapidity, such as without some extraordinary impulse to urge them to it, would have been quite impossible, they got rid of their theatrical trappings, and resumed their own clothing.

The manager, accustomed as he was to stage dressing, was quite surprised to see them so soon.

"You are quick, indeed," he said; "mount and be off now, and good luck go with you."

"Take that," said Claude, as he handed him a purse; "take that, and divide it among your company according to your discretion; and believe me, I and my two friends will for ever feel grateful for the favour you have done us to-day."

"Don't mention that; you will put a meal into a number of hungry stomachs by your liberality."

Claude raised his hat, and the three friends set off at a gallop through the high street of Guildford, and were soon clear of the town, and in the pretty country beyond it.

CHAPTER CCXXVIII.

THE ROBERRY OF THE PRIVATE STAGE COACH, AND ITS RESULT.

Claude pulled up when they had got about two miles from Guildford, and burst into a loud laugh, as he said,—

"Well, what think you of our Guildford adventure, Jack and Dick? Was it not an amusing one?"

"It was," said Dick; "I only wonder if the officers' broke their necks down that trap! I never saw people disappear so cleanly in all my life."

"I hope our friends, the players, will not get into any trouble upon our account," said Jack.

"Oh, no,—that is not at all likely," said Dick; "they will not be forced to say anything further than what Claude told them. But what do you think of doing, Claude, now?"

"Why, of making our way to London, and doing the best we can upon the road."

"Agreed.—I'm quite willing. It strikes me that we get on capitally together,

and of the two, I certainly prefer this sort of thing to solitude, which was never much in my line."

"Nor in mine either," said Claude; "and I can say for myself, and I am sure I can answer for Jack, that the longer you think proper to stay with us, the better pleased we shall be."



THE VISION OF THE HAUNTED GRANGE.

"Yes," said Jack, "that's about the fact."

"It's a fact, then," said Dick, "that it gives me no small pleasure to hear of, for I was really at times afraid that you might get tired of me and wish me from you; but now I do think I shall stick to you a little longer. Where are we now, Jack?"

"Well, we have got into a cross-road, I rather think."

"There's an inn a little in advance, I suppose," said Claude, "for I can see a swinging sign on a tall post in the road. Let us push on and see what it is."

They rode on, and soon came to as prettily situated an inn as could be conceived. One of the most magnificent chestnut trees they had ever seen shaded the door, and there were four horses standing there, evidently waiting for their riders, who were within.

"It's perhaps worth while to find out who these horsemen are," said Claude to Dick, in a whisper. "Just hold my horse while I step into the inn; perhaps I may see them."

Claude was upon the point of dismounting, when the riders came out of the inn. They were four young men attired in faded finery, and they assumed a swaggering gait that quite astonished Claude. One of them in particular, as he mounted, hummed a song, the burthen of which was,—

"A moonlight night, a moonlight night,
And my pistols bright and steady, O!
'Stand! stand!' I cry, and without sob or sigh,
I pocket all their rowdy, O!"

With a whoop and a shout, the four horsemen then trotted off. Dick and Jack looked at Claude, and Claude looked at them with surprise, and then Jack said,—

"Why, Claude, if we don't look out, we shall be robbed upon the highway by these fellows."

"Upon my word," said Claude, "it looks very like it. What, on earth, can be the meaning of it?"

"And who are they here?" said Dick.

"Perhaps the landlord knows them. I will go into the inn as I intended, and inquire. Oh, here he is, I suppose."

At this moment, a little corpulent man, with evident looks of alarm, made his appearance at the inn door, and shading his eyes with his hand, he looked after the four horsemen, and shook his head.

"Hilloa, landlord!" said Claude, "who are those worthies that have just left your door?"

"Worthies do you call them, sir?"

"Why, perhaps the term is misapplied; but they don't seem the most respectable members of society."

"Respectable? No, sir. Oh, dear, no. I only hope I shall never see them at the White Horse again, that's all."

"Why, who are they, then?"

"I tell you what it is, gentlemen—if you are going down the road, don't do it. Don't do it. You will be robbed—robbed, gentlemen, and, for all I know, murdered!"

"Robbed and murdered?"

"Yes, gentlemen: indeed you will."

"Oh, you don't mean that, landlord?"

"Don't I though! You take a fool's advice, now, for once, and stop at the White Horse. Don't you go any further, now, or else, I assure you, gentlemen, it will be all the worse for you."

"But why, landlord?"

The landlord looked right and left to see that no one was listening to him, and then coming close up to Claude, he said, while Jack and Dick eagerly listened—

"Did you see that one, sir, that was singing a bit of a song?"

"Yes—yes."

"And you heard him, sir, as well? You took a good look at him, I hope, gentlemen, so that you might know him again?"

"We did—we did."

"Then, gentlemen, I can tell you that that person is neither more nor less than—than——"

"Who?—who?"

"The celebrated Claude Duval, the highwayman!"

"You don't say so?' said Claude, making a very great effort to keep himself from bursting out laughing in the corpulent little landlord's face. "You really don't say so, my honest friend?"

"Yes, I do."

"Is it possible?" said both Dick and Jack, affecting to lift up their hands in positive horror at the idea of being in such close proximity to such a dreadful and atrocious character as Claude Duval the celebrated highwayman was to all intents and purposes.

"Yes," added the landlord, who was quite gratified at the impression he thought he had made. "Yes, that was him; and I can tell you it will take me some time to get over the fright. I was told he was upon this road, but I didn't believe it—leastways, I didn't put myself out of the way about it, and only laughed; but now I'm all of a shake. Yes, gentlemen, I am all of a shake."

"And no wonder," said Claude. "But how did you come to make the discovery, landlord?"

"Why, you see, gentlemen, first of all, when they came to the White Horse, I thought they were no good, so I kept a sort of watch upon them—you understand, gentlemen? They ordered a bottle of wine; and just as I took it in, I heard one of 'em say to that young fellow who was singing the song, 'Well, Duval, I hope we shall have good luck.'"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. That's what I heard; and I heard something else, too, and that was, that they were going to stop Lord Whiffle."

"And who is he?"

"Why, gentlemen, he is a nobleman of very great taste, indeed, and a very nice man. He has set up a stage-coach of his own, and it's got up just like any other stage-coach; and his lordship drives it, and people actually think it is a stage-coach at times, and call after it, and that's the joke, you see, gentlemen."

"A very brilliant one certainly," said Claude. "But don't he ever take passengers?"

"Oh, yes, when he is in a funny humour he will take up anybody; and then when they stop he will say 'Pray remember the coachman,' and that's a capital joke."

"What an idiot he must be!"

"An idiot, sir?"

"Yes. Why don't his friends put him into some asylum for the weak-minded? But that is their affair, not ours. Do you really think that Claude Duval intends to attack his lordship's coach?"

"I am sure of it, sir; and I strongly advise you, gentlemen, to stop here till the affair is over, for you don't know what mischief may come of it. I have heard that that Duval is a most desperate fellow."

"So have I. But our business will not permit us to stop. So we must take our chances on the road. What has his lordship's coach upon it, landlord?"

"Nothing at all, gentlemen. You would know it in a moment if you saw it, for there is no reading on it at all. It's quite a plain coach; and sometimes, when somebody hails it, and his lordship stops, he says, 'What do you want?' and the person says, 'Where are you going to, coachman?' and he says, 'Wherever you see it written on the coach panels;' and then the person looks and, looks, and can't see anything, and that's another of his lordship's jokes. You understand?"

"Oh, it's easily understandable, and I really cannot say which of his lordship's jokes is the most admirable. Good-day, landlord: we are much obliged to you for your information."

They trotted off, and the landlord looked after them, shaking his head, and prophesying that they would come to their deaths if they met with Claude Duval.

When they had got some distance from the inn, Claude pulled up, and turning to Dick and Jack, he said—

"Can either of you give a likely explanation of this affair? What, on earth, can it all mean?"

"The only thing I can think of," cried Dick, "is that some fellows have taken to the road and have adopted your name, Claude, as a means of making the business more profitable than probably it otherwise would be."

"Yes," said Jack, "that must be it."

"Well," said Claude, "it's about the only explanation that presents itself of the affair; but I am not going to put up with it quietly, I can assure them. What I do, I will stand the consequences and the repute of; but I am not going to let another bring disgrace upon my name and my courage, by insane proceedings on the road."

"Let us after them," said Dick, "and convince them that it is rather dangerous to travel with such an alias. They cannot have got very far by this time, and we are better mounted than they, for I took a good look at their horses, and I will engage that ours could beat them all to pieces at actual work."

"Come on, then."

Duval was rather in a state of aggravation at the idea that the person whom he had seen should adopt his name. It was really a species of arrogance that he was hardly prepared for; and probably if the jocose young man who had sung the verse of the highwayman's song at the inn-door had come suddenly in his way, Claude would have made him repent most bitterly the assumption of the character that did not belong to him.

Fortunately for that individual, however, he did not happen to come in the way of Claude, and after about a mile's gallop down the road, Jack raised himself in his stirrups and said—

"A coach! A coach!"

"Which way, Jack?"

"Coming on to meet us. There, don't you see it?"

"Ah, yes, I do—and, by George, there are the very four fellows we saw at the inn. Look at them Dick. They are them."

The three friends now stopped and drew aside, so that they were very much in the shadow of some tall trees that grew close to the road-side, and from that spot they were the witnesses to about as curious and amusing a scene as they had ever witnessed.

The coach they had no sort of difficulty in deciding to be that of the facetious nobleman who, in so very small a way, thought himself so very jocular, for it was quite plain, as the landlord of the White Horse had described it to be, and no one was upon it but the apparent coachman, and a lad behind in a red coat, who played the part of a guard. Coming after this coach, which was drawn by four horses, came the personages who had been seen at the inn door, one of whom gave himself out to be Claude Duval. A most amusing race took place, until a pistol shot was fired by one the horsemen, and then his lordship immediately pulled up.

The four horsemen galloped up in a moment. One of them went to the heads of the two leading horses, and held them until the others surrounded the coach. The distance was too great to hear what was said; but the conduct of his lordship was the best joke of all.

He dropped the reins, and scrambled on to the roof of the coach, where he got upon his knees, and in the most abject manner imaginable, held up his joined hands in the attitude of prayer. The lad in the red coat rolled out of the little dickey at the back of the coach, and lay flat upon his back in the road.

"I should like wonderfully," said Claude, "to hear what they all say. Can we not get a little closer?"

"Yes, easily," said Jack. "Let us get through this gate. The meadow continues all the way to the spot of the encounter, parallel with the road, and if we lead our horses, I don't think it is possible that we can be seen."

"Come on, then, at once."

The gate to which Jack had alluded was close at hand, and they soon opened it, and passed through into the meadow. Dismounting, then, they led their horses along the silent turf, and in a few moments were exactly opposite to the scene of the encounter, and only hidden from observation by a clay bank, with a thick set hedge at the top of it.

The noble lord, who was so very facetious, was pleading for his life. The four highwaymen had crape masks on, that concealed the upper portion of their faces completely, and they had pistols in their hands, with which they made a great deal of unnecessary flourishing, to the immense terror of his Lordship of Whiffle.

"Oh, spare my life, gentlemen," he said, "spare my life. I will give you all my money if you will be so good as to spare my life. I don't mean any harm, I assure you, Mr. Highwayman."

"Are you Lord Whiffle?" cried one.

"Yes, sir, if you please. Oh, have mercy upon me."

"Did you not say in St. James's Street only yesterday, that you defied all the highwaymen in England to rob you?"

"Oh, dear, no, sir, you are quite mistaken; I only said I hoped they would be so good as not to stop me, that was all, sir; but I am quite willing to be robbed, indeed, I am, sir."

"Do you know that I am Claude Duval?"

"Oh—ch—oh! I was told you were upon the road, sir, but I did not know you, sir. I have some money, sir; and I only ask for my life!"

CHAPTER CCXXIX.

CLAUDE ROBS THE THIEVES—AND MAKES A LITTLE DISCOVERY.

The abject manner in which Lord Whiffle begged and prayed for his life excited both the amusement and the indignation of Claude and his companions.

"Is it not monstrous," said Claude, "to hear a fellow set such store by his paltry existence, that he will whine and weep in such a way as that about it?"

"It is contemptible enough," said Jack; "but then, you must bear in mind, that he is a lord, and, of course, a legislator for his country, and loves to spend the taxes that the people are fools enough to pay; therefore, his life is of more importance than that of any ordinary person."

"Precisely," said Dick. "But do listen to them. It is as good as a play. I am much amused."

"Oh, then," cried the fellow who played the part of Duval, "you have some money with you?"

"Yes, dear, sir, I have," whimpered his lordship; "and it is all at your service. I have no objection, likewise, to draw you a cheque if you will be pleased to accept of it, and if you will only spare my life—I assure you I never did much harm."

"Why, I suppose, to tell the truth, you are stupid?"

"Yes, gentlemen, if you please, I rather think I am."

"Oh, very well. In that case, then, we will only rob you; and you will, I hope, remember for the longest day you have to live, meeting with Claude Duval upon the high-road."

"Oh, yes; thank you, sir, I shall remember it, and anything else you may be so good as to require of me."

"Well, since you are so submissive, give up your purse; and write the cheque you speak of. Here is a pencil and paper; let it be for five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred pounds? Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"Very good. You don't like it, and between you and me, I don't think your

life is worth one half the money. If you will just hold your head a little on one side so that I may get the barrel of the pistol into your ear, I will blow your brains out in a moment as comfortably as possible."

"The Lord have mercy upon me! I will write the cheque at once, I will, indeed. Oh, dear, it's more even than my coach cost; it is, indeed; but anything to oblige you, sir. Excuse its being a little shaky, but it will be all right, sir."

"Are we going to put up with this?" said Dick.

"Not exactly," said Claude. "I propose that we let this little affair proceed, and when his lordship is fairly robbed and those fellows have left him, we will be after them quickly."

"Agreed."

Poor, miserable Lord Whiffle shook so that it was far from being an easy matter with him to write the cheque that was proposed to him; but he did get through it in some sort of fashion; and having surrendered his purse, his watch, and his rings to the sham Claude Duval, he with a groan said,

"I humbly suppose, sir, that now I may go?"

"Why, yes, I don't see anything particular to stop you now, my Lord Whiffle, and it is only to be hoped that you won't deny at your club in London that you have been robbed on the highway by Claude Duval, that is all."

"Oh, dear no. Anything you like, sir. I won't deny anything."

"Go back, then, on your road, for if you come in the direction we are going, we shall be under the disagreeable necessity of blowing your brains out, notwithstanding all promises to the contrary."

Lord Whiffle was as submissive as any human being could possibly be, and turning his horses' head towards Guilford again, he went off at a trot, shaking so as he did, that the horses, no doubt, wondered who was jerking at the reins in such an odd fashion. But no sooner had his lordship got to a distance that made him out of ear shot, than the four highwayman burst into an uproarious peal of laughter, and seemed so delighted with the success of the adventure, that they could hardly sit their horses.

"It's capital," said one, in a very effeminate tone of voice. "It's capital! How much money have you got out of him altogether, Tom. Let's count it over at once."

"Oh, it's a good lot. But let us get off to London now as quickly as we can possibly do so. We will all go to my lodgings, and make merry upon the occasion.

"That will do—come on."

They set off at a pleasant kind of trot, and Claude, as he looked at his two friends, said—

"Well, I think that they take things coolly, don't they?"

"They do, indeed, said Jack. "But you don't mean to let them go off in that way, Claude?"

"Not, exactly. Let us get into the road, and be off after them, directly. A stern chase, as they say at sea, is a long chase, and it won't do to let them get too far ahead."

"Certainly not, and here is a gap in the hedge, quite convenient to get the horses through. Come on. Hear we are in the high-road, and by this time they must be a mile off."

"Which it will take a good canter of three to make up," said Jack, "so it is no use playing at it."

"Off we go," said Claude, as he put his horse to speed, and in a moment the whole three of them were going at a pace along the road that promised rapidly to diminish the distance between them and the party they pursued.

Claude, by dint of raising his voice and speaking very slowly, managed to carry on a sort of conversation with his two friends, notwithstanding the difficulty of doing so at the pace they were going at.

"I have thought," he said, "of a way of managing the affair, which will afford us no small share of amusement, as well as terrifying the party we are in pursuit of."

"How will you do it?" said Dick.

"In the first place, let us rob them of all their plunder, and of all their own cash likewise, if they have any; and then we can easily find some spot where we can alter our appearance, and come upon them as officers of justice, and give them into custody for the robbery on Lord Whiffle. By that means we shall clear the road of them."

"It will, indeed."

"What say you, Jack—will that suit?"

"Excellently well; and there are our men in advance of us; don't you see them, Claude, down in the hollow, there?— and they don't seem to be at all alarmed."

"Not they, indeed. Why, I do believe tkey see us, and are waiting for us. Perhaps they think they will have some more booty. That would be a rich thing if we were to be stopped on the highway, after all."

"Rather so," said Dick. "Let us try it."

They galloped on now, and sure enough, about a quarter of a mile in advance, they found the four horsemen who robbed Lord Whiffle going on at an easy trot, and conversing together as if nothing were at all amiss. Twice or thrice some of them half turned, and looked rather steadily at Claude and his friends; but they did not stop.

"Jack," said Claude, "you stand a few feet behind us, and prevent them from escaping that way, while Dick and I ride past them, and then suddenly turn upon them."

"That will do," said Jack.

This little manœuvre was executed in a few moments. Jack, with a pistol in his hand, halted, and Claude and Dick rode past the party about twenty paces, and then suddenly turning face to face with them, Claude cried—

"Stand! For your lives, stand!"

The four horsemen immediately drew up in some confusion, bustling against each other as they did so in the surprise of the moment, and one of them uttered quite a scream of alarm, which was truly ludicrous to hear.

"Now, sirs," said Claude, "I will trouble you for your money and other valuables, if you please. It is all the same to us whether you provoke us to blow your brains out first or not; but that is a matter for your own consideration quite."

"Murder!" cried one.

"As you please, gentlemen. As you please."

Two of the party turned their horses' heads apparenty to seek safety in flight, but there was Jack with a huge horse-pistol in his hand, and they saw that their case was hopeless. Claude dashed up to the young man who had passed himself off as Claude Duval, and laying a hand upon his collar, said to him—

"Now, sir, oblige me by telling me who you are?"

"I—I? Who I am?"

"Yes. If you have any courage in you, you will try to do a little credit to the name you have assumed. Are you, or are you not Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"Oh dear, no! I am not."

"Yes you are, for you have only recently announced yourself to be such; and as I was always under an impression that that was my name, I felt just a little confounded at hearing that there were two of us."

"Oh, have mercy upon me! It was all a joke."

"Rather a practical one though, I should think. But we are disappointed. We did think that you would have had the courage to defend yourselves, and then there might have been a little sport; but this is a very lame affair indeed."

"But we don't want to be killed," said one of the party, in a voice that made Claude and Dick laugh.

"Come," added Claude; "your money and valuables at once. We are not accustomed to delays."

The whole four horsemen gave up, not only the money they had received from

Lord Whiffle, but a considerable sum of their own, as well as a gold watch that each of them had, so that upon the whole, Claude and his friends were very well pleased with their day's work.

"Now," said Claude, let me advise you, by all means, if you try the road again, not to name yourselves by any names but your own; or if you must adopt one, don't let it be mine, for the only thing I would say nothing about, were you to personify me, would be if you were to be hanged."

"And that you may be as soon as you like," said Dick.

The four horsemen looked about as silly as they possibly could, and the rueful manner in which they regarded each other, was most particularly comic, going far to disarm Claude of the rage that he naturally enough felt against them at their assumption of his name on the road.

"Good day," he said; "perhaps you will remember us in your prayers, and you may consider yourselves well off to escape as you have done. It's only, you know, the highwayman robbing the highwayman; and as we have the most right to Claude Duval's booty, we consider that what we have taken from you, we have quite honestly come by."

The discomfited robbers of Lord Whiffle made no reply to this. It was quite evident that whatever joke Claude Duval and his friends found in the transaction, they could see none whatever; and with the most ludicrously chop-fallen looks in the world, they saw all their plunder taken away.

"Now for Oxford!" said Claude, on purpose to give the four discomfited men an idea that they would not again see them, and away the friends went at a gallop, which they did not in the least abate until they got to a turn of the road which hid them from observation.

If his life had depended upon his preserving silence, Claude could not have prevented himself from stopping to laugh; and in a shout of merriment, he showed how much he had been amused at the discomfiture of the four robbers of Lord Whiffle.

"Did you ever," he said, "in all your life, come across such absolute cowards as they were?"

"Never," said Dick, "except Lord Whiffle, who I verily believe would have conquered them all if he had had the courage to flourish his whip at them only. Such fellows as that are enough to bring discredit upon our profession, and yet they must have been tolerably successful, for they had means, and were well dressed."

"They may well be successful," said Claude, "when they meet with greater cowards than they are themselves."

"That's about it," said Jack; "but do you intend still to persevere in persecuting them, Claude?"

"Do I? Yes, Jack, I do, indeed. It will be the finest fun in the world now to take them into custody. Let us dismount in this quiet spot, and make such alterations in our costume as we can, so as to look as like officers as possible. We have seen enough of that sort of gentry, I think, to be able to imitate them pretty well."

"We ought," said Jack.

The vallise which Jack had at the back of his saddle, held quite an astonishing number of articles in a small compass; and as they were all skilfully got up for the express purpose of disguise, there was no great difficulty in accomplishing the object that Claude had in view.

When they all put on brown wigs of quite a different colour to their natural hair, and made a few alterations in their costume, among which was the placing a red handkerchief just within each of their coats in such a way as to lead immediately to the idea that they had red waistcoats, they looked as like officers as they possibly could.

"Have you that little gilt staff, Jack," said Claude, "that we borrowed of a fellow once who thought he would be clever enough to frighten us with it?"

"Yes, Claude, here it is."

Jack produced an officer's staff with its little gilt crown at the end of it, and Claude put it in his pocket, saying —

"If that don't frighten them a little, I don't know what will, for they seem just the sort to be terrified at it. And now let us go after them again just as quickly as we can. This will be better sport than before, though not so profitable perhaps."



THE THREE FRIENDS DISCOVER THE COINER IN THE OLD GRANGE.

CHAPTER CCXXX.

DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS VENTURE A LITTLE TOO FAR.

THE four horsemen, in their intense chagrin at being so effectually robbed of what they had so easily got from the fears of Lord Whiffle, did not seem to have spirit enough left in them to gallop, although they were well-mounted; and by

the time Claude and his two friends had gone a couple of miles, they saw them a little in advance upon the wood.

"They will not recognise us," said Dick to Jack; "do you think that we are quite safe in that way?"

"I do; there is but one chance against us."

"What is that, Jack?" said Claude; "what chance is that that you consider to be against us?"

"Why, just think, if they had taken a good look at our horses, they would know them again; but I think they were in too much of a fright to know whether we were mounted on blue, black, or gray steeds."

"That is my opinion," said Claude. "You may depend upon it, that in the state of mind they were in, they were totally incapable of coming to any conclusion of that sort."

"There," said Dick, "they are looking at us now, and, behold! they have come to a stand-still; perhaps they think they will yet retrieve this day's work by a good booty, and they mean to stop us. Let us push on—this will be capital sport."

"Prepare your pistols," said Claude. "I will call upon them to surrender in the king's name, and we will take them on to Ealing, and have them put in the lock-up there for the robbery on Lord Whiffle. Forward! forward!"

He dashed on, and Dick and Jack followed him closely. The four horsemen had drawn up together in the centre of the road, and looked rather panic-stricken at this sudden charge. It was quite evident that there was no recognition of our three adventurers by the party. Claude rode close up to them, and producing the little gilt staff, he called,—

"Surrender, you ruffians, surrender! In the king's name, I call upon you to surrender: you are our prisoners."

The four horsemen looked at each other with dismay upon their countenances.

"Forward, my lads, and seize them!" added Claude; "they are desperate highwaymen, and one of them, is the notorious Claude Duval. There will be a capital reward for seizing him. Shoot them at once if they resist; we must have them dead or alive."

"Stop! oh, stop!" cried one of the party; "we don't at all resist. It is all a mistake."

"Oh, dear, no!" said Claude, "it is no mistake. Lord Whiffle is raising the country on account of a robbery upon him by four highwaymen, one of whom is Claude Duval, and you are the man."

"The devil he is!" cried Dick.

Dick and Jack presented their pistols at the head of the party, and Claude flourished his staff after the most approved constable-like fashion.

The quietest and oldest of the party now, in a loud voice, said—

"My friends, this affair is getting too troublesome and serious, and it is time, now that we have encountered the officers of justice, that we should really explain who and what we are."

"Oh, we know well enough," said Claude.

"No, you don't," continued the speaker. "Is it agreeable to you all, my friends, that I tell the exact truth to the officers?"

"Yes—yes," they all said, and one of them was actually crying and whimpering, much to the disgust of Claude, who said—

"Why, you cowardly rascal, you are not fit to rob a cat on the highway."

"It's of no use disguising the matter," said one. "That is a young lady!"

"A young lady?"

"Yes. The fact is, we are all gentlemen, except Miss Kitty Juniper there, who is—a—a kind of lady, you see."

"Oh," said Claude, "I understand."

"None of your nonsense, Tom," said the lady, "or I'll lay my horsewhip about your back."

"Come—come, Kitty, be quiet. You know you can lose nothing by the affair."

"My virtue," said Kitty. "Think of that."

They all three burst out into a laugh as Kitty said those words, and she got so desperate, that with a little riding-whip she had with her, she began cutting about in all directions, until Dick stopped and disarmed her, and quickly tied her hands behind her back, saying, as he did so—

"Your name may be Kitty, for all I know to the contrary; but I daresay you are Claude Duval's Kitty, and you will be hanged for the robbery along with the rest."

"Not a doubt of it," said Claude.

"But I tell you," said the oldest of the three gentlemen—"I tell you, Mr. Officer, that it is all a sham. We three gentlemen belong to the same club with Lord Whiffle; and only a few days ago he was boasting, as the discourse had turned upon highwaymen, that a dozen of them should not rob him; so we made a wager with three other men in the club that we would stop Whiffle on the road, and rob him, and frighten him out of his life almost."

"And who are you?" said Claude.

"I am the Honourable John Ratchley—that is, Lord Tom Titherleigh, and that is Mr. Lorimer, the M.P., and this is Kitty Juniper, a lady who—who—a-hem!"

"Oh, vengeance!" said Kitty. "This is the way a delicate young creature is to have her character taken away, just because, for a mere frolic, she puts on a pair of what-do-you-call-'ems, and comes out on horseback for a bit of fun."

"Never mind," said Claude. "Bring them along. Character won't matter when you come to the gallows."

"But, good gracious," cried Kitty, "don't you hear that they are gentlemen, you stupid man?"

"Yes, I hear," said Claude; "but I didn't believe one word of it. I believe that one of you is Claude Duval, and that the other two are two notorious rascals; and you, Kitty, I believe, are quite a mild, inoffensive young creature, who will be hanged, as sure as fate."

"Well," said Kitty, "I should only like to have the chance of scratching your ugly eyes out, that I should."

"But, officers," cried another of the gentlemen, "we beg to assure you, upon our words of honour, that——"

"Hold your tongue," said Claude. "We have had quite enough of your assurance. We are too old birds to be taken by such nonsense, as you being gentlemen. We know gentlemen when we see them, and we know highwaymen likewise; so it's of no use your saying anything now about it. We know what you are, and that you will all swing for the highway robbery upon my Lord Whiffle, who defended himself for a whole hour against you, as he says."

"Oh, oh!" cried they all at this. "Why, he begged for his life in the most abject manner."

"Now only listen to these rascals," cried Claude; "they have the coolness to admit the robbery."

"Of course we do; I told you that before."

"Bring them along, then—bring them along. Oh, the villains!—to try and persuade us they are gentlemen, and only did it for a joke,! The law don't understand joking, and no doubt Lord Whiffle will be able to swear to them all."

"Now, get on," said Dick.

"Come, move," cried Jack.

The four gentlemen, for such indeed they were, and had given their real names, found that there was no resource but submission, and they trotted gloomily on in charge of the sham officers; but Kitty Juniper, although her hands were tied, made such liberal use of her tongue, that it was perfectly stunning. She called Claude and his two friends all the dreadful names she could think of, and abused her own friends for bringing her into such trouble as she was then in.

"It's quite enough," said Claude, "to set the question at rest about whether you are gentlemen or not, to hear this woman. No gentlemen could possibly have such a person in their company."

"Your reproach is just enough," said one, "and when we get out of this scrape, she won't find that her conduct has done her any good. We knew she was a little violent, but we did not quite expect to find her what she is. You will find your mistake about us when we can send for our friends."

"Oh, dear, no," said Claude, putting on a look of extreme stolidity; "oh, dear, no, not at all; I suppose you are Claude Duval?"

The unfortunate jokers, finding that it was all in vain to say anything, lapsed into silence, and the whole party proceeded at a brisk trot till they came to Ealing, and Claude led the way to the lock-up in that village.

The news that four highwaymen had been taken and brought in by the officers, spread like wildfire through the place, and it was quite an astonishing thing where the crowd could come from that quickly assembled. Jack whispered to Claude,—

"Let us get out of this as soon as we can."

"I mean to do so, but we must give them into safe custody; then we can be off again. What is all this?"

As Claude spoke, about a dozen persons on horseback appeared in the high-road. Three or four of them had scarlet coats on, and the whole, by their equipments, were evidently on the route to some hunt.

There might, or there might not be danger from all this; and whether there was or not was quickly apparent, for one of Claude's prisoners cried out in a loud voice,—

"My Lord Penthurst, don't you know me?"

"Hilloa!" said one of the huntsmen, "who is that? I think that's Lord Titherleigh's voice."

"To be sure it is. Here we are in custody as highwaymen—will you be bail for us?"

At these words, those who were in the costume of huntsmen, with all their friends who were not, gathered round our friends and their prisoners. Jack turned rather pale, but Dick and Claude kept their ground and their countenances very well indeed upon the occasion.

"Why, what is the meaning of all this nonsense?" said an elderly gentleman in a scarlet coat.

"Nonsense or not, sir," said Claude, "it simply means that Lord Whiffle has been robbed on the highway, and that these four persons are the robbers."

"Oh, impossible!"

"Ask them, sir."

"Yes, we admit it; but it was only a joke you see—nothing in the world but a joke."

The elderly gentleman in the red coat looked rather grave, and Claude said, very mildly—

"It is all very well for a robber on the highway to say that his criminality is a joke, but as officers of justice, we are not in a position to admit of such an excuse."

"Oh, dear no. Certainly not—certainly not. Why, what mad, blind folly has this been."

"Hilloa!" said a stout man, bustling into the throng with a constable's staff in his hand; "what is all this? Who has any prisoners, eh?—eh?"

"I have," said Claude. "Who are you?"

"I am Smithers, the keeper of the lock-up, and if you have a prisoner, you will be so good as to give him up to me."

"With pleasure," said Claude. "Take them all. Here they are, and I and my brother officers will give an intimation of the whole affair to the London magistrates. We don't wish anything but what is right, of course. Come on."

Claude got out of the throng, followed by Dick and Jack closely. There was an odd sort of pause, during which no one seemed exactly to know what to be at; but it sufficed to let Claude and his friends get about twenty yards off. At

that moment a sharp gust of wind blew off Dick's hat, and in an effort to catch it, off came his wig. A shrill voice at once screamed out—

"Why that's Dick Turpin!"

"That's a good guess," said Dick. "Off Claude—off Jack—off, and away!"

They gave their horses an impulse forward, and away they went at a tremendous speed. There was a wild shout from every throat of the crowd, in the High-street of Ealing, and the clatter of horses' hoofs upon the track of the three friends came furiously. A pistol bullet went past Jack's head. Another knocked Claude's hat off, and then he turned in his saddle and fired at the foremost of his pursuers. Horse and man both fell, and the next to him could not clear the sudden obstruction, although he made an effort to do so, and down he went, being pitched over his horse's head a considerable distance in the road.

"Hurrah!" cried Claude, for now he was fairly excited. "Hurrah! Who is for a race and an ounce of hot lead in his brains at the end of it? Ha! ha!"

Like the wind, away they sped, and the pursuit was evidently given up, for upon reaching the summit of a hill, Claude checked his horse, and pointing to the valley below, he said—

"There they are. Ha! ha!—they find it safer to talk about Gentleman Jack than to follow him. They had better follow death than me, when they don't give me fair play."

CHAPTER CCXXXI.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURE AT THE HAUNTED MANSION.

"Well," said Dick, "this, after all, is likely to turn out anything but an agreeable affair. I think we had better push on."

"Oh, no—all's right!" cried Claude. "They know a trick worth two of coming after us, now. We are fairly on the hill, do you not see, and should have them at great advantage to ourselves if they were to attempt to attack us."

"Then you think," said Jack, "that there is no occasion to hurry, Claude, and that we may take things tolerably easy?"

"I do."

"I am very glad to hear it, for my horse has become lame, and I doubt whether he would carry me another mile. I don't know what is the matter with him, but I suppose it is something in his foot that he has picked up upon the road, for you see he limps dreadfully."

"I will see what it is, Jack," said Claude.

"Nay, keep your seat, Claude. Just hold him by the bridle, while I dismount and have a look. It is possible enough that I may be able to relieve him of it, if it be a stone only."

"Do if you can," said Dick, "for, notwithstanding we are upon a hill, there is no knowing how desirable and necessary a sharp trot may be in the course of the next hour or two."

Jack dismounted, and by an examination of his horse's foot, found that the mischief was worse than he thought it was. The foot appeared to have got a wound by some means or another, but he could not see that there was anything in it, although he looked carefully.

"Claude," he said, "this is more serious than I thought, and I shall have to put up somewhere in consequence of it. You and Dick had better ride on, and let me shift for myself the best way I can. We can easily appoint some place of meeting."

"No, Jack," said Claude, "that won't do. We must all keep together somehow. How long do you think it will be before your horse is fit for service again?"

"A night's rest," said Jack, "will do it; but I must have that time for the acting of a salve that I will put to his foot."

"Then let us look out for some place of shelter at one. Here is a long shady lane to the right. Let us go down it. We don't know but it may lead us somewhere where we can put up with safety. None of our horses will be the worse for a quiet night. What say you, Dick?"

"I'm willing. Come on."

"Then I will lead my horse," said Jack, as he finished tying a handkerchief tightly round the foot of the animal.

The lane into which they now plunged was one of great beauty. The trees in many places met overhead, forming a natural canopy, through which the sunlight came darting down in long pencils of beauty, and dappled the walk beneath, giving it a most sweet and extraordinary appearance. The sides of this lane were covered with wild flowers, and the birds, with unusual boldness, sung upon every branch.

"Really this is a sweet spot," said Claude.

"It is," said Jack, as he led his horse, and looked with pleased surprise around him. "I can hardly take it to be a lane at all."

"Why, then, what is it?" said Dick.

"Some neglected avenue to some estate."

Upon Jack giving that opinion of the place in which they were, they all halted, and Claude said—

"If so, we are perhaps getting what is popularly call out of the frying-pan into the fire. Is it desirable to proceed any further?"

"Why, yes," said Jack. "Let us go on—I may be wrong; and yet I cannot help thinking that the place has something of the aspect of a once well-kept avenue."

"I agree with you," said Claude. "What is this?"

They all paused to look at what had attracted the attention of Claude by the side of the lane, and they found that it was a statue upon a pedestal, but so completely covered up with wild roses, and other plants and flowering shrubs, that it was only very dimly visible, but it had a pleasing effect.

"This," said Claude, "settles the question."

"What question?" said Dick.

"Why, that this is not a mere country lane. I feel convinced now, that we are in, as Jack says, a made avenue to some estate or house. No doubt, at one time it has been well looked to, and trimly kept, but it is quite clear that for a long time everything in it has been suffered to grow wild."

"Yes," said Jack. "It is evident enough, that folks don't put up statues in country lanes. This is private property, you may depend; but yet I think we ought to go on, and see where it leads to."

"I am willing," said Dick.

"And we can but come back again," said Claude, "if we fine it desirable so to do. It is not at all likely that the place is wholly deserted. Keep your eyes about you both of you, for I don't like this very suspicious stillness."

"What!" said Dick, "are you afraid of an ambuscade?"

"Not exactly, and yet—ah, what is that?"

A strange unearthly kind of cry came upon their ears, and they all paused with surprise, looking at each other for some explanation of the sound.

"What the deuce was that?" said Claude.

They both shook their heads, and Jack, as he looked rather pale, said—

"Do you think that that cry was meant as a warning to us, Claude?"

"A warning of what?"

"Of danger—perhaps of death, if we should proceed further on the course that we are now on. If it were so, we ought not to defy it."

"Oh, Jack," said Claude, "you are like the Athenians of old—you are too superstitious. Now, I don't feel at all inclined to be frightened away from this beautiful spot by a squall such as that we now heard; and as long as the danger is confined to that, it won't stop me. My curiosity is now strongly excited, and I must confess I don't feel at all inclined to go back."

"Nor I," said Dick.

"Very well, then," said Jack, "if you are both agreed, it is not for me to dissent, and I will go on with you; but I feel convinced there is some mystery about this place, whether, as far as we are concerned, it be for good or for evil."

"We will make it for good," said Claude, "whether it likes it or not. Come on. The avenue, for now we ought not to call it a lane, turns more beautiful at each step as we go on, and see, there is another statue half hidden among the trees, as we catch but a faint glimpse of it."

They paused a moment or two, to look at the other statue, which was that of some wood nymph, in an attitude of listening.

"Well," said Claude, "somebody has had this place at one time, as one upon which to exhibit a charming fancy. This walk must have been quite delicious when it was in all its glory."

"For my part," said Dick, "I think, I like it better now than I should have done at the time when it was trimly kept. There is something very captivating to me in this union of art and nature. You may depend that no skill of the most skilful gardener that ever lived, could have wreathed those wild roses round the statues, and the trunks of the trees, as nature has done them.'

"You are right, Dick," said Claude, "and I applaud your taste; but here is a winding turn in the avenue, and ten to one but we came to some fine view now—Hilloa! There it is again!"

The same unearthly sound that had before attracted their attention, now broke upon their ears, and, as before, they all came to a temporary stand still from surprise; but upon this occasion, they had added to the unearthly cry a scream that was evidently human, and in another moment, a boy, in the dress of a peasant, rushed towards them, crying—

"Oh, don't—oh, murder—murder! Oh, don't—oh, oh!"

"Hold!" cried Claude. "Stop, boy. What is the matter with you, that you cry out in such a strain?"

The boy, when he saw Claude and his companions, suddenly plumped down upon his knees in the lane, and holding up his hands, he cried—

"Oh, sir, don't let 'em take me! Oh, save me from them! I won't come here any more—indeed, I won't! Oh, do let me go, sir, if you are one of them!"

"One of what? What on earth do you mean?"

"Come, come," said Jack, as he took him by the arm, "get up with you—We don't want any kneeling. Just tell us at once what's the matter with you."

"Oh, sir, nothing."

"Nothing? and yet you have been making noise enough to alarm the whole parish. What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, dear, I only meant nothing, sir, as there was nothing the matter with me; but lor'! ain't I frightened a bit!"

"What it?"

"You won't let 'em lay hold of me, will you, gentlemen? Oh, don't. They drove poor Dick Stevens mad—oh, dear, yes, they did, and—and I thought I would just go and take a few peaches—they are so nice and ripe at this time—and oh—oh—oh—let me go home! Mercy!—murder! They are coming after me. I know they are. Help—oh, oh, dear—oh!"

The boy clung to Jack with such frantic violence, that if he had felt ever so much inclined to shake him off, he could not have done so, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he was at length calmed down sufficiently to speak to them with any degree of rationality.

"I tell you what it is, my lad," said Claude, "if you don't be a little quiet now, we will take you back to where you came from, and leave you there; so now you know what to expect, you young rascal."

Upon this, the boy would have got down upon his knees again, but Jack would not let him, and holding him by the collar, he said—

"Now tell us, at once, what it is that has frightened you almost out of your small amount of wits?"

"Oh, yes, I will," said the boy. "You see, gentlemen, I'm only a poor boy, and my name is Will Baker, and I live in the village there away about a mile down the road when you turn to the left, as you go past Farmer Hastings's wheat stacks, where there's a pound, you know, and——"

"Come to the point," said Claude. "Bother you and Farmer Hastings; we want to know what frightened you here, and not where you live."

"Yes, sir—oh, dear, yes. Well, as I was a saying, sir:—the boys in the village will have it that there's lots of fruit in the old garden up this ways; and about a week ago, Stevens, sir, he went to get some, and he came home again, and he's been what they calls an idiot ever since; and he only sits and laughs, now, in the chimney-corner at nothing."

"But what frightened him?"

"Nobody knows, sir; and you see, I didn't think that it could be anything much, 'cos Stevens wasn't never very bright, so I thought I would come to-day and get a hatful of peaches, or something of that sort, you see, sir; and I comed."

"Well?"

"Oh, dear, it wasn't well, sir."

"Ill, then?"

"Yes, sir, that's what it was. It was only about half-an-hour ago, that I came up the walk, and got through the hedge into the old garden, and I didn't see nothing and nobody to be frightened at, so I got quite pleased like; and there was such beauties of peaches on one of the old walls—oh, my eye, wasn't there?"

"And the gardener came out and caught you, I suppose, with a good stick, did he?"

"The gardener, sir? Oh, lor! There hasn't been a gardener there, sir, for eight years come Christmas next, they say."

"Who did catch you, then?"

"I'll tell you, sir. The peaches did look so nice, so I fastened my cap to my waist, and got a little way up the wall by the thick stem of the old trees, and held on while I picked some of them. I got down again, and turned round to cut away with the peaches, when, right in my way—oh—oh!"

"Well? What was right in your way?"

The boy shook fearfully, and then in a low half-choked voice, he said—

"Right in my way was a kind of dreadful thing, all bones, with such a dreadful look, and blood coming out of the skeleton eyes and mouth, and the long, bony fingers were put out to catch hold of me; and I dropped my cap and the peaches, and I knew then that that was what had frightened poor Stevens into being an idiot, and I come out of the garden; but they called out after me, for there were more than one of them, and I nearly fell down when they called, for the horrid sound went right through me; and I shall turn an idiot like Stevens!"

"No you won't," said Jack. "Come—come, don't shake so. It was nothing, after all, but your own fancy."

"Fancy?"

"Yes, your own imagination, you know

"Oh, lor, no sir! I ain't got none."

"How many times did they call after you?" said Dick.

"Two times, sir," said the boy.

Dick whispered to Claude—

"What do you think of this affair? There is something in it, for we heard two cries."

"We did; and with you, Dick, I feel that there is something in it, but what that something is, I cannot pretend to say. I will speak closely to the boy."

"Do so. Perhaps you may get some more facts out of him."

"Now, my boy," said Claude, "attend to me."

"I will, sir. Oh, yes, sir, I will."

"Where does this lane lead to?"

"It ain't a lane, sir. It's called the Grange Walk, sir. That's what it is, and

it leads to the Grange as has been shut up ever so long, all on account of the ghosts, you see, sir, and that's one of 'em."

"Where?" cried Jack, starting round.

"Oh, it's not here, sir. I mean that was one of 'em as tried to lay hold of me, when I was getting the peaches, and as called out after me in such a horrid way."



THE THREE ADVENTURERS MAKE THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE OLD GRANGE.

"And who lives at the Grange?" added Claude.

"Lor, sir! nobody, in course, lives there but the ghosts. Who would live there to be frightened out of their wits like poor Stevens, and made an idiot to sit in a chimney-corner, and grin at nothing?"

"Not a very pleasant prospect, certainly."

"Oh, no, sir. If you want to go to the village, gentlemen, I'll soon show you

the way; and there's the Barley Mow there, ever such a nice public house, as never was, sir. This way, gentlemen, this way."

"Stop a bit," said Claude: "I am very fond of a nice peach, and I feel very much inclined, notwithstanding the ghosts, to go to that garden and get one or two; I think we are in pretty good force to resist anything in the shape of ghosts that may offer themselves; and now that there is such a capital chance of seeing a few in the old Grange, I can't resist going."

"Oh, don't, sir, don't," said the boy, with earnestness; "you can't tell what they may be able to do."

"We will chance that. What say you, Dick, and you, Jack?"

"Come on," said Dick.

"As you please," said Jack; "and if you are both willing, so am I; but we need not drive this lad out of his wits by making him go with us: that would be a needless piece of cruelty and oppression towards him."

CHAPTER CCXXXII.

THE FRIENDS TAKE POSSESSION OF THE HAUNTED GRANGE.

As Jack uttered these last words, the boy looked wistfully down the lane. He was evidently in doubt as to which he should do—go home at once to the village, or accompany Jack and his friends to the Haunted Grange.

"Come," said Claude, "make up your mind. Come with us or be off. If you really have any liking for a peach, you had better come, for I tell you I have made up my mind to have some in spite of all the ghosts that can conspire to prevent me."

"Don't speak of 'em in that way, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because—because, you see, sir, they don't like it, and it is said, that when anybody speaks slightingly of them, they take all sorts of vengeance upon them. Don't, sir; it ain't, you know, gentlemen, worth while to be made idiots of, and sit in chimney corners and grin at nothing."

Jack gave a sort of nod, to the great amusement of Claude, as if he would have said, "I am precisely of that opinion." Dick looked from one to the other of them with a half-laugh upon his face, as though he did not know exactly whether to view the matter in a comic or a serious light.

"Well, I'm going to the Grange," said Claude.

"And I," said Dick.

"And I, then," said Jack, "if it comes to that."

"Well, gentlemen," said the boy, "if so be as you will promise to protect me against the ghosts, I will go too. There is peaches, and good ones I can tell, and perhaps we may get some, and then get away again before any of the ghosts think of interfering with us, you see."

"Nothing is more probable," said Claude, drily.

They all now went up the avenue, and upon making a curved turn in it, they suddenly, through the trees, came into sight of the old mansion.

It was one of the oldest of the Elizabethan structures that adorn England, and was of great extent. Ancient ivy had climbed to the top of its tallest chimneys, and where that leafy screen had not hidden their rich colour, the red bricks still shone out in the sun with all the effect as if they had been but recently put up. There was a kind of observatory at the top of the house, which had a very graceful appearance; and but for the air of desolation about it, and a number of broken windows, the Grange would have been a stately and imposing structure.

"It's a pity," said Claude, "that such a house as that might be is abandoned to ruin."

"It is," said Dick, "a thousand pities."

"Oh, but the ghosts, sir," said the boy; "who likes to hear them following you up and down stairs and wherever you go! Oh, dear no!"

The lad kept so close to Claude, whom he probably thought the bravest of the party upon the subject of ghosts, that the horse was in danger of treading upon his toes each moment, and Claude had to warn him to keep a further distance. Jack still led his horse, and in that way they presently reached the end of the avenue, and saw before them a large and handsomely laid out lawn, in the centre of which there had at one time been a fountain, surmounted by sculptured tritons and sea nymphs, but now its jet was still, and weeds and moss covered every available spot. The grass upon the lawn was intersected and mingled with every description of rank vegetation, wound about in masses. The once trimly kept gravelled walks had yielded to the influence of time, and the grass had grown up over them rankly and luxuriously.

"This is a pity," said Dick, as he glanced around him.

"It is quite extraordinary," said Claude.

"Yes," said Jack, "and—and it only shows you,"—Jack kept a wary eye around him as he spoke,—"and it only shows you what a shocking thing it is to be superstitious."

Claude turned aside to smile at this, for he knew that superstition was Jack's failing.

"Never mind," he said, "Jack; if you can rest your horse here and get what you want for his wounded foot, all will be well."

"That I can easily get," said Jack. "The best thing to put to it will be some bruised leaves of the common flowering mallow, and I see that it is here in abundance."

"Certainly," said Claude, as he glanced around him, "there is no want of that in this place. It seems to be the favourite wild growth of the spot."

"Oh, there's lots," said the boy.

"Well, my young friend," added Claude, "we do not see any of the ghosts yet."

"Don't speak of them, sir."

"Oh, stuff; I am convinced of one thing as regards ghosts, and that is, that the more you are afraid of them the more you may be; and they never, on any account, make their appearance to persons who laugh at them."

"Do you really think so, sir?"

"I do more than think it, boy: I know it. And now you will be so good as to show us the way to the garden where all the peaches are that you speak of, for I long to taste some of them."

"It's this way," said the boy, with a kind of shudder; "but I hope you won't want me to go in, sir?"

"Not if you have any great objection."

"Oh, dear haven't I a big objection? Didn't I see the horrid thing, all bones and horrid blood, that nearly made me an idiot? Oh, sir, don't make me got into the garden. I'll wait here for you, if you please, sir. Indeed I will."

"Very good; only point out to us the way, and I promise you that I will bring you a peach or two for your pains."

"That's the way, then, sir, past that old mulberrry-tree, and right on by the side of the house: you will soon come to it."

"Very good."

Claude had by this time dismounted, and so had Dick. They tied their horses to some iron hurdles that were close at hand, and then on foot made their way to the garden by the route the boy had pointed out to them. They found that they had to skirt a hedge for a considerable distance before they reached a pretty rustic gate that opened into the garden, but the sight that presented itself to their eyes when they did reach it, amply compensated them for all the time and trouble they had expended in so doing.

The garden was of considerable extent, and although time and neglect had

evidently done much to injure the neatness of its appearance, it had not been sufficient to destroy it wholly. No doubt, the produce of that favoured patch of ground would have been of a much higher character had it been well attended to; but as it was, there was much to tempt the eye and the appetite.

Clustering fruits hung in luxuriance upon the branches of the trees; a perfect wilderness of flowers adorned the ground; and upon the walls the plum, the peach, and the nectarine hung in profusion.

"Upon my word," said Claude, "this is the first time that I ever thought ghosts had such taste."

"They are well off here, indeed," said Dick.

"Come—come now," said Jack, "it's a subject that is just as well not to joke about, you know, for, after all, what do we know about it? and whether there are supernatural beings or not as long as they don't interfere with us, I think the best we can do is not to interfere with them."

"Very good, Jack," laughed Claude. "If you take the ghosts under your special protection, we will say nothing against them."

"Yes; but——Good Heavens, what is that?"

The same unearthly sound that had before come upon their ears, and which they had almost forgotten, suddenly broke the stillness of the air with the most startling effect, and this time it appeared to be quite close at hand, so that they all three started as its echoes passed them, as though the means by which it was produced were close to their ears.

"This is something more than strange," said Claude.

"It is. It is horrible," said Jack.

"Not so," added Claude. "I will not have it to be horrible. It is curious, but that it is of mortal origin, I feel convinced."

"Mortal?" cried Jack.

"Yes, I will not even yield to superstitious fancies; and if all the noises that earth, sea, or air can make were to combine to appal me, I would not shrink. I will have a peach."

"Oh, don't," cried Jack. "Take my advice now, and come away at once from this dreadful place."

"Not I."

"Oh yes, do, Claude. It is much better."

"No, Jack. You would be, in after time, the first to laugh at the great absurdity of our being frightened by a mere sound. Come, let us regale ourselves off the wall-fruit. You don't want to go, Dick?"

"Not I."

"Come on, then."

As he spoke, Duval plucked two or three peaches, and handing one to Dick, they both began eating.

"Come, Jack," he said. "You see the ghost of the old Haunted Grange has not, after all, the courage to come in person to defend his peaches. You had better eat one. They are truly delicious, I can assure you. Perhaps it is, after all, only boys that the ghost has an objection to."

When Jack saw that Claude and Dick were eating away at the peaches with impunity, he got a little ashamed of his fears, and took on, saying as he did so—

"Why, Claude, I feel quite sure that even you will admit that there is much more in supernatural matters than any of us are well aware of."

"Oh, yes, I admit that."

"Very well then, you ought not to feel surprised if I think more deeply upon such subjects than you do."

"Not at all, Jack—not at all. Only you enjoy with us this delicious fruit, and I shall not say another word to you about it."

Jack ate the peach.

"Now, if you are both of my mind," said Claude, "I shall propose that we stay here long enough to give the necessary rest to Jack's horse, in defiance of all the ghosts of the Grange."

"I say yes to that," said Dick. "But tell me, Claude, have you any suspicions of that boy?"

Claude nodded.

"I have," he said. "From the first I thought that the young rascal was acting a part, and as he went on, felt quite convinced of it. Did you notice how at times he put on the tone and language of a country boy, and then forgetting that part of the performance, he would say a few sentences as well as you or I could for the lives of us?"

"I did."

"Well," said Jack, "I confess that something of that sort struck me; but I did not think it sufficiently clear to make any observation upon it, or to think that it was of much consequence. There is one thing, though, that we have done that, as the catechism says, we ought not to have done."

"And what is that, Jack?"

"Why, if that boy has been playing a part, it is for some ulterior purpose, and we have very kindly left our horses at his disposal.

"The deuce take it!" cried Claude, throwing down the peach he was very quietly eating, "so we have."

"An oversight that," said Dick. "Let us go at once and ease our minds upon that subject. Each moment now will seem to me an age until I clap my eyes upon my gallant four-footed friend again.

This suggestion of Jack's was really so very alarming, that there was something quite ludicrous in the haste with which they all three left the garden that they had been in such rapture about, and rushed in the direction of the iron hurdle railing by the lawn, to which they had fastened their horses about ten minutes before.

One glance was sufficient. The horses were gone!

"Done, by Heaven!" cried Dick.

"Confusion!" said Claude.

"Lost—lost," said Jack, "and all owing to our own want of thought. Well, for once in a way, the whole three of us are thoroughly outwitted. But what's that lying down there? Why, it's the boy."

They all made their way to the lawn, and there, lying upon his face, to all appearances dead, was the boy. Claude turned him over on his back, and then he opened his eyes and looked wildly about him.

"Oh—oh," he groaned, "I am mad now! Oh, save me—save me!"

"Speak," said Claude, shaking him. "Where are our horses? Speak, or I will shake the life out of you!"

The boy made several gasping efforts to speak before he could do so, and then he said—

"Oh, sir, oh! You hadn't been gone above a few minutes when one of them came. Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"One of what?"

"The ghosts of the Grange. Oh, it was an awful one. All green and fat. Oh, it was dreadful! and the fat ran down its green cheeks; and its tongue was like a flame; and it just pointed to the horses, and they broke away from the iron and disappeared, I don't know where; and then three of them came, and they danced round me—they were skeletons; and then down I went, and then I think I fainted away."

"Indeed?"

"Here are the bridles," said Jack, "hanging to the iron hurdle fence. Look, here they are."

"Broken?" said Claude.

"No. They are unbuckled from the bits, and are quite perfect."

"Indeed! That was kind of the ghosts not to break our reins. Oh, very! Now, my lad, where are our cattle?"

"Lord bless you, sir, I don't know."

"Very good. Dick, will you be so good as to collect as good a bundle of long

switches of blackthorn as you can from that hedge? Now, my boy, you will please to come with me just to this young sycamore tree, to which I intend to tie you up comfortably."

"Oh lor, sir, what for?"

"Where are our horses?"

"But I don't know, sir. Oh, murder!"

"Very good."

Claude, with one of the bridles, strapped the highly talented youth to the tree he spoke of, and Dick collected a capital handful of long switches of a highly stinging character.

CHAPTER CCXXXIII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE HAUNTED GRANGE IS SOLVED.

"Oh, lor, what have I done to be wolloped!" cried the boy, when he saw that such active preparations were on foot for the accomplishment of that object. "Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"Hark you, my lad," said Claude. "It is quite impossible for me to take upon myself to say that you have hidden our horses, or been at all instrumental in their hiding; but you must know. I have the very greatest notion of your abilites."

"My what, sir?"

"Your cleverness and talent. I have that confidence in both those qualities in you, that I cannot help thinking you will be able to hit upon some shrewd conjecture upon the subject."

"Oh, but I don't know."

"Very good. Strip, if you please. Oh, you decline? Jack, will you be so good as to prepare this young gentleman for a little wholesome castigation, which if it does him no other good, will circulate his blood, and so prove very beneficial to his general health. He don't seem thoroughly to understand it himself."

Both Jack and Dick now saw what Claude intended, and as they had their own suspicions of the lad's complotment in the affair of the loss of the horses, they were nothing loth to get the truth out of him in any way that seemed the most likely to effect that object. They entered into the affair with spirit.

"Oh, murder," cried the boy, as he tried in vain to free himself from the bonds that held him to the tree. "Oh, murder! Why should a poor boy be whacked because he don't know where some 'osses is?"

"Ah, why indeed?" said Claude. "Now, Jack."

Jack did not trouble the vivacious youth with any solicitations to aid in his own disrobing, but in a few moments prepared him very nicely for the assault of the twigs that had been collected.

"Now," said Claude, as he flashed the handful of stinging, long pieces of vegetation in his right hand. "Now, where are our horses, my fine fellow?"

"Oh, I don't know."

Whack! came the twigs, and the boy raised a shout that must have been heard half a mile off.

"Where are our horses?" said Claude.

"Oh, goodness gracious, I told you that I didn't know."

Swish, came the twigs again through the air, and the boy bellowed like a young bull.

"Where are the horses?"

"Murder! I don't know."

"Very good."

Claude did not now wait to repeat his question between the strokes of the twigs, but laid on at a rate that set the boy howling and screaching so loudly that both

Jack and Dick were really alarmed; but Claude was not in the least moved to pity. On he went, and after about a dozen strokes, the boy shouted—

"Oh, stop! I will tell."

"Very good," said Claude. "Be quick about it, then."

"Oh dear, the horses are in the old barnhouse. I'll take you to them. Oh—oh—oh! Oh, lor—oh, lor!"

"Now," said Claude, "that is very satisfactorily settled; and if you had said as much half a minute or so ago, you would have saved your skin a little smarting, that I think will last you some days to come. You may now be so good as to put yourself into walking order, and show us the way to this same barnhouse; but mark me, if we see any prevaricating, or any tricks, back you come to this same tree to have the second dose of the same medicine that you now know the taste of so well."

Jack undid the bridle that fastened the lad to the tree, and then, with his face the colour of a peony, and great tears bubbling over his eyes, he led the way from the garden.

Jack and Dick had the greatest difficulty to smother their desires to roar with laughter, and Claude, too, found it no easy matter to keep a grave countenance. The only person of the party who looked as if he were not likely to laugh again was the boy, who had certainly received such a castigation as he could not have had any idea of in his life before.

Fretting, and groaning, and crying as he went, he conducted the friends through a kind of poultry-yard, and then round a corner of the house to a large door that he opened savagely, saying—

"There they are. Oh, dear, I never was so served out in all my life. Oh—oh! Oh, my!"

The three horses were in the barnhouse, standing upon a quantity of stable litter, and looking rather frightened at the intense darkness of the place in which they had been shut up.

"All's right," said Claude. "The lad has not deceived us. Now we are all right again, and you see, my lad, what virtue there is in a good handful of twigs. Whenever you think of playing a trick upon any one, you had better look out if there are any nice little twigs growing in the neighbourhood, and a strong hand to wield them."

The boy cried lustily, for the smart of his castigation had by no means abated; and then he managed to say—

"Oh, dear! I suppose I may go now? You don't want to keep a fellow here, after whacking him at such a rate?"

"Certainly not," said Claude; "you may go as soon as you like now, and I beg that for the future you will remember me."

"Oh, I can't possibly forget," whimpered the boy. "It ain't easy. Oh dear—oh, if I had only know'd this, wouldn't I have seen all these horses further first! Oh—oh!"

Still ejaculating in his misery, the boy walked away, and when he was out of hearing, Dick said—

"Would it not have been as well, Claude, to have brought that lad with us? He may now give notice of our being here to some who may be enemies."

"Why," said Claude, "it was rather difficult to know upon what pretence to detain the fellow now. Besides, I am quite convinced that he is in some sort of connection with the choice spirits who haunt the old Grange."

"What do you mean?" said Jack.

"Why, I mean, Jack, that I am of opinion the Grange is haunted; but that the ghosts are beings of flesh and blood like ourselves, and that we have not much to fear from them. But now we have our affairs in our own hands again, by the possession of our horses, and we can either go or stay. What is your opinion, Dick?"

"Why, I think that we had better stay, if it is only for the purpose of getting Jack's horse's foot to rights."

"Ah," said Jack, "that is a reason which goes far, indeed, with me, and stay we must, I fear."

"Very good," said Claude, "then it is settled in the affirmative; and I propose that we take the horses into the house at once, and place them in one of the lower rooms. In that barnhouse there was plenty of straw."

"Yes," said Dick, "and there is a good hay-stack close by the lawn, that, no doubt, is the produce of a meadow that lies beyond it; so we can give them a sort of feed."

"Be it so, then," said Jack. "I will set about preparing the dressing for my horse's foot; and if it be possible to give it a night's rest, it will be no bad thing, and in the morning we can all start fresh from the place; but my own private opinion certainly is, that we shall not be permitted to pass a very quiet night."

"It's a good thing, then," laughed Claude, "that we are used to unquiet ones, Jack. Let us come into the house and see what sort of accommodation we can find for man and beast within the walls."

There were several rooms that evidently looked out upon the lawn, and several doors that opened from that side of the building, so that there could be no great difficulty in making an entrance to the Grange. After trying a couple of doors, and finding that they were undoubtedly fastened within, Claude made his way through one of the windows, and with a pistol in his hand, with which he determined to give a warm reception to any one who should attempt to impede his progress.

The door that he determined upon opening, was not far off from the room into which he had managed to penetrate, so that he reached it in a moment or two, and drew back the two bolts that held it fast, and flung it open to his friends.

"All right?" cried Dick.

"Yes," said Claude, "the house is quiet enough. I have seen no one, mortal or immortal, as yet. Bring in the horses. We can easily put them in one of the rooms, here."

The horses were led into the house, and Claude opened the door of an apartment, that no doubt at one time had been a very handsome refreshment-room, but which was then in a sadly dismantled condition; some of the old furniture yet remained in the room that had been fitted to it, and that would have been quite useless if removed; but those who had at one time inhabited the mansion, little imagined that that room would ever be turned into a stable for the horses of three highwaymen.

Claude examined the lock, and found that it was in tolerably good condition, with the key in it.

"This will do," he said, "and all we have got now to be quick about, is to get in some hay and straw. I think it would be bad policy, after what has happened, for all three of us to leave the house at once, so two can go for the hay and straw, while one remains as guard here, and we can take turn, and turn about in the duty."

This was agreed to, and Dick and Jack went first for the hay and straw, while Claude remained with the horses, and then while he went, Dick remained, and then it came to Jack's turn; and by the time they had made the three journeys, they had got as much as the horses required, and on the floor of that really handsome room, a comfortable bed was made for the cattle.

Jack went out to the garden and got in a number of leaves of the mallow, with which he made a dressing for his horse's foot, and then they felt that they had done all that they could for the comfort of the animals, upon whose health and strength so much depended.

"And now," said Claude, "that we have done our duty—and I mean to say that it is no more than our duty—to our horses, what sort of cheer, Jack, can you give us for ourselves? I am well aware that you generally have something in the vallise good to eat and to drink."

"Yes, Claude, it is well that I look after that department a little. I happen to be provided with a bottle of wine, as good old port—if I may judge from another

that came from the same place—as ever you tasted, and a few biscuits. Beyond these materials for keeping the enemies, hunger and thirst, at bay, I have nothing."

"We won't complain," said Dick. "We might do a great deal worse than have a meal off port wine and biscuits. Come, Jack, unpack, and let us fall-to, for I confess that for once I have a good appetite."



CICELY WELCOMING CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS TO THE FARM.

"And I," said Claude.

"Well," said Jack, "I could do a little, I think, with the wine myself."

With this, Jack unpacked the vallise that he always had at the back of his saddle, and produced the bottle of port and the biscuits.

"It won't be any the better," he said, "for the shaking it has had; but I

can't help that, you know, as it was forced to travel on horseback; but it is one of your light wines, that fortunately has little crust, so it may be better than one expects."

"Any port in a storm," said Dick, perpetrating a very old joke indeed; "so let us have it, Jack."

They dispensed with a cork-screw by very cleverly knocking off the head of the bottle; and then as Jack had likewise in his vallise a little portable drinking cup, they were able to help themselves from the bottle very comfortably.

Claude sat upon a table in the room, and Dick threw himself into the recesses of an old arm chair that had once been covered with rich velvet, and Jack sat upon the seat of a very low chair, that had been made, no doubt, for devotional services, and was of that description commonly known on the continent by the name of a *Prie Dieu*. It was, truly, a strange scene that to see those three men and the three horses all in that room, with its remnants of faded past magnificence upon every portion of it.

"Well, Jack," said Claude, "give us a toast."

"I——"

Jack had only just opened his mouth to reply to this, when there arose in the house such a dreadful yell that they all instantaneously started to their feet. Claude was off the table in a moment. Dick struggled out of the depth of the arm-chair, and Jack, after rolling on the floor with the devotional chair, got to his feet, crying—

"What's that? What's that?"

"Hush!" said Claude. "Hush!"

To describe that sound which had so startled them would have been utterly impossible, because in such description we can only proceed upon comparisons, and there was nothing like unto it. In all their experiences, neither Claude, nor Dick, nor Jack, had ever heard anything that at all approached it. It was a yell that no one for a moment could believe to be human; and for some moments the echo of it seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere of the place, and to have taken entire possession of their brains. The horses started with affright, and one of them made a dash across the floor of the room, and had to be caught by Dick, who had some difficulty in soothing the creature. The other two trembled excessively.

"What in the name of all that's horrible," said Jack, "can be the meaning of this?"

"I will find it out before I leave this house," said Claude, "or I will know some very special reason why. I will not be made the fool of a mere sound in this way.""

"Nor I," cried Dick. "I am quite convinced that there is something in the shape of trickery in this matter; and I think with you, Claude, that we ought not to dream of leaving this house until we have found it out."

"Oh, be careful," said Jack, "what you do and what you say. There is certainly more in Heaven and on earth than we know of. How can we take upon ourselves to say what that sound was?'

"No how, Jack;" said Claude, "but if it really should proceed from supernatural beings, I cannot conceive what gratification it can be to them to terrify our horses, and attempt to terrify ourselves."

"Hush! Do not speak of them in such a way. Oh, Heaven! there it is again!"

A second time the wild shout came upon their ears, and the horses, now thoroughly alarmed, snorted and made an attempt to dash out of the room through one of the windows. It took all that both Claude and Dick could do to stop them, and then Claude cried—

"Oh, that I had kept that boy here! Who knows but that another application of the twigs would have procured from him a solution of this mystery as it did of the other connected with the disappearance of our horses?"

CHAPTER CCXXXIV.

CLAUDE AND DICK SEARCH THE OLD GRANGE, AND ENCOUNTER A GHOST.

"THIS sort of thing," said Claude, "will not do for me. The evening will soon be here, when anything that may be attempted against our peace may be done with ten times the facility that daylight affords. It is necessary that we should settle all this affair before night."

"And it shall be settled," said Dick. "I am not going to be made a fool of by a mere noise."

"You both speak," said Jack, "as if you felt quite assured that the noise you have heard was mortal, and was a mere human contrivance. You cannot take upon yourselves to say it is such."

"Jack—Jack," said Claude, "once more I beg of you not to give way to superstition. I do not see that we can do anything else but, with our pistols in our hands, search the house through; and the sooner such a job is set about the better. Jack, will you mind the cattle while Dick and I go through the building?"

Jack evidently hesitated.

"Well," added Claude, "shall I go alone?"

"Not so," said Dick; "that would be hazardous. Suppose we carefully fasten up this room and all its windows, and then the whole three of us can go? I think that will be the best plan. We can take such measures as to make the room pretty secure."

It was evident enough that Claude did not much relish the idea of leaving the horses; but as it was equally evident that Jack was really not in a frame of mind to be left alone in case of any attack upon them, that he might consider in his heated imagination to be supernatural, there was no other resource but for them all to go on the expedition through the house, for neither did Dick like the idea of not going, nor did Claude fancy being without so bold and efficient a companion in the adventure.

"We must chance it then," said Claude, "and all go. Help me, Dick, to secure the windows of the room as well as possible. Oh, there are good shutters, I see, and strong fastenings. There will be no difficulty, and now I leave the cattle with something like confidence."

The room was well fastened up, but Jack was rather silent, for he could not help feeling that he was rather to blame for his superstitious fears; nevertheless he could not get sufficiently the better of them to insist upon staying with the cattle, and Claude said to him, kindly—

"It's all right now, Jack. See, I have locked the door, and both lock and door are strong, so that there need be no fear for the horses. Besides, I believe that we shall give whoever is in the house quite enough to do, now, to induce them to let our cattle be."

"I hope so," said Jack.

"Cheer up, Jack," cried Dick. "You will be the first to laugh at all this to-morrow, when we have found out what is the meaning of it. I quite agree with you, Claude, that if we only had that boy here again, we should find out all about it by virtue of the twigs that in so miraculous a manner brought us to the barnhouse where our horses were hidden. That one circumstance is quite sufficient to convince me that the whole affair is of mortal origin."

"And me, likewise," said Claude; "and if Jack will but think a little, it will convince him too. Come, Jack, what say you to that?"

"I own it staggers me," he replied; "but then, what possible explanation can you give of that truly awful noise?"

"None, at present; but we shall not be for long, I hope and expect, in that state of ignorance. If I mistake not, we shall soon find out all about it; and now let us commence a systematic search of the old house."

It was a great advantage to them that they had still daylight in which to

prosecute their search in the Grange, for there were none of the uncertainties and the shadows of an artificial light to perplex their perceptions. Moreover, the very presence of daylight is such a foe to superstitious fears, that even Jack could not feel what he might have felt if the sun had fairly sunk.

Immediately outside the room in which they were, was an irregularly-shaped kind of hall or passage, from which opened a variety of doors. At one end of the hall or passage, there were steps, conducting to the domestic portion of the house, which seemed to be just a little below the level of the other part. From the middle of the hall—taking a grand sweep into it, so as to have an imposing commencement—was the staircase that led to the upper floor.

When the three friends got fairly into the hall, they paused to listen if there were any sounds in the house which might guide them in their operations; but after about a minute thus spent, they heard nothing, so that they could only proceed as systematically as possible in searching the various rooms.

"Come," said Claude, "we will look through all the rooms on this floor first, and I should advise that we take some means of propping all the doors open as we proceed."

"That will not be at all difficult," said Dick. "Here are plenty of bits of wood and litter of all sorts lying about, with which I will, with the aid of my knife, fashion a few wedges that will answer that purpose well enough."

While this was being done, Claude opened the door that was the nearest to him, and walked into a room that was of beautiful proportions, and still very handsome in some of its decorations. At the farther end of it was a large glass door, that opened into a conservatory.

He glanced round the room, but there was no indication of the recent presence of any one.

"Push open the door, Dick," he said. "It's all right here."

"Stop a bit," said Jack; "before we proceed any further, I see that there is a door that leads to the offices from the hall here. I propose that we fasten that up as best we may before we go any further in our search. There is a key in the lock, and a bolt upon this side."

"Do it, Jack. It is a good thought."

Jack advanced to the door, and had just got the bolt shot into its socket, when from some upper portion of the house, as they thought, there came two of the most dreadful shrieks that any of them had ever heard. These two sounds differed very much from the strange cry that had before made the house vocal with its echoes.

"Ah!" cried Claude, "they are trying it again."

"Good gracious!" said Jack; "but those cries are horrible!"

"They may be; but I am not going to be shouted or scared out of this house. Come on. Let us continue our search."

Jack looked very pale, indeed; but he made no sort of opposition to the search being carried on through the house, although both Claude and Dick knew perfectly well, of course, that he would much rather have been out of it. Claude thought that as those cries had come from the upper part of the house, they were either made for the purpose of preventing their ascending the staircase, or to attract them up at once, so as to stop them from pursuing their search in those rooms on the ground floor, where they had thus begun it; so he resolved to disappoint both expectations by gently continuing the search where he was, and when that was concluded, but not before, ascending to the upper rooms.

Dick, with one of the little wedges that he had made, effectually propped open the door of that first room that they had examined, and then they passed through it, and took a look in the conservatory beyond; but all was quiet there, and as the conservatory only opened again into the garden, they did not think it worth their while to proceed further in that direction.

Returning, then, to the hall, they opened another of the numerous doors leading from it, and, suffice it to say, that they went into no less a number

than seven rooms—all of which were, more or less, in a state of delapidation—without being rewarded for their perseverance, with any discovery.

"So far so good," said Claude, "and we have found out nothing. Now for up stairs. I think if we are to have any success at all, it will be there, surely, since we have not achieved it here."

"I do sincerely hope," said Dick, "that we shall not be obliged to leave this place without discovering what it is that has produced those diabolical sounds. I should feel very much dissatisfied, indeed, if we could not find out the author of them."

"Never fear," said Claude. "A little perseverance will do wonders."

"I don't know," said Jack. "If those sounds are produced by mortal agency, I grant you then, that there will not be much difficulty in finding out who has produced them; but that is of itself a point that you know is not settled."

"Quite settled, Jack," laughed Claude; "so now let us come up stairs at once."

They ascended the grand staircase, but they had not got above half way up it, when one of the strange cries, similar to those that they had at first heard, came upon their ears. Jack was compelled to hold by the balustrade of the staircase to save himself from falling, and both Claude and Dick, so really terrific was the sound, could not at the moment keep from feeling something like alarm.

"What on earth can it be?" said Claude. "I will not be made a fool of in this way any longer."

Raising his voice then, he cried loudly—

"Be you whom you may, and let your object be what it may, I warn you that we are not to be terrified by cries or shrieks. There is not a room in this house into which we will not penetrate; so you must adopt some other mode of scaring us than by ugly cries."

After this speech, Claude waited with the expectation of there coming some sort of answer to it; but in that he was disappointed, for all was profoundly still as before.

"Come on," cried Claude, "come on," and he sprang up the remainder of the stairs, and reached the landing-place, from which opened several doors. The moment Claude laid his hand upon the lock of one of them, he heard a voice from within say—

"Help—help! Oh, will nobody save me?"

Claude dashed the door open, and made his way into the room, where he found, to his great surp ise, a lad of about fourteen years of age, securely tied to a table that was in the centre of it. The lad was crying bitterly; and when he saw Claude, he called out—

"Oh, don't kill me—don't kill me!"

"Who are you?" said Claude.

"Oh, dear, sir, take me away—do take me away from here! I will never come any more to the garden!"

"Oh, you have been in the garden, have you?"

"Yes, sir. My farther is Mr. Dale in the village; and I came a birds-nesting, sir, and a man told me if I came into the house he would show me an owl's nest, and so I came; but when we got into this room, his face all changed into a skeleton's, and he put his dreadful mouth close to my ear, and made—oh, such a frightful cry, that I think I must have fainted away; and when I came to myself, I found that I was tied to this table. Oh! gentlemen, come with me to the village, and my father will be so thankful, and so will my poor mother, gentlemen, for they don't know where I am; and my father will come back and help to look over the house, and bring his friend Mr. Clements with him, too, so that it will be much better."

"Dear me," said Claude. "It was too bad to frighten you in such a way, my boy."

"Oh, yes, sir, it was; but come away at once, gentlemen. I will show you the way out, and then we can all come back again and search the house."

Claude whispered a few words to Dick, who immediately left the room rather to the consternation of Jack; and then Claude said to the boy—

"I suppose, after what has happened to you here, you would like very much to find out all about it—who it is that makes the strange noises, and all that sort of thing?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I should indeed like it. And by the time we come back it will be all right, no doubt, sir."

"Not a doubt of it. Oh, here you are, Dick."

"Yes," said Dick, as he re-appeared with the bundle of twigs that had been use in the castigation of the other boy. "Yes, it's all right. Here I am, Claude, and here is the persuader."

"Now," said Claude to the boy, "I will show you a much readier way of getting at all the information you require, and that we require, likewise. It is not worth while for us to go to your father, nor to his friend, Mr. Clements. Jack, will you hold his heels, and Dick, will you hold his arms? and between you, it will not be at all difficult to make him lie on this table, as I have loosened the cord that held him to the leg of it."

"Oh, dear!" said the boy, "what are you going to do? I will go home to father at once, if you please, gentlemen."

"We want to know," said Claude, "the meaning of the strange sounds in this house, and how they are produced, and by whom?"

"But, lor, sir! how should I know?"

"Up with him!" said Claude.

Jack and Dick lifted up the boy, and placed him upon the table; and Claude rendered him to a condition, as regarded apparel, in which the switches were likely to be very effective.

"Now, my lad," said Claude, "I shall not trouble myself to keep asking you. You are quite well acquainted with what we want to know, so you can stop these proceedings at once by telling us. Is all right, Dick?"

"Yes; all's right."

Claude immediately applied the twigs, with an energy that made the boy burst into such a roar, that it was perfectly ludicrous to hear him; and after about half a minute he could stand it no longer, but shouted out—

"I'll tell! I'll tell! Oh, I'll tell!"

"Very good! Go on, then," said Claude.

"It's my father who is here. He is a coiner, and I'll take you to him, and he makes that horrid noise by blowing through a large cow's-horn. Oh, dear! oh, dear! I didn't think I should come to this. It's very horrid! Oh! Oh! Oh! Let me go; do, sir, let me go! I can't stand any more of it."

CHAPTER CCXXXV.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS ARE COMPELLED TO GET RID OF THE COINER.

Jack and Dick were so very much amused at this capital plan of Claude's in the way of getting information from boys, that they roared again with laughing; and, probably, Jack now laughed, or affected to laugh, the loudest, for he felt thoroughly ashamed of his fears upon the subject of the haunted house, and was afraid, now, that Dick and Claude might refer to them.

"Oh, that is capital!" he cried. "Capital!"

"And so," said Dick, "it is by bellowing through a cow's-horn, that the noise is made?"

"Oh, dear, yes," said the boy. "The other boy you met was my brother Bill. Why didn't you whack it all out of him, instead of giving me such a teaser?"

"Why, my lad," said Claude, "we did try it with your brother Bill, and found it equally successful as with you, so far as we asked him for information."

"Oh, dear! then he ought to have told a fellow how you managed things, that he ought. I never was so served out in all my life behind, before."

"You have your own obstinacy to thank for it; and now, as you have explained all that we want to know, you will perhaps be so good as to fulfil your promise of taking us to your father, the coiner. Come, will you do so?"

"Oh, dear, yes," said the boy, who had now scrambled off the table, "anything you like, sir, so that you put those twigs away."

"Oh, you don't like the look of them?"

"It ain't the look of them, sir," said the boy, as he made a wry face. "It's the feel of 'em."

"Very good—I have no wish in the world to administer another dose, unless it should be absolutely necessary. It was a very ungenerous thing of your brother Bill, not to give you due notice of our mode of transacting business."

"Oh, yes, sir, it was; but then you see, sir, he was afraid I might laugh at him, and I dare say he wanted me to catch it, too. That was it! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"Lead on, then, and we will follow you."

"This way, gentlemen, this way. I am rather in for it now, I think, for I suppose, when you are gone, father will begin upon both me and Bill, so I think the very best thing we can do is to run away."

With this sagacious remark, the boy led them from the room on to the landing-place again, and after proceeding some little distance, he came to a door, at which he tapped three times in a very peculiar manner. A voice from within immediately said—

"Is that you, Joe?"

"Yes," said the boy, mournfully. "Oh, yes, it's me. I only wish as it wasn't, that's all; and that somebody else felt what I feel now."

The door was opened after a little fuss in undoing what, no doubt, were some very secure fastenings on the inside, and a man, with a very grimy face, made his appearance. Claude and his friends had remained perfectly still, so that he had no idea that there was any one there but the boy, and the moment he caught sight of the strange faces, he called out in a loud voice—

"Ah! am I betrayed at last, and by my own flesh and blood, too?"

"No!" said Claude. "Don't be hasty—It is not so. This boy has been enforced to conduct us to you. But lay aside your fears; we will not be of any disservice to you. Our intentions are by no means against you. All that we want is to remain here, and rest ourselves in peace and quietness for the night, and your secret will be quite as safe in our keeping as in your own."

"How am I to know that?"

"No how, except by experience of the fact; but a fact it is for all that. We are not men who care one straw whether you make money one way or another."

"If I could only feel assured—"

"Pho!—pho! man, you may feel assured. Here are three of us, well armed, and if we meant you any mischief, I should rather think there would be no occasion to temporise with you, or to lie about it."

"That is true."

"Very well. With that belief, then, you had much better put your mind at ease concerning us."

"I will. And I am armed, too; but what could I do against so many?"

"Nothing, but make a fool of yourself."

At this juncture, the boy thought it necessary to say something to his father in vindication of himself, and in a whining tone, he said—

"Oh, father, I couldn't help it. I should have been all cut up into bits soon if I had not told all about it. Indeed I should, father."

The father looked at him angrily.

"What do you mean," he said, "by being forced to tell all about it? You

do not mean to tell me that you had anything really to fear from these three gent emen?"

"Oh, yes, he had, though," said Claude.

"What? You do not mean to tell me that you would have taken the life of a boy for keeping his father's secret?"

"Certainly not. We have a much better plan than that. We did not attempt by threats to induce him to tell, nor would he have yielded to them very probably; but we appealed to his sensations in another way. Did you not hear a noise?"

"I heard some one roaring out as if in pain."

"Oh, lor!" said the boy, "that was me, and wasn't I in pain, neither!"

"Yes," added Claude. "We whipped the secret from him, and found it wonderfully effective."

The man bit his lips, and looked vexed; but after a moments pause, he said—

"It is ridiculous of me to say, now, that I will trust you, for I cannot help it. Pray come in, and make yourselves at home in this room, which has not been intruded into by a stranger for many a month. I am a coiner of base money, I freely confess it; and by terrifying the country people regarding this house, I have made them all ready to swear that it is haunted, and they will not come near it, so I have it all to myself."

"Exactly; but we are not the right sort to be frightened; so you see, here we are; and if you keep quiet, you may go on to-morrow just as usual."

With these words, Claude and his companions stepped into the room, where they found a fire lighted, but no indications of the employment of the coiner. He was quite alone, too, and Claude said—

"Where are your tools? If you manufacture base money, you must have the means of doing so."

"Yes; but as a matter of common caution, when any one approaches the place, I conceal everything as quickly as I possibly can. I do not intend to remain here myself, for, however I have braved it out for a length of time, now I am quite convinced that there are noises in this house which are not human."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I am sorry to feel obliged to give way to such a belief, but circumstances force it upon me."

As he spoke, Claude, without appearing to do so, kept the most careful watch upon the actions of the man without appearing to do so, and he saw that he put his hand behind him, close to the wall, and touched a bell pull that hung to it. The moment he did so, there came from the lower part of the house one of the horrible sounds which had been explained by the boy while he was under punishment, but which the coiner did not know was so well now understood by his visitors.

"Oh, there it is!" he cried. "There it is! Tell me, my good friends—oh, tell me, if you can, what you can ascribe that dreadful noise to? It appals me!"

"What, that bellowing we heard just now?" said Claude, in the most indifferent tone he could assume.

"Yes, oh, yes."

"Oh, that's somebody blowing through a cow's-horn, I am quite convinced. I have no doubt at all upon the subject. It is your son, Bill, I shouldn't wonder."

"The devil!" said the coiner.

"Come—come," said Duval, "it is of no use your trying this sort of thing any longer with us. We don't intend to be frightened out of the house; and if there should happen anything that we don't quite understand, our friend Joe, here, will explain it to us after a little persuasion with a few twigs."

"Oh dear, don't think of it," said Joe.

The coiner shook his head.

"Humph!" he said, "so I find he has told you all. Just you wait a bit, Joe, that's all. You and I can come to an account to-morrow."

"There," said Joe, "I said so. I shall catch it from everybody now, and be flayed alive, that I shall. Oh, I can't stand this sort of thing. It's too horrid."

"Allow me," said Claude, "to intercede for Joe. In a ridiculous kind of way he has been quite sufficiently already punished, I assure you. It was not possible that he could hold out against the inducements we offered to him to tell us all."

"Not possible?"



JACK PERCEIVES THE OFFICERS MAKING FOR THE FARM-HOUSE.

"Oh, no," said Joe, "I'm quite sure of that."

"Under such circumstances, then," added Claude, "and as no real harm will come of it, I hope that you will forgive him, and take no further notice of it."

"I presume I must."

"And Bill, likewise, for he has been subjected to the same persuasion; and under great compulsion that way, he told us where our horses were hidden."

"The rascal ! he came here and said you had gone about yourselves till you heard one of them neighing, and then, of course, lit upon where they were."

"Oh dear, no. It was quite the contrary. It was Bill's neighing that gave us the information."

At this moment a footstep was heard upon the stairs, and then the father cried out—

"Is that you, Bill ?"

"Yes, father. Have they gone away ?"

"Come here and see."

Bill bounced into the room, and he was tolerably staggered to see Claude and his friends there.

"Well, Bill," said Claude, "where is the cow's-horn ?"

"Oh, lor !"

"You did that last bellow pretty well, but it did not come near up to the natural shout that you made when you were tied to the tree below, did it now ?"

Bill looked uncommonly sheepish, and Joe, with a look of some satisfaction, said—

"Well, I am glad that you had it as well as me, Bill, so you can't laugh at me now, you know, old fellow, and you told about the *osses*, if I told about father and the cow's-horn."

"Yes," said the coiner, "all is known now; but these gentlemen say they will keep our secret, so get a table ready, and let us see how we can manage to entertain them, my lads. We owe them some sort of reparation for the trouble that we have given them."

"A great deal too much trouble they have had," said Bill. "If I could only have thought they wouldn't be in the way, I should have liked to spare them one part of their trouble, since they have been about this old place."

"And so should I," said Joe, with a rueful look.

"Let bygones be bygones," said Claude. "I will make you some amends for the twig business before I leave the house."

"You are very good, sir," remarked the coiner, "but, indeed, they don't deserve anything. Come, boys, bustle—bustle. We will do the best we can, at all events, although our larder is not very well stocked."

A furious ringing at a bell at this moment claimed the attention of them all.

"Pray," said Claude, "what do you mean by that ?"

"I !" cried the coiner. "I know nothing about that, I assure you. It is none of our doing. Oh, I am lost—lost! I shall be taken and dragged to a jail, at once. Oh, save me—save me !"

The terror of the coiner was too genuine to be suspected, and Claude said at once—

"It is possible enough that whoever is ringing the bell in that style, is an enemy of mine, if not of yours. What had better be done in such a case ? Surely it must happen that sometimes strangers come to the house ?"

"Oh, yes, yes, and then Bill always meets them with terror in his looks, and tells some story about, coming to gather blackberries, or something of that sort, and how he has seen something that has nearly frightened him out of his wits ; and in nine cases out of ten, the people shuffle off again as quickly as they can."

"Let him try it now, then."

"Go, Bill. Go, my boy, and do your best, and remember that you give us notice with your whistle if they are too obstinate for you. Go and terrify them with some of the stories that I have taught you to tell of the old place."

"I will, I will, father. It ain't very likely that they will think of the sort of way of getting at secrets that these gentlemen did. Oh, dear, me, it's horrid to think of."

CHAPTER CCXXXVI.

THE NIGHT OF DANGER IN THE DESERTED HOUSE.

As the boy spoke, with so vivid a recollection, of what he had suffered at the hands of Claude Duval, there came another desperate ring at the large bell at the hall-door, and it became quite evident that whoever was there, was not disposed upon light grounds to leave the spot.

"Go at once, boy," said Claude, "and stop them, if you can. If you cannot, and they should turn out to be enemies of mine, I am not one that will very tamely submit to their dictates. Look to your pistols, my friends."

"Ah!" said the coiner, "you will repel force by force, then?"

"We will."

"Will you tell me, then, who you are? Surely you may trust me, now?"

"If there were any occasion to trust you," said Claude, "I for one should not hesitate a moment; but there can be no possible use in your knowing our names; and if we were to tell you, you have no means of satisfying yourself that we tell you the exact truth in the matter."

"Well, I will be content. Let us listen for Bill's signal. If he be successful in getting rid of whoever is ringing at the door, he will blow a shrill clear whistle, which we cannot but hear if we are only tolerably attentive."

Upon this they all remained profoundly still, listening for the whistle, and in about five minutes it came, breaking in upon the silence with a startling effect.

"All's right," said the coiner; "he has frightened them."

"Are you sure of that?" said Jack.

"Quite sure. We shall have him here soon. Go, Joe, and listen at the head of the stairs for your brother's footsteps.

Joe left the room, and after he had been gone some little time, the coiner, with an air of uneasiness, said—

"What can have become of the boys? I will go and seek them."

"Hold!" said Claude.

"What would you say? What do you suspect?"

"Nothing. But in order that we may continue in that blessed state, I beg that you will have the goodness to stay with us. You will recollect that we are but very slight acquaintances, indeed, and until we know each other better, I do not like to part with the whole of the family at once."

"As you please. I did not think of anything wrong, for I apprehend that I have much more to dread than you can possibly have. But I hear a footstep. It is one of the boys. Ah, they are both here, I fancy. Yes, here they are."

Bill and Joe both came into the room, now, and the former said—

"I have frightened them away, although there was a sort of constable among them."

"A constable, Bill? You don't mean that surely? How did you know h was one?"

"He said he was, and he said something else, too, that perhaps these gentlemen might not like."

"Whatever it is," said Claude, "let us have it. It is the constable's saying, not yours, so we cannot blame you for it."

"Yes," said the father, "say it at once, Bill."

"Then," said the boy, "the constable said that he was on the look out for Claude Duval, who was in this neighbourhood along with two friends of his, and he said that he would give one hundred pounds to anybody who would give him any information that might place him on their track, if he caught them."

"Claude Duval, the famous highwayman!" cried the coiner.

"Yes, and his two friends."

The coiner glanced knowingly at Claude and his companions, and the two boys, who were cunning beyond their age, likewise looked at them with eyes full of meaning.

"So," said Claude, "all this means now that you suspect I am Claude Duval, and that these are my two friends that the constable spoke of? Is it not so? Speak out."

"It is," said the coiner.

"It is," said Bill and Joe, both in a breath.

"Oh, what mistakes people do make in this world," said Claude. "The idea of mistaking three commercial travellers for three of the most desperate highwaymen! Why, I tell you that that very Claude Duval you speak of, has got the most of my money in his pocket."

"What, then, has he robbed you?"

"He has got possession of all I had, if you call that robbing; and as for my two friends here, they would not like to meet Duval on a dark night all alone, I can tell you."

"There's five hundred pounds reward for him now," said the coiner, "and there was at one time fifteen hundred pounds, but a lot of it has been withdrawn by the different parties as they cooled down in their feelings after he had robbed them. The five hundred pounds, though, is a good sum, and would be no bad day's work."

"Yes, if it could only be earned," said Claude. "But you promised that you would get us something to eat, and we shall be glad to see of what your larder consists. How dark it gets."

"Yes," said Dick, "the twilight is going fast. The long shadows are in the old garden now. We shan't see each other's faces for many minutes longer."

"Light up, Joe," said the coiner. "We don't make much of a flare when the night comes, for fear it should be seen; but we have light enough to look at each other by, at all events. And now let me tell you, that whether you be the persons mentioned by the officer, or not, you are safe here. I am not the man to betray any one, and if ten times five hundred pounds were to be got by it, I should expect every guinea of the ill-gotten money to stick in my throat. I would rather go on at my own trade of coining."

"You are right," said Jack, "for I rather think that something would stick in your throat, if it were not a guinea.

"Not a doubt of it," said Dick.

The coiner affected to laugh heartily, and Joe, by dint of clambering upon a table, lit a solitary candle that was in the remains of what had once been a very handsome lamp, hanging from the ceiling. When lit, that candle gave but a dim light, which was only just sufficient to enable those in the room to see each other, and not to run against its furniture.

"This is darkness visible," said Dick.

"It is, rather; but as Bill is going to the village to make a few purchases, he can bring us a candle or two. Now, Bill, mind you get exactly what is wanted."

"Yes, father."

"And be as smart and as quick as you can; and, of course, as you always are, you will be upon your guard."

"Yes, father."

"Be off with you, then, and get back as soon as you can. Don't forget the brandy and the candles. That will do."

Bill left the room, but he had not been gone a moment or two, when the coiner called out,—

"Bill! Bill! stop, I forgot—I quite forgot: bring in some whitening with you. Confound the boy, he don't hear me. Bill! Bill! I say!"

He ran out of the room and went down the stairs with a great clatter after Bill. Joe remained in the room, and looked rather silly as he eyed Claude out of the corners of his eyes. In the course of a few moments, the coiner came back.

"We use whitening in our work," he said, "and I send to the village so very seldom for fear of exciting any suspicion of who Bill is, that I always wish him to bring in everything at once, if possible, He is asked at times who he is, and

then he names some farmer a good way off, and says he is with him, and that satisfies the people."

"You cannot do better," said Claude.

"Well, in this world, of course, we always do the best we can—ah! ah! All's right, I rather think."

The coiner said those words, 'All's right' so significantly, that Claude and his companions could not help thinking they had some hidden meaning, and if they had, it was, in all probability, one that was not over-favourable to their safety.

Duval would have been glad of an opportunity to say a few words in private to Jack and Dick, to ask, in fact, their opinion regarding the present posture of affairs, and how far they thought the coiner and his hopeful family ought to be trusted, under these circumstances; but he could not very well get such an opportunity. If it had not been for Jack's horse, he would have at once left the place; but anything in the shape of lameness in any one of the animals, upon whose speed and powers so much depended, was not a thing to be trifled with in any shape or way.

The coiner, and the boy whom he named Joe, busied themselves in spreading a cloth upon the table; and from a cupboard in the room that was capitally concealed in the panelling of the wall, they took out some bread and some cold meat. The meat was mutton, and by the manner in which it was cut, it looked wonderfully like as if some grazier had suffered for it.

It had evidently not been cut up according to the ordinary rules of butchers' craft.

"Come," said the coiner; "all you have got to do, is to eat, drink, and be merry, and quite at your ease. Bill will soon be back with the brandy, and more lights.'

"I think," said Joe, "that you ought to have told Bill, father, not to put up with the bad brandy at the Rose and Crown, but to ask for something strong."

It was quite evident that Joe in his own mind, looked upon this as something of a joke, for he grinned as he said it, in despite of certain smarting sensations that reminded him of a recent event.

The coiner gave him a kick under the table to be quiet, which made the matter only rather more suspicious.

"Jack," said Claude, "have you any objection to step down stairs, and take a look at the cattle?"

"Not the least; I was thinking of doing so."

Jack rose, and Claude did so likewise.

"We will go together, Jack," he said. "I dare say our kind host will excuse us for a few moments."

"Don't mention it," said Dick, answering for the coiner, who did not seem quite at his ease at this movement of Claude's. Dick knew well enough that Claude wanted to say something to Jack, and he was willing to give him the opportunity of so doing. In another moment they had left the room, and proceeded down stairs to the room where the horses were placed. It was in the same state in which they left it, and Claude was well enough pleased to see that the whole of their horses were laying down and comfortably resting.

"Jack," said Claude, "what do you think of our new friend, the coiner, and his two hopeful sons?"

"That he is as great a rogue as needs be, and that he is bringing them up in the same way," said Jack.

"But does it strike you, Jack, what Master Bill has gone to the village for?"

"Why, no, not exactly."

"Well it does me; and in my humble opinion, Jack, it is for the express purpose of getting together a force to try and take us prisoners."

"You don't really think that, Claude?"

"Indeed but I do."

"Then we must be off at once. My horse's foot would be eventually the

better for a little longer rest; but if it can't have it, it can't, and there's an end of it."

"Do you think the creature could take a canter?"

"Oh, yes, now it could, or gallop, for the matter of that; but, as I say, rest would be a good thing for it, no doubt. If, however, you have suspicions of the sort you name, let us go."

"Recollect, Jack, that they are only suspicions."

"Yes; but the more I think of them, the more likely they look. That he suspects, to the extent of knowing, who and what we are, I can well believe, and the reward has tempted him. He, no doubt, calculates, too, upon his own offences against the law being passed over with impunity, on account of aiding in our capture."

"That may be, and, doubtless, is a part of his calculation; and so, Jack, I will tell you what I was thinking. It will be, in my opinion, advisable to change the place where the horses are now, and to place them somewhere that we only know of; so that, at the urgency of a moment, we could seek them, and mount and be off."

"Good!"

"Very well. Then I propose that we remain in this house until we have the most irresistible and positive evidence that our suspicions are quite correct."

"Let it be so then, Claude. I only hope we shall get safe out of this abominable house; I think the ghosts that we thought at first were in it were more endurable than the flesh and blood that we really find here."

"Don't say we thought the ghosts were here, Jack," said Claude with a smile. "Recollect that you had that all to yourself."

"Well—well! We will say no more about that."

Claude and Jack were both such practised hands at the management of horses, that they got all the three animals up, and saddled and bridled, in the course of a few minutes, and then they conducted them quite gently out of the house and fastened them to the lattice-work of a little summer-house in the garden that was close to the lane.

CHAPTER CCXXXVII.

CLAUDE AND HIS COMPANIONS ARE BELEAGUERED IN THE OLD HOUSE.

"HARK!" said Jack, "I hear something in the lane. I only wish Dick was with us instead of keeping company with that rascal of a coiner, we would be off at once."

"Perhaps it is Bill coming back?" said Claude.

"Listen!—Listen!"

R "You are right, Jack. There are persons in the lane, and they are coming on with such caution, too, that we may well suspect them to be enemies."

"You may depend," said Jack, "that Bill's kind errand to the village has been for the express purpose of getting a force, by the aid of which to arrest us. I half-suspected it before."

"And I, too; but I never like to give way to suspicion, for one's fancy is so very apt to mislead one in circumstances of danger; but now I think there can be but little doubt of the fact. Oh! that Dick were with us! There is no help for it, though, Jack. Let us go back to him, for we have succeeded in getting the horses into a handy position, and that is everything. Come on."

Jack followed Claude quickly into the house again, and they made their way back to the room where Dick was keeping company with the coiner. Upon their entrance, Dick spoke, saying—

"Is all right with the cattle?"

"Quite," said Claude, "and Bill is coming, I think, for we fancied we heard a footstep or two in the lane."

"Oh, I am glad of that," said the coiner, "we shall be so very nice and comfortable, when Bill comes back, I do think."

"Well, so do I," said Claude. "It will be the only thing that it is at all wanting to our felicity. But don't you run considerable risks here, my friend, at times, from the curiosity of strangers, who may come into this house?"

"Oh, no, not much. This room can be well fastened up. Don't you see that there is an iron bar inside the door, here, that I have had the precaution of putting up myself, so that no one here can get in without my leave. But here is Bill."

At this moment that precocious young gentleman found his way to the room: He was quite alone.

"Oh, gentlemen," he said, "I am afraid that your horses are frightened at something."

"Indeed!" said Claude.

"Yes, sir, they are making quite a kind of disturbance on the floor of the room below. I would have gone in and seen what it was, but I was afraid, you see, sir, that they might kick me; but it will be better for you to go at once."

"Why, the fact is, Bill," said Claude, as he stepped to the door of the room, and put up the bar that the coiner had unbarred, "the fact is, my fine fellow, that we always let our horses amuse themselves in their own way."

"Why are you putting up that bar?" said the coiner, with rather a flurried kind of look.

"Oh, just as a little measure of security, that's all, my friend. And now, Bill, we want a little bit of information from you, and we sincerely hope that you will give it to us without putting us to the trouble and you to the pain of a process of getting it, which you know by experience is very efficient, indeed."

"Oh, this is some joke," said the coiner. "Ha! ha! It is some very good joke, indeed, this is."

Bill looked very red and fidgetty.

"I—I don't know anything, gentlemen," he said; "but, of course, if I find I do, I will tell everything to you in a moment, if you will only be so good as to say what it is."

"Certainly, Bill; we won't keep you in suspense about what it is for long, you may depend. How many persons, now, have you brought with you from the village to capture us?"

"How many?"

"Yes. We want to know what force is opposed to us, that we may take our measures accordingly."

"Oh, now, that's too bad," said Bill. "Do you think that I would do such a thing? It's quite wrong, sir—indeed, it is. Why, father don't want people out of the village here, I'll be bound."

"Indeed I do not, my child," said the coiner, with a look of great candour, "and I am quite surprised that the gentlemen should think of such a thing—quite. Oh, it is too bad, after we feel inclined to do all we can to make them comfortable for the night. But come, my son—since the gentlemen think that we are not good and honest company enough for them, we will go to another room, and there pass the night; and in the morning, when they find that all their suspicions of us are groundless, they will then apologise to us for our entertaining them."

"Yes, father," said Bill, in the same canting tone. "It's a shocking thing to be suspected, when you are doing your best to be kind and obliging to people."

"It is, my dear son, but you will find that such is the way of the world, and that virtue and charity must be their own rewards, for the world will not appreciate either. Come, my boy. Let us come away and leave these gentlemen to themselves."

"Wait a bit," said Claude, "we are very much afraid that you will be rather dull without us, so we cannot think of parting with you or Bill."

"But my dear sir, allow me to say ——"

"Whatever you please, in a little while—but at present we have something to do. Jack, have you got a good strong piece of twine?"

"Oh yes," said Jack. "I always carry some nice, round, strong whipcord with me, and here it is."

"Very good; now, Mr. Coiner, I intend to take the liberty of tying your hands behind your back."

"Tying me!—Me!"

"Even so, you; and then, if you are prudent enough to be quite quiet, you will receive no injury, but if you are otherwise, I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of wasting a charge of gunpowder in blowing out your brains, if you have got any."

The coiner turned ghastly pale.

"Oh," he said, "this is too bad. What on earth can you suspect of me? Am I not a criminal, and would it be at all possible that I should bring down upon you the police, whose efforts would be as much directed against me as against you?"

"I don't know that," said Claude. "You have a suspicion that I am Claude Duval.—Have you not?"

"I know you are."

"Exactly; and I know likewise, that the government is sufficiently anxious for my apprehension to look over the pettier offences of any one who may be instrumental in giving me up. Come now, confess, Master Coiner, that you sent Bill to the village to get a sufficient force here to apprehend us. Is it not so?"

"Oh, no—no! I appeal to Bill."

"Certainly not," said Bill. "Such a thing would have been very wrong indeed. Oh, my—I could not have done it."

"Very well," said Claude. "Of course it is a matter of fact, and not of opinion. You will be so good as to sit here, Mr. Coiner."

Claude Duval had securely tied the wrists of the coiner together behind his back, and now he placed a chair exactly against the door of the room, and intimated that it was there he was to seat himself. The fellow hesitated for a few moments, and Claude said mildly—

"I have no objection to give you a reason for seating you there. The fact is, that if officers are in the house they will be pretty sure to threaten to fire through the door if we will not open it, and you, as you sit against it, will catch the shots, you see."

"Oh, murder, no!"

"Nay, my friend: if there are no officers in the house, you will be in no danger. Tie him to the chair, Jack, by his ankles to the legs of it, and then he won't be able to get up upon any emergency."

The coiner looked rather agonised, and licked his lips nervously.

"Oh, Bill," he said, "is not this dreadful treatment for a son to see a father endure?"

"It is, father," said Bill, in an oratorical kind of tone, "and the heart that can witness such things without a pang, is—a—a—that is to say—I quite agree with you, father."

"Yes, my dear; and now tell me, Bill—Did you see any suspicious persons prowling about the house, for I rather think you did?—Hem!"

"Why yes," said Bill, taking the hint, "I did, and I was going to tell these gentlemen so, when they all of a sudden took it into their heads that we were acting a base part towards them. As I got to the end of the lane, father, I did fancy I heard footsteps."

"Then," said the coiner, "let us all unite and resist the common enemy. Claude Duval, I will fight by your side, and so will Bill, I feel convinced."

"Yes," said Bill; "and if we all fall, let it be as friends. Oh, father, the

idea of any one suspecting you of sending for the officers is enough to bring tears from a flintstone, it is."

At any other time, when their danger had been less imminent, Claude Duval and his friends would have been highly amused at this conversation between the father and son, for it was about as fine a piece of duplicity as could very well be



CICELY HAS FOREBODINGS OF DANGER TO CLAUDE IN THE FARM-HOUSE.

imagined; but as it was, the danger that Claude and his friends were in made them exhibit an amount of impatience that they would not otherwise have yielded to, and in a voice that had quite enough passion in its tones to convince them both that he was perfectly serious, Claude spoke—

"This hypocrisy is thrown away," he said. "I and my friends are perfectly

convinced that you have thought it worth your while to betray us. Come, Bill be so good as to confess it at once, and let us know the number of persons who, no doubt, are even now below."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear," said Bill. "How can I tell what isn't?"

"Very good," said Claude. "I think you have got the twigs, Dick?"

"I have. Thinking they might be useful, I brought them into this room, and here they are."

"The twigs!" said the coiner. "What is the meaning of the twigs?"

"Oh, father," said Bill, "they whack a fellow with them till he is glad to say anything to get them to leave off. Really I don't know anything, do I father? There's nothing to know."

"Certainly not, my son, and it will give me much more satisfaction to see you suffer for the truth any amount of punishment, than lose your character by telling a falsehood. Never mind, my son—your reward will be in a better world than this."

"But the whacking," said Bill, "in the meantime, is horrid."

"You should look upon it, Bill, as one of the trials in this life we have all to undergo. I recollect when I was a Methodist preacher in London, I often used to preach upon the necessity of having patience under grievous trials."

"Well, now," said Jack, "if I didn't think that you had been a Methodist parson! Come, Bill—we are sorry to be so very troublesome to you; but having found, by experience, that the only way to make you speak out is to make you smart a little first, you can't blame us."

"If you say anything but what you ought," said the coiner to Bill, "I shall take the first opportunity of thrashing you within an inch of your life."

Bill burst into a howling cry, as Jack laid hold of him by the shoulder, and dragged him over to the table, while Claude began the operation of the twigs.

"Oh, murder! murder! I can't stand it! It's worse than before. I'll tell—I'll tell! There's six officers down stairs, and they mean to have you. They are going to wait for two more, and then come up. Oh, murder! murder! dont—dont——"

"Did your father tell you to bring them?"

"Oh, no—no! Oh, lor! don't—don't!—Yes, he did—he did!"

"Oh, William," said the coiner, "I am surprised at you telling such very infamous falsehoods; I would rather have seen you flogged by those twigs than I would have heard you say what you have."

"Oh, dear, yes," sobbed Bill. "I daresay you would; but I never knew what a whacking was till to-day. It's enough to make a fellow say anything, to lay into him in such a way. Oh, oh! I might as well have told at first without all this. Oh, dear, I have caught it!"

At this moment, some heavy blows came against the door of the room, and a voice from without cried—

"Open—open! Open the door this moment! We won't stand any nonsense! Open the door!"

"Who's there?" cried Claude.

"Oh, never you mind who's there. Open the door, I tell you, and that will be the very best thing you can do. There are eight of us here, and we are all well armed, and won't be trifled with."

"Well," said Claude, "there are five of us here, and we are well armed, and won't be trifled with."

"In the king's name," said another voice, "I summon you to open this door, and surrender yourselves. In the king's name, recollect!"

"Oh, we shall not forget it," said Claude.

"Come, come, it is of no use trifling with the law in this sort of way. We give you fair warning that if the door is not opened within the next few minutes, we shall fire upon you."

"Oh, don't!" howled the coiner.

Claude stepped up to him and placed the muzzle of a pistol against his forehead, as he said, in a low tone—

"Hark you, my friend—it is to us highly desirable that we leave this place as quickly as possible. We are going to adopt an extraordinary means of doing so, and now I warn you that if you utter one half word that in my estimation is calculated to have the effect of letting those without know what we are about, I will blow your brains out without mercy!"

"But don't let me stay here against the door to be shot."

"Tell them that you are against it, and then, perhaps, as you brought them here, they will be considerate enough to let you alone."

Claude now hastily whispered a few words to Dick and Jack, and they at once commenced operations in the room, while he talked to the men without in a loud voice, so as to drown the noise that they made. The coiner, in the way of his business, had several tools about the place, such as files and chisels, and so on. It was astounding with what quickness and dexterity Jack, who was a capital workman, got off some of the skirting band of the room, and then pulled up a couple of the planks that belonged to its flooring. The joists were not very wide apart; but it is astonishing what a small aperture a tolerably bulky body will go through with a little squeezing. It was the intention of Claude and his friends to make a hole in the floor right through to the room below, and so escape. The coiner quickly saw not only what was doing, but he saw, likewise, that it was even likely to be quite successful. If he had only dared to do so, he would that moment have given the alarm; but the threat of Claude was uttered in a tone of voice that convinced him it was anything but a joke, and that it would, without the shadow of a doubt, be carried out, if he should be so indiscreet as to give occasion for it.

He was forced to content himself with conversing in a very low tone of voice, which, as it had no effect upon anybody, and gave the officers without no sort of information, Claude did not take any notice of.

After the floor boards was removed, it was not a matter of any difficulty to knock through the lath and plaster of the ceiling of the room below, and so make a clear aperture.

CHAPTER CCXXXVIII.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS ESCAPE FROM THE HAUNTED VILLA.

"All is ready," said Jack.

"That will do," said Claude. "You and Dick get through as quietly as you can—I will follow you."

"This won't do," said the officer without. "I will fire through the door if you don't open it. I tell you, Claude Duval, that we know you are there, and that there is no chance, whatever, for you to escape. We must have you this time. There is but this door to the room, I know, and you cannot escape us. You had better surrender without resisting, and so causing bloodshed—Listen to reason, Duval!"

"So I will. How many did you say there were of you?"

"Eight, and in the course of a few moments there will be twenty more people, at least, from the village. If you surrender now, we will undertake that the villagers shall not treat you and your comrades with any violence; but if you are foolish enough to resist, I cannot answer for the consequences."

"Where do you want to take us?"

"Direct to London—where you know you will get a fair trial, so I don't think that, in the long run, you will have anything to complain of. Come, come! be reasonable."

"Certainly I shall not complain of anything after I am hanged," said Duval. "I suppose, Mr. Officer, that is what you mean by stopping my complaints? But

I will just say a word or two to my friends, and perhaps, after all, we may think it better to chance what may happen afterwards, than to have a row with you here, as you say you are well armed."

"We are, indeed, Claude Duval."

By this time, Dick had got through the aperture in the floor, and Jack, who was less bulky, was preparing to follow him. Claude made a sign to him to go quickly, and then suddenly taking hold of Bill by the collar, he turned to the coiner, saying—

"We are so fond of Bill that we shall take him with us. You may or you may not care for his life; but if you do, you will be careful not to give any alarm to the officers, regarding our mode of escape, until sufficient time has elapsed for us to be off. If you listen, you will be able to hear our horses' feet in the lane. When you do hear such a sound, you may say anything you please; but if before that they come upon us, we shall know that we have you to thank for it; and as it will be all in the family—we will shoot Bill."

"Oh, dear! I'm to be served out for everybody else?" said Bill.

"Exactly so," said Claude. "Below, there!"

To the great consternation of the boy, he dropped him through the aperture in the floor, and Dick caught him below. The officers were getting impatient, and their spokesman cried—

"Come, now, Duval, none of your tricks, my fine fellow; you can't help yourself, you know that well enough. The bravest thing a man can do is to give in, when he feels he can't help himself."

"I think so, too," said Claude. "Wait a minute, that's all. You will soon get your answer, and I hope it will be satisfactory to you."

With these words, Claude himself got through the hole in the floor, and alighted safely on his feet in the room below.

"All's right," said Jack. "Let us be off, now, as quickly as we possibly can. How shall we get Bill along?"

"I'll manage that," said Dick, as he took hold of one of Bill's ears. "Now, my boy, the more trouble I have in getting you along with us, the harder I pinch, that's all."

"Oh, I'll come—I'll come," said Bill. "Anything but the twigs. I never was so served out as I have been to-day. I'll come along as quick as you like—indeed I will. But—but——"

"But what, you young sinner?"

"I'm afraid—that is, I suspect——"

"Well, what are you afraid of, and what do you expect?"

"That the officers found out where your horses were in the room close to here, and put 'em away somewhere."

"No, you don't suspect any such thing, my dear boy. Bill, you know, you rascal, that you told them where they were; but for your special gratification, you will find that we are one too many for you, my boy, and we removed them ourselves; so we shall get clear off in spite of you."

Bill groaned.

During this little bit of conversation between Dick and Bill, the whole party had moved on at a rapid pace, and getting into the room where the horses had been, they left it again by one of the windows, and rapidly crossing the garden, found the three animals quietly waiting for their masters by the little gate to which they had been tied by their bridles. To mount was the work of a moment with the three friends; and then Dick got Bill up behind him, saying—

"We are going at a decent pace, Bill; so if you don't want rather an awkward tumble, you will do well to hold on like death, for we mean to give you a little ride, as a kind of recompense for all your kindness towards us."

"Off and away! Hurrah!" cried Claude.

They were in the lane. The impulse was given to the horses—Jack was a little afraid of the lame foot of his steed, but he found that it went much better than he expected; so they got off at a canter that covered a great deal more

ground than it seemed to do. Bill was in the greatest fright imaginable, and clung to Dick as though he considered that was the only hold he had of life. If he could only have been sure of alighting in some soft place, and escaping the horse's heels, he would have gladly done so; but he dreaded to make the experiment; so he continued a prisoner, notwithstanding it was quite at his own option not to do so. The end of the lane was quickly gained, and Claude and his friends took the high road to London, well enough pleased at their escape.

They rode four miles without a pause, and then Jack cried out—

"Can we ease the pace a little? Pursuit is out of the question, and I am rather afraid of my horse's foot."

"Certainly," said Claude, "there is no hurry now; but what shall we do with our friend Bill?"

"Oh, let me go, now," said Bill. "Do let me go now, and I will never do so any more—indeed I won't."

"You are the most treacherous young rascal," said Claude, "that I ever remember to have come across. In the most cool and villanous manner you have tried to do all the mischief you possibly can; and when you were defeated at one scheme, you tried another; so that if we were even to take your life, it would be no more than what you fully deserve; for it was at our lives that all your plans and actions were aimed. You are an educated lad, I can see, although at times you have thought proper to put on the appearance of a country lout, and to affect the languge of one. Now, say freely what you think we ought to do with you?"

"You have got away," said Bill, "and so I think you ought to let a poor boy go now. Besides, you know, I caught it rather with those twigs, and I feel it yet."

"A good job, too, Bill. Now, we will be more generous to you than you deserve, rascal as you are. That you will come to some bad end it don't require a conjurer to prophesy. Is that a labourer's cottage a little ahead there, Jack?"

"It is, and a man is at the door of it."

"Very good. Let us speak to him."

"But you mean to let me go now?" said Bill. "It will be a long trot back, you know, and before I get there, you can be half a dozen miles off, so I can't do you any harm if I wanted."

"We shall see, Bill—we shall see."

They all rode on till they came to the cottage that was on the rode-side, and as it was not far off the dawn, they could just see it, and the little patch of garden-ground that joined it to the main-road. Indeed, in the eastern sky there was already a long streak of strange coloured light, which was at each moment widening, so that in a very little while the new day would be in the heavens.

"You are early up, my friend," said Claude, to the man who was at the cottage-door, and who seemed to be finishing his toilette there.

"Yes, sir," he replied; "my work begins as soon as I can see it, so, you see, I am obliged to be up betimes."

"Ah, to be sure. Well, have you any objection to earn a guinea in the next half-hour? It will be easily earned, and it will be doing a good action beside."

"Objection, sir? Oh, dear, no. I haven't so much as seen a guinea for I don't know when, sir. I hope it is nothing wrong that you want me to do?"

"Certainly not. Don't I tell you it's a good action?"

"Ah, then, sir, I shall be main pleased to do it."

"Very good. You see this lad? He is a very bad fellow, and if we did what was right, we ought to take him to prison. He has tried to get us impeded upon our journey by pretending that we are highwaymen. Now, do we look like it?"

"Oh dear, no, sir."

"Well, we think that a little wholsesome correction will do him more good than anything else, so if you will give him a capital flogging, and then let him go, you will deservedly earn the guinea of us."

"What!" shouted Bill. "More of it! Oh dear, no. I have had enough of that to last me all my life. Oh, let me off, do! I promise better behaviour for the future."

"You hear him? Will you earn the guinea?"

"Won't I? that's all!" said the labourer, advancing to the side of Dick's horse, and collaring Bill. "If I don't give him a good lesson, it shan't be my fault. Come, my young fellow, it will all be for your own good in the long run."

"There is the guinea, then," said Claude, who was hardly able to restrain his laughter at the rueful face that Bill put on. "I will trust entirely to your honour to perform your part of the bargain; and so good morning, for we are rather in a hurry."

With this, Claude and his friends trotted off again, leaving Bill in the hands of the labourer. When they had got to some little distance, they simultaneously stopped to laugh.

"Upon my word," said Dick, "although that young rascal fully deserves his punishment, it was enough to make a cat laugh to think how he had been half-flayed already. You may depend upon it such a retribution will not again overtake him in this world, and the chances really are, that it will make him very cautious for the future how he engages in acts of treachery."

"If," said Claude, "his punishment has that effect, we are not his worst friends, after all. Hillio! what's that?"

"Why, Bill howling, to be sure."

Claude laughed, and so did Jack, and they all three went off again at a hard trot, that quickly took them out of hearing of the guinea's worth of castigation that Bill was duly receiving at the hands of the conscientious labourer.

They had not got far before they met a man on horseback, who, the moment he got up to them, cried out—

"Are they taken yet, gentlemen—are the highwaymen taken? I have been for some help, and there's half a dozen gentlemen on horseback coming."

"It's a pity they are too late," said Claude, "for the highwaymen are not only on the road again, and perfectly free, but one of them is about to blow your brains out, if you have got any."

To the intense horror of this man, who had so unexpectedly spoken, Claude held a pistol to his head.

"Oh, spare me," he said; "spare me; I have a wife and family!"

"You ought to have thought of them," said Claude, "before you made yourself so busy in hunting to the death, if you could have done it, others who have done you no harm; but you will be spared on condition that you ride on with us, and when we meet the mounted men, you spoke of, you will be so good as to pass us as friends of yours. Upon no other terms will I spare you."

"Of course," he said, turning very white, "I accede to those terms. If I have been a fool, I must take the consequences."

"Just so," said Claude; "and now come on. Ah, there are your friends, I presume?"

"They are, and but for my folly, Claude Duval would have been taken to-day."

"It is possible; but the best thing you can do now is to provide for your own safety. Mark me, when I say a thing, I mean it, and if you attempt any tricks, I will shoot you with as little compunction as I would a mad dog."

At this moment half a dozen men rode up in haste, and the foremost of them cried out—

"Hilloa, Simpson, I thought you were in such a hurry to get back that you could not wait for us, and here you are with your horse's head the other way!"

"Why, these are friends of mine! No, hang it! They are no such thing Blaze away! One can but die once."

Duval was too much struck with the courage of this man to find it in his heart to deliberately murder him, although he had said that he would do so. He lowered his pistol as he said—

"I spare you, and leave it to your conscience to do as you please. You can go."

"Then, by Heaven, I repent that I have said a word."

"What is the meaning of all this?" cried one of the fresh arrivals. "Are you all out of your senses?"

"No!" said Claude, in a voice of thunder. "The meaning of it just is, that I am Claude Duval, and you stop the road, gentlemen. Forward, my gallant friends! Charge them!"

Without, then, giving the six, or rather, we ought to say, the seven horsemen, time to think what to do, Claude and his two companions dashed forward among them, and succeeded in making their way through them. The man who had been Claude's prisoner for so brief a space of time, shouted out—

"Off with you, Duval, and good luck to you. I won't pull a trigger or move an inch after you."

The others were by no means so scrupulous, for in the course of the next few moments three or four pistol bullets rattled about the ears of our adventurers. Claude felt that one of the bullets touched his cheek, and a slight exclamation from Dick led him to think that he was wounded.

"We cannot stand this," said Duval. "Fire upon them!"

He turned, and so did Dick and Jack. They all three fired, and then, amid the smoke of their own pistols, without waiting to see what execution they had done, they went off at a gallop.

After this taste of the quality of the highwaymen, no one seemed very much inclined to follow them. After half-an-hour's fast riding, they thereupon thought proper to decrease their speed, and examine into the amount of damage done by the pistol bullets.

"Is any one touched?" said Claude.

"No," cried both Jack and Dick, "there's no mischief worth the speaking of done, at all events. Let us push on for London at once, or the road will be too hot for us soon."

CHAPTER CCXXXIX.

CLAUDE GOES HOME FOR A FEW DAYS, AND THERE MEETS WITH A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

CLAUDE's idea was to get to Ealing now as quickly as he could, and taste the luxury of repose for a day or two at the farm, where Cicely, he knew, would be overjoyed to see him.

He felt a little backward, though, in saying as much to his two friends, so he rather hinted it than absolutely said it.

"I suppose, now," he said, "you would think me but a lazy fellow if I were to lie by for a day and a night at Ealing? Come, speak the truth. Will you relish being my guests for a little time at the old farm, or has the road too many attractions for you both?"

Jack looked at Dick and laughed. "The road is all very well," he then said, "but if you, Claude, will really take us into comfortable keeping for a day or two, I don't know anything that will be a more desirable change. What do you say, Dick?"

"I say yes to the proposition, with all my heart," responded Dick, and from his manner, it was quite clear that he spoke his real sentiments, and not from any show of complaisance to Claude Duval merely.

"Why, then," said Claude, "you both of you do me a very great kindness, and since that is all settled, let us push on as fast as we conveniently can."

"Recollect my horse's foot," said Jack.

"Certainly. No one would be less willing to forget any ailment of a horse, than I. We will entirely accommodate ourselves, Jack, to your horse's con-

venience and pace, and you shall go first, so that we may do so with a degree of certainty that we could not otherwise aim at."

"That will do," said Jack. "I don't mean to say that I am going to crawl, but I like the creature to have its own pace when it really has anything the matter with it. And now, Claude, just see what a nice little rent in the sleeve of my coat one of the bullets of our acquaintances on the road has made."

"It has, indeed. An inch deeper, Jack,—"

"And I should have had a broken arm; but a miss, you know, as the old saying has it, is as good as a mile."

"It is, Jack, and take things on the long run, I will say it, that we have all of us the most extraordinary luck."

"Well, now," said Dick, putting on a very philosophical look, "you may call it luck, if you like, but I rather differ from you there. I think it solely arises from the fact of our not flinching."

"Indeed, Dick?"

"Yes. You see when a bullet leaves the barrel of a pistol, it takes a particular course, in a curved line, and, of course, if you or I happen to be in the line, we catch it; but there's many chances to one that we are not in it, and as we keep steady, it passes us, when most folks, if they fancy a bullet is coming, dodge about in an extraordinary manner, with the idea of avoiding it, when, in point of fact, by so doing, they are only giving it a further chance of hitting them."

"There's something in that," said Jack.

"To be sure there is," cried Claude, laughing; "but not much, for you forget, Dick, that you may dodge out of the way of the bullet as well as into it."

"Never mind that. It is not a good plan to try to get out of the way of a shot; and I have heard folks who have been in the army, and who have heard them whistling around them, say the same thing. Those who have tried all sorts of schemes to avoid the shots, have almost always caught one, while those who took no notice have escaped."

"Well," said Claude, "I shall think it a capital theory so long as I am not hit; but the moment I am, I am afraid I shall alter my opinion upon the subject. But here are some passengers. What are we to do, my friends?"

"Let us be respectable, for once in a way, and allow them to go in peace," said Jack. "There is a coach, too; but it is a poor-looking affair, after all, and at no time would be worth the stopping."

"I am of your opinion."

The carriage which had induced these remarks was, in good truth, rather a miserable affair. It was drawn by a horse that certainly ought to have been past all service; and the set-out, take it for all in all, was of so violently shabby a character, that you would not have given a five pound note for the whole of it. Some sort of groom, or serving-man, went in front of it, mounted upon such another horse as the miserable-looking one that drew the carriage. He had on a faded livery, out at the elbows, and looked the picture of starvation.

"A luxurious turn-out, with a vengeance," said Dick to Claude.

"Yes. The carriage-windows are close shut. Shall we take a peep in before letting it go?"

"Oh, it is not worth while."

"Well, perhaps it is not. Let it pass. We are too near our place of destination to make it worth while to get into a disturbance for nothing."

Acting upon that principle, they did not offer the slightest obstruction to the passage of the carriage, and when it was fairly past they did not think themselves called upon to restrain their laughter at the odd character of the whole equipage.

"I'd lay any sum, now," said Dick, "that that affair belongs to some old maid who, perhaps, has seen better days, or who, even upon slender resources, tries to get the reputation of keeping a carriage, with the hope that the very name of it will attract some loving old bachelor."

Both Claude and Jack agreed that this might very likely be the case, and in a few minutes they dismissed all consideration of that carriage from their thoughts.

Little did they suspect that its passing them was, in reality, to be the most important event that had happened to them for some time, and that it was to Claude Duval a matter of almost life or death.

Within that miserable vehicle, in company with an old toothless hag who had



THE THREE ADVENTURERS HIDE FROM THE OFFICERS IN THE STABLE.

taken him into a kind of keeping, was no other than Tom Brereton, and through numerous interstices in the blinds, he saw with ease the face of Claude Duval.

Well did Tom Brereton know the large rewards that were still offered by the government for Claude's apprehension, and with an ardent wish to earn them, he only waited until the carriage was out of sight of the three friends, in consequence of a turn in the road, and then, making an excuse to the old lady, who was

half asleep, he hastily alighted, and slinking along by the road side, he continued to keep Claude and his friends in sight.

The important consequences of this system of espionage practised by Tom Brereton will soon develop themselves, and, in the meantime, we accompany the unsuspecting trio to the farm at Ealing Common, where Cicely was waiting day by day, with the hope of hearing the well known sound of Claude Duval's voice.

Claude always approached this home of Cicely's with the greatest possible caution. He not only did so for her sake and for his own safety, but he considered that he owed it to the people who granted to her an asylum in so generous a spirit, to be as careful as possible that they should not suffer from it.

The common mode of proceeding which Claude adopted was first of all to ride right across the common, then abruptly to turn and go about a third of the way back to the commencement of a bridle-path, that led to the back of the farm, and where, in a very few moments, he could completely hide himself from all observation among the trees.

In daylight, such precautions were much more necessary than at night; and now, little fancying that any one was specially watching him, he went with his two friends by the route we have mentioned, with the full idea that he was being eminently successful in getting to his destination unobserved by any one.

Tom Brereton, however, had, at the commencement of the common, got right into a hedge, from the recesses of which he watched the whole proceeding.

"Good," he said. "If I don't have Duval now I'm a Dutchman. There is only one house beyond all those trees, and that is where he has gone to. Now for London."

It so happened that, in a few moments, a stage-coach that came from Wycomb made its appearance on the common, and Tom Brereton, hailing it, got up on the outside, and was soon at a good pace whirled into the metropolis.

In the meantime, Claude conducted his two friends to the little gate that led to the stable-yard of the farm; and then turning to them, he said, with a pleased look—

"This place, amid all the storms and disasters of my life, is a true haven of rest for Cicely."

"Long may it continue so," said Dick.

"Amen!" said Jack; and he did not say it lightly or jocularly, but with the real feeling that the word should inspire.

"I thank you both for your good wishes," added Claude. "Only once has this house been invaded by the enemy, and to only one is the secret confided beyond you two and the inhabitants of the place; and yet, each time that I come here, I tremble for the result, and have a dread that some one may, after all, have an eye upon me."

"Banish such a fear," said Jack. "I looked back upon the common, and no one was at hand."

"And I looked forward," said Dick, "and all was clear."

"Well," said Claude, with a satisfied look, "I do believe that, for once in a way, I may be content, and consider myself quite safe."

It was strange that, upon the only occasion when his danger was very great, Claude should consider that he was unusually safe, and free from all sorts of peril.

Claude was so familiar to the place in which he was now, that he opened the gate, and rode in, accompanied by his friends. It was only the angry barking of a dog that summoned some of the family out to the yard to see what was amiss; but at the sight of Duval, he was hailed with pleasure. In the course of a few moments Cicely, looking quite fresh and blooming, was in the farm-yard, and the pleased flush upon her face at the sight of Claude lent her more beauty.

"Thrice welcome, Claude!" she said. "Thrice welcome!"

"You are quite well, dear Cicely?"

"I am, indeed. But tell me—is this a mere passing call, or can you and will you stay awhile?"

"I *thought* of staying a day or two."

"Ah! that, indeed, is welcome news. And your friends, too—they will stay and take a rest in the old place?"

"Yes. I have ventured upon saying that tkey would be welcome here, and I think and hope I have not been wrong in doing so, Cicely?"

"Far from wrong.—But come in all of you—the whole of the family are not at home; but those that are will make you most welcome. This way—this way. We have cut a new path, you see, Claude, right through the flower garden."

Poor Cicely was really so delighted to see Claude again, quite well, and to hear that he purposed staying a day or two at the farm, that she ran on talking and hardly knew what she said while the bright tears stood in her eyes, and she could have wept for joy.

Some of the lads took charge of the horses, and the three adventurers, little expecting what was brewing for them in London, quite gave themselves up to what they considered the serenity of the hour and the place, and did not dream of danger.

A hasty dinner was prepared in the ample kitchen of the farm-house; and to just take a peep at the party assembled there, no one could possibly have believed that three out of the lot had prices set upon their heads by the authorities.

Time soon flies when it is laughed away in agreeable society, so that the remainder of the day passed, and the evening shadows crept over tree and flower of the old farm, before Claude or his two friends thought it possible it could be so near at hand. Even Cicely seemed to share in the general confidence that all was safe; and, contrary to her habit, she did not suffer herself to entertain any of those gloomy fancies that usually beset her concerning the safety of Claude.

Alas! what a fatal serenity that was.

"I tell you what we think of doing," said Claude, as they all walked in the flower garden, to watch the last rays of the setting sun. "We will remain here until midnight to-morrow night, so that that will make two whole days and one whole night, and the greater part of the evening of the second day. Will that do, Cicely?"

"Ah, Claude, if you must then go, it shall and must do; but I lead a life of continual apprehension when you are away."

"Nay, then, that you should not. You should reflect upon the many dangers I have gone through, and you should tell yourself that it is hardly possible that I should again encounter such serious ones, so that you should consider me safer now than I have been."

"No, Claude, I cannot reason myself into any such fallacy. It is here that you have run the most serious past risks; but they, in their remembrance, only suggest what dangers may be still to come."

"But recollect that now," said Dick, "we go together, so that we are really strong enough to repel slight dangers."

"And, if I mistake not," said Jack, "we mean to keep together, too. Is it not so, Claude?"

"With all my heart."

"And with all mine," said Dick. "It is a lonely thing to be by one's self upon the road, knowing that the whole of society is in arms against you, and that in every man you see an enemy, while there is no one with whom you dare to exchange a kindly word."

"I have felt that," said Claude; "but then my heart used to fly here—(he pressed Cicely's hand as he spoke)—and then I was not lonely, but full of busy and happy thought."

Cicely looked at him gratefully for that speech. It was a tribute to her affection which she felt she deserved, but which was none the less delightful and welcome upon that account.

"You know where our horses are, Claude, in case of any alarm?" said Jack, with a sudden seriousness.

"Oh, yes; but it is fit and proper that you both should know likewise, although, as for any alarm here, I think, for a very small sum I would consent to insure your safety. What makes you, Jack, all in a moment, begin to have apprehensions?"

"That I cannot tell you, Claude. All I can say is, that the idea suddenly crossed my brain, and beyond that I know nothing; and as for apprehensions, I certainly cannot take upon myself to say that I have any."

"Well, we will have a peep at the horses for all that, Jack, and I am glad that you thought of it, for in my feeling of over-security in this place, I dare say it would not have crossed my mind to take you to the stables. But come on, we will go at once."

It was certainly strange that some obscure notion of danger should lay hold of Jack's mind at such a juncture; but it certainly did, and he could not shake it off either. The stables were duly visited, where the three horses were enjoying themselves with every luxury that could be placed before hem. Jack would not say anything else to damp their great hilarity, for, to tell the truth, he felt rather ashamed of his own fears, and he dreaded that Claude and Dick should begin to banter him about them.

By ten o'clock they all retired to rest, and a profound silence reigned throughout the farm.

CHAPTER CCXLI.

SHOWS HOW TOM BRERETON WENT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

We will attend very briefly to the proceedings of Tom Brereton after he had fairly seen, or as good as seen, Claude Duval and his two friends housed in the farm.

For once in his life, Tom was determined to do the thing well, and as he knew that his information was very acceptable indeed in certain high quarters, he made up his mind as the Wycomb Coach rattled down Oxford Street, to go to the best market he could with his news, and make a thorough good bargain for himself.

"I won't mince the matter," said Tom. "I will go to the Under-Secretary of State at once, and tell him all about it, and get him to move in the business himself. There can be no cavilling then about the reward, or about who gave the first information, and all that sort of thing. Yes, I'll do it that way."

Full of this intent, Tom got off the coach at the corner of Bond Street, and making his way up that then much more fashionable thoroughfare than it is now, he turned into Grafton Street, where he happened to know the private house of the official personage he wished to see was situated.

"I'll see the secretary himself," muttered Tom; "and I will tell him all about it, and if I can't see him, I won't tell it at all; but when they find me obstinate, they wont hold out, I know; so it will be all right."

Now, this was a very good notion of Tom's, for if he had gone to a police office, he would just have got surrounded by officers, who would each have strove to have some hand in the affair, so that in all probability, with their eagerness and their avarice, the matter might have been completely spoiled; but, by going to the highest authority, he at once established his own position in the matter, as well as keeping it out of low hands in the carrying out.

There was only one little difficulty, and that was, the manner in which official personages are surrounded and made difficult of access—a fact that we cannot wonder at, for if they were at all easy of access, the space of time they wou have left for the transaction of real business would be small, indeed.

Just at that time, though, it so happened that the political aspect of the country was rather stormy, and there were many rumours of plots against the government, and conspiracies, for the purpose of assassinating the king; so that in th

respect, Tom, as will be seen, had an advantage, and his application to see the secretary was not so likely to be slighted as under quieter circumstances.

Giving his hat, then, a more knowing look, by placing it rather on one side of his head, and opening his waistcoat a button or two, to show his well-pleated shirt-frill, Tom strutted up to the door of the secretary, and executed a rather alarming knock, after which, seeing a bell-handle with a little brass plate under it, upon which were the words, "Ring also," Tom laid hold of it, and worked away at it until the door was flung open by a couple of powdered flunkies, who thought that some very great person must be at the door, and yet they wondered they had not heard the sound of carriage wheels.

"A-hem!" said Tom, setting his arms a-kimbo. "Is his lordship within?"

The two footmen were so completely astounded at any one on foot, and with anything but an aristocratic air asking if his lordship were within, that one of them did nothing but stare at Tom Brereton in the face, while the other one walked completely round him in mute wonder.

"Come—come, flunkies!" said Tom, "no nonsense. I want to see his lordship, and I must and I will."

"And, pray, sir," said one of the footmen, with an affected drawl, "who may you be?"

"How do I know," said Tom, "who I may be? I only know who I am. I have business of the greatest importance with his lordship, and I won't tell any one else on any account."

"Ah!" said the footman, taking a pinch of snuff. "Does it concern the—the country?"

"Rather," said Tom; "the country roads in particular."

Tom Brereton took care to utter these last words rather aside, so that they did not reach the ears of the footmen.

"Ah!—ah!" said his interrogator, "in that case you will tell me, and I will tell his lordship's secretary's clerk, and he will tell his lordship's secretary, and he will tell his lordship. Ah!"

"Very well," said Tom Brereton, buttoning his coat slowly up to the chin, and then giving a decisive blow to his chest, "very well; just as you please. When the story all comes out, and there is the very devil to pay about it, it will then be fully understood that I was repulsed at his lordship's door by his lordship's footmen. Very good, indeed!"

"Stop!—stop! Ah—that is to say, stop!"

"What for? What is the use of stopping?"

The two footmen looked at each other with rather puzzled expressions, and then the one with the snuff-box, as he regailed himself with a pinch, said—

"Sir, it—ah—may, or it—ah—may not, be quite right and proper that you should see somebody, and so you shall; I must take upon myself the rather frightful and—ah—I may say, serious responsibility of introducing you to somebody."

"You had better," said Tom.

"And—ah—if it should turn out to be really—ah—nothing of any importance, I shall never forgive myself, and his lordship is very likely to say to me, 'Thomas, you are—a—a——'"

"An ass!" said Tom.

"Upon my life, sir," said Thomas, rapping the lid of his snuff-box. "Upon my life, I must say that you take very great liberties, indeed, sir—very great liberties, I may say."

"I tell you what it is," said Tom Brereton, "if you don't be quick about introducing me to your master, it will be too late, and then I won't exactly say what the consequences may chance to be."

Upon this intimation, the gentlemen in plush bestired themselves. They had of late heard so much about conspiracies and plots against the government, that they were quite in a state of agony upon that subject, and the idea that their per-

tinacious visitor might have something frightful to disclose in that line, had been gradually taking possession of their faculties for the last five minutes.

"Yes. Oh—ah—certainly," said the one with the snuff-box. "Just step this way, sir, if you please."

"All's right," said Tom, as he again carefully unbuttoned his coat, and flung it open with an air of importance. "All's right now, I rather think—ahem!"

Strutting after the footman with all the importance of his little despicable nature, Tom flattered himself that at last he had done the thing rather cleverly, and that not only should he achieve his revenge against Claude Duval for the many slights he had put upon him, and the frights he had given him, but that he should gain a good round sum of money by the transaction.

"Ah," he muttered to himself, "this is the way to do business, I rather think—hem! Always go to the fountain-head, and then you are sure to be all right—hem!"

The footman conducted Tom into a waiting-room upon the ground floor, which was fitted up upon the same principle that the waiting-rooms of physicians houses are, namely, with everything of so big and bulky a character, that if the cleverest appropriators of other folks' goods that London could produce got into the place, he would not be able to take anything away with him.

"If you will be so obliging as to wait a few minutes, sir," said the footman, whose respect for Tom, in proportion as he thought he might really have something important to tell, increased, "you will be attended to."

"Oh, don't hurry—a minute or two, or perhaps three," said Tom, "may not be of much consequence; but three is the outside, young man—quite the outside, now."

"Certainly, sir—of course, sir—no doubt of it."

Tom was left alone, and full of the importance of the tidings that he came with, he threw himself into an easy chair, and strove to look as important as though he were himself a secretary of state, and the owner of the house into which he had made his way.

"This affair," he said, "will strike up a kind of acquaintance between me and the government, so that it will be obliged to provide for me as it provides for other great men out of the taxes. I don't at all like paying taxes, but I have no objection in the world to being provided for out of them. Indeed it is rather a pleasant idea than otherwise, I should say, and I shall feel it my duty to——"

"Well, sir, what is it?" said a voice.

Tom sprang up from the easy chair, with the full conviction that his lordship was before him, for there stood a quiet looking man in black, with a pen in his hand, which looked, Tom thought, very Secretary-of-State-like.

"Oh, my lord," said Tom, "I beg your lordship ten thousand pardons; but the fact is, I was rather just a little tired, you see, and so I sat down. That was all, my lord, upon my word."

"It's of no sort of consequence—you are quite welcome. I am not his lordship; but you can, with perfect safety and propriety, tell me what you come about."

"You are not his lordship?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I'll see you at the bottom of the sea before I tell you. I have news for the ear of the Secretary of State. I came here to tell it to him, and if he won't listen to it, I can go away again, that's all, so tha's flat."

"But my good sir——"

"It's of no use your speaking to me—not a bit. Not a bit. Hold your row. It's of no use, I tell you, at all. I won't tell you or anybody but the Secretary of State himself."

"Very good, sir. Is it a matter connected with the state of the country?"

"It is a matter connected with the state of the country—roads," added Tom to himself. "Of that I give you my most particular word of honour."

"Very good, sir. Will you be so good as to wait?"

The gentlemanly-looking man in black left the room, and once again Tom Brereton sunk into the recesses of the easy chair, and then wagging his head to and fro for a few moments, he said, in what he considered was an enormously sagacious tone of voice—

"Ha, ha! They won't get the better of me. Oh, no! I am not going to let any whipper-snapper of a clerk stand between me and the reward. Oh, no!"

"Well, sir!" said a voice.

Tom started to his feet again, and beheld a bald-headed elderly man, elegantly dressed in evening costume, in the centre of the room. "That's the fellow!" thought Tom, and he executed a very low bow.

"Your lordship is very good," said Tom. "I hope I have the pleasure of seeing your lordship quite well, and—and that is to say quite well?"

"Pray, sir, do not mistake," said the bald-headed man in the most bland accents. "I have not the honour of being his lordship. I am only his lordship's secretary."

"The devil!"

"Sir?"

"Oh, no offence; but I thought really that I had got the ear of the right man at last. And pray, sir, who was the gentleman with the pen in his hand who came here only a little while ago?"

"That was my clerk."

"Your clerk?"

"Precisely so, sir. I hope and trust that I may be permitted to have a clerk without that point being at all offensive to you?"

"Oh, you may have a dozen; but I tell you what it is, Mr. Secretary, I don't mean to let you know what I come about any more than your clerk. I have got a piece of information to give to the Secretary of State, and if I do not see him and tell him personally, I can carry it away again with me, and the country—roads" added Tom in a low tone, "must take the wretched and most diabolical consequences."

The secretary looked grave.

"Allow me to assure you, sir," he said, "that whatever you say to me goes directly to the Secretary of State, without anything being added or taken from it. It is my special duty to be to that distinguished personage a faithful reporter of facts, and under such circumstances I do hope that——"

"Bow! wow!—don't bother! I tell you, I won't, and there's an end of it if I had only known there had been half so much bother as this, I would not have come at all. But I can go—yes, sir, I can go as I came, with my information here, sir—here!"

Tom rather fiercely struck his forehead as he spoke, and the very polite secretary looked rather puzzled to know what to do in the matter. After a pause, he said,—

"Well, sir: pray be patient for a few minutes, and I will see what can be done. I will speak to his lordship, and very probably, as you say it is information connected with the country, he may feel inclined to see you. Pray be seated, sir."

CHAPTER CCXLII.

THE ALARM AT THE FARM.—CLAUDE'S GREAT DANGER.

Tom Brereton was again alone.

"Ah!" he said, "I shall do it at last, in spite of them all, I know—the vagabonds! Lord, I know 'em well! They would swear me out, among them, that I had never been here, after a little time, and pocket the reward among them."

One would really think that Tom Brereton must have, at one time or another, been in public life, to have acquired so capital and accurate a notion of the mo-

rality of it; and we cannot but admire the perseverance with which he insisted upon seeing the secretary, who could not very well flinch from any promises he might make concerning the reward for the apprehension of Claude Duval.

Tom was determined that this time he would keep an eye upon the door, so that when the secretary should appear, he might not be taken by surprise; and it was well that he did so, for in the course of about three minutes, the door opened, and an odd-looking, red-faced, vulgar looking man bustled into the room.

Tom stared at him in amazement.

"Now, sir, what is it?" said the man; "you would insist on seeing me, and here I am."

"What, are you his lordship?"

"I am the Secretary of State for the Home Department, sir, and I shall feel obliged if you will be brief in what you have to say to me, as my time is very much occupied."

Tom shook his head.

"How am I to know you arethe Secretary of State? You say you are, but how am I to know it?"

"Tut—tut; what folly this is, to be sure. Then, sir, do you see that portrait on the chimney piece?"

"Oh, yes, I see it."

"Well, look at it, and then look at me; it is flattered a little, but still is sufficiently like for you to see that it is intended for me, and it is not very likely that any one else's portrait but that of the master of the house hangs in such a place. Are you satisfied?"

Tom made a low bow, as he said,—

"I am, my lord."

"Very good; that's settled. Now, sir, what have you to say? what is your information?"

"Well, then, my lord, as I feel now quite convinced that you are my lord, and as there can be no possible mistake about it—"

"Quick, sir—quick."

"And as by the portrait, which is nearly as ugly—I mean nearly as handsome—as your lordshp, it is quite easy to perceive that——"

"Do you want to keep me here all the day, sir? I tell you my time is appropriated to the last moment. It is as much as I can do to eat or drink, or sleep, sir; and yet, here you are dallying with the minutes, as though they were of not the slightest consequence."

"Then, my lord, I beg to state, that if you will make me feel sure of the reward, I will take anybody you like to send to where they may lay their hands upon Claude Duval."

"Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"The very same."

"And why, in the name of all that is abominable, sir, could you not take your information to the police-office?"

"Oh, my lord, you don't know what rogues they are at police-offices. They would have jewed me out of the reward as safe as eggs are eggs, so I thought I would come to you."

"A pretty affair, indeed, that I am to be consulted about thief-catching! At the same time, I admit, sir, that the government is anxious for the apprehension of this Claude Duval. As long as he remains at large, it is a disgrace to the police of this country."

"Just so, my lord."

"And he has committed some of the most daring and violent attacks upon persons in a high station of life that it is possible to conceive. Sir, I do not at all undervalue your information; but, yet, there was no occasion for such an amount of pertinacity in seeing me upon the subject."

"Oh, dear, yes, there was! I have no notion of not getting the reward, you see,

my lord. My name is Tom Brereton, and I really want the money, I assure you; so I hope I may have your lordship's word that if I really do give Duval into the hands of the officers, I am to get what has been offered for his apprehension?"

"Most assuredly."

"That's all right, then. It's as good as settled; and I tell you what I can do



THE PURSUIT FROM THE FARM-HOUSE.

as well—I can give you two other highwaymen that are with him into the bargain, for I happen to know where the whole three of them have gone, and no mistake!"

"There is one thing, Mr. Tom Button," said his lordship, "that I hope you are right in, and that——"

"Brereton, my lord."

"Oh, it's no matter—Bacon or Button. They will do equally well. But I was

going to say, that I hope you are quite sure of the identity of Duval with the persons you say you can deliver up to the officers of justice?"

"Oh, yes, my lord. I happen to know him rather too well. It isn't at all likely that I shall make any mistake of that sort, I can tell you."

"Very good, then. As you have my word for the reward, which was what you wanted to see me for, I presume you can make the particulars of your communition to the secretary, if you please; and I beg to bid you good-day, Mr. Tom Burnett."

Before Tom could interpose another word to detain his lordship, he had abruptly left the room.

"Confound it," said Tom, "what does he mean by calling me Bacon, and Button, and Burnett? Does he mean to try and swindle me out of the reward by raising a cavil about my name? Oh, what a thing it is that people are all such rogues!"

No doubt Tom Brereton had arrived at this conclusion regarding human nature by an attentive self-examination, for the reader is already aware of several little passages in Tom's history, that are by no means of an exalted character.

Very shortly afterwards the respectable looking secretary with the bald head made his appearance, and took down in writing the exact information that Tom could give about the whereabouts of Claude Duval; and when that was concluded, he said,—

"I have received his lordship's orders upon this affair, and since there is, from what you say, every reason to believe that this place you mention is one at which Claude Duval will remain the night, it is determined to make the seizure an hour before midnight. It will take nearly an hour to get to Ealing Common; so, you will be so good as to come here at ten o'clock this evening."

"What? me?"

"Yes. It is thought desirable by his lordship, in order that there should not be the shadow of a doubt concerning the reward, that you should accompany the party."

"Oh, well, if I must, why—a—a—I suppose I must; but I am not at all good at the fighting business."

"Concerning that, you need not trouble yourself. We will provide a sufficient force to take all that difficulty off your shoulders."

"Oh, then, in that case I have no objection in life to go, and you may expect me to the minute quite punctually."

Having made this arrangement with the secretary, Tom felt pretty well satisfied with the manner in which he had conducted the affair. We may at once skip over the hours that intervened between this and ten o'clock at night, and fancy Tom once again at the door of the Secretary of State, about a minute after the metropolitan church clocks had agreed that it was ten.

This time Tom Brereton did not find the same difficulty that he had before experienced in making his way to the interior of the mansion. The clerk to the secretary was waiting for him, and the moment he saw him, he said, very politely—

"I am to accompany you, Mr. Brereton."

"You?" cried Tom. "But do you think that you and I can lay hold of such a fellow as Claude Duval?"

"Certainly not, sir. I should for one be very sorry to make the attempt; but I will take you to where you will find quite a sufficient force to settle the business."

"Oh, that's quite another thing."

"Exactly—I hear the sound of carriage-wheels at the door. His lordship is kind enough to accommodate us with one of his private carriages as far as Hyde Park, and after that we will go on horseback."

"Horseback!" said Tom to himself. "Somehow, I never feel very happy on horseback." That was no time, however, to start any frivolous objections, and as Tom knew that at the least the rewards for the apprehension of Duval were a

thousand pounds, he was far from wishing to throw any obstacles in the way of carrying out the affair.

In the course of a couple of minutes, he and the clerk were being wheeled off at a rapid pace to the Oxford Street corner of Hyde Park; and so swiftly did they go, that the distance appeared to be a mere nothing. The night was rather dark and blusterous—now and then a smart puff of wind, that was strongly indicative of rough weather, would come across the faces of the horses, and make them almost pause; and when Tom and the clerk alighted, the trees in the park were agitated furiously by the breeze.

"A roughish night," said Tom.

"Yes, we shall have wind and rain enough on our progress, I daresay; but that cannot be helped," said the clerk. "Be so good as to step this way, if you please. One party was to be stationed a little way down here, beyond Tyburn Gate."

Three minutes' walking took Tom Brereton and the clerk through the celebrated gate; and then, to their surprise, but greatly to the comfort of Tom, he found that, drawn up close to the roadside, was a party of twenty-five of a Light Cavalry Regiment that happened at that time to be quartered at Kensington. Along with these soldiers there were six mounted police-officers, so that the party altogether that went upon that occasion to capture Claude Duval, was really one of a very formidable description indeed.

"Hilloa!" said Tom, "this is coming it strong, rather."

"Yes, Mr. Brereton," said the clerk. "If your information be quite correct, I think there is very little doubt of the capture of Claude Duval, now, and his associates; and if once captured, he will soon be disposed of."

"Yes; this will be a settler, I rather think."

"Mr. Anderson," said the clerk, in a higher voice, "are you there, sir? Mr. Anderson!"

"Yes, sir," said one of the mounted police-officers. "All's right, sir. We have been waiting some little time. Here are the led horses, sir."

"Very good; now, Mr, Brereton will you be so good as to mount, and we will start at once upon the expedition."

A very tall horse was brought to Tom Brereton, upon the back of which he did, after no inconsiderable difficulty, succeed in scrambling; and there he sat, perched up, at an amazing and perilous height from the ground, and feeling anything but comfortable or pleased with his situation.

"It's all very fine, Mr. Clerk," said Tom, "but if there are any bullets flying about, I rather think I am in just the proper place to catch a few of them."

"Oh, no—no, not at all. It's all luck in such matters, my dear sir; I don't think, if you are to catch a shot or two, that do what you will you can avoid them."

"Really?"

"No; and, of course, in such little affairs as this, there must be some danger. But if you are hit, it will be still a great satisfaction to you to feel that it is in the service of your country, and in the protection of legitimate rights of property."

"Oh, very great! Confound the rights of property! What the deuce is property to me with a pistol bullet in my brain, I should like to know? Nothing at all. I tell you what it is, Mr. Clerk—I did not bargain for any danger in the affair; so after I have pointed out where the fellows you want are to be found, I shall make bold to be off to a distance."

"Well, I am certainly surprised at you, Mr. Brereton."

"Surprised? What at?"

"Why, that you should not have enjoyed a little fracas."

"Are you?—then you don't know me. I like peace and quietness, and plenty to eat and drink, and lots of money and nothing to do. Fighting is not in my line. Dear me, how fast we are going."

"Delays are dangerous."

"Yes, but it's much more dangerous, don't you think, to be jolted off the back of a trotting horse, as high as a first-floor window?"

Tom Brereton's remonstrances produced no sort of effect upon the party, They went on at a rattling pace, and he found, that unless he held on with all his skill and power, that he ran a risk of being left behind in the middle of the road; so he put up with it the best way he could with a good grace, although the bumping he got was really something seriously alarming. In this way, however, and at such a pace, the ground was soon got over. The village of Acton was passed through as the old church-clock chimed the half hour past ten, and several heads were thrust out of the cottage windows at the sound of the unwonted bustle made by the horses' feet in the road-way.

The cavalcade of soldiers and civilians, however, swept past before any one could hazard a conjecture upon the subject of their destination; and in a very short time Ealing Common was in sight, looking wide and black and mysterious in the night air.

The wind was rather whistling over the common with a melancholy sound that made Tom Brereton shiver again.

"Halt!" cried the officer commanding the party of cavalry, and then turning to the civilian who answered to the name of Anderson, he said,—"Now, sir, where are we to go? I was to come to Ealing Common, and there wait your directions, and here I am."

"This is the gentleman who will guide us to the house, I presume," said Anderson, singling out Tom Brereton. "What I shall then request of you, captain, will be to surround the premises in the way your own judgment may suggest, so that no one shall be able to escape—that's all. We, of course, will go in and make the capture."

"Very well. I will undertake that no one passes the cordon that I will establish without; and whoever attempts it, must just take the consequences of their indiscretion, for my men will not be very particular, I daresay."

"It isn't necessary that they should, captain. No one will try to escape from us that we don't want to nab."

"Now, Mr. Brereton," said the clerk, "lead on if you please, sir."

"Oh, dear, yes," said Tom. "How pleasant this is, to be sure! Don't you think you could find the place, now, if I were to describe it to you?—for, to tell the truth, I have just recollected that I have an appointment in London of very great importance, indeed. It's a fact."

"You must break it then, sir, if you please. Pray lead on. No possible description of the place we are to attack can come up to actually showing us. Recollect the reward."

"Oh, dear, yes; that's the only thing that I do want to recollect in the whole affair; but, I suppose, there is no help for it, and even I must go. This is the way, gentlemen. Let me beg that you will be so good as to make as little noise as you possibly can in the way, for that Claude Duval has very sharp ears."

"Caution!" said the captain.

The cavalry adopted a step that was very light, and which could not have been heard at any distance. The horses seemed quite perfectly to understand what was required of them; and certainly more noise in going across Ealing Common was made by the half-dozen police horses than by the whole twenty-five cavalry.

This alteration of pace, though, was a very welcome thing to Tom Brereton; and but for the fact that he felt he was approaching rather to a dangerous proximity with the farm-house where Duval was, he would have felt now tolerably comfortable. He took the party to the shrubbery that skirted the farm, and then, in a low voice, he said—

"Oh, gracious! Here we are."

CHAPTER CCXLIII.

TAKES A PEEP WITHIN THE FARM-HOUSE, AND GIVES AN ALARM.

It is necessary now that we should see what our friends in the farm-house are about.

The intense feeling of security of which we have before spoken, and which in some strange manner had taken possession of Claude Duval, spread its influence over every one but Jack, and he, from constitutional nervousness, did not participate in it. Yet, as he felt that upon many occasions he had raised a feeling of alarm where none should have existed, he did not like, upon the present occasion, to damp the feeling of general satisfaction that was evidently in the breasts of the whole of the people at the farm-house.

The countenance will speak, however, if the eyes do not, and Claude could not but see that Jack was ill at ease. Dick likewise observed as much; but then, knowing Jack as well as they did, they naturally enough set it down to the infirmity of his nature.

Claude tried at supper to rally him out of the feeling, and he did succeed to some extent in doing so.

"Come, Jack," he said, "you must not look so dull and downcast now. Recollect that if all the world is in arms against us, this is a haven of rest and security."

"I hope it is," said Jack.

"You only hope?"

"Well, Claude, is not that sufficient? I say I hope it is; and if you think it is, I am content to believe as much; and yet——"

"Well, Jack, and yet?"

"I think that even here we ought not to neglect all precautions, and if you won't take it amiss that I do so, I will keep watch during the night round the farm, while you and Dick rest yourselves from your late fatigues."

"Now this is really too bad, Jack," said Claude.

"Very much too bad," said Dick.

"Well," added Jack, "I really can't see how it is too bad. If nothing comes of my forebodings, why, I lose my night's rest for my pains; but if anything does come of them, I have the great satisfaction of having been, by my caution, useful to my friends."

"Now, Jack, listen to me," said Claude, with a smile. "Our fatigues are no greater than yours, for we have all three been together precisely through the same adventures, and exposed to the same adversities; therefore, if there were any real occasion for watching, we ought to take that business by turns, or rather, I should say, that I ought to do it wholly, as I must be the principal person whose name brings danger upon you two."

"Oh, I demur to that," said Dick. "If we are to mount guard during the night, let us take it turn and turn about in the regular way. I certainly will not submit to Jack being made the victim."

"Nor I," Claude cried, "so give it up at once, Jack, for we really all need a night's rest."

"Very well, I give it up," said Jack; "let us hear no more about it; and now let us enjoy ourselves as we best can, for, as you say, it is not often we can sit down with the same feelings we do now at any table."

Claude and Dick were tolerably well satisfied with the change that now took place in the manner of Jack, for there was a degree of hilarity about him which they had seldom witnessed; and whether it were acting or a reflex of his real feelings, they had no opportunity of coming to a judgment.

The evening now deepened into night, in the midst of rather sprightly conversation, and at length a general move was made to retire, and in the course of another quarter of an hour there was a profound silence in the farm-house, for everybody had gone to rest.

It was then about a quarter past ten o'clock.

The room which had been appropriated to Jack was a small apartment at one corner of the house, and which had a little window that opened upon the sloping roof of an outhouse, over which grew a very luxuriant vine. There was another window likewise to the room, that looked to the back garden. When Jack retired to this apartment, Claude went with him for a few moments, and remained talking to him while he took off his coat and boots.

"Now, Jack," he said, "take a night's rest, for I am quite sure you want one, and don't let any fears disturb you, for it is one of the most unlikely things in all the world, as you know well, that any enemy can possibly be aware that we are here."

"You are right, I think, Claude."

"I know I am. Here we have been a number of hours in this place, and no one has come to it upon any real or pretended business, so that there has been no chance of anything going amiss. I merely wish to assure you of my most perfect and entire confidence in our safety; and now good-night, Jack, and a good rest to you."

"Good-night, Claude, the same to you. All's right."

"Poor Jack!" thought Claude as he left the room, "he has never recovered that hanging business, and I suppose he never will now, poor fellow. But I think I have quieted him down, now, as regards any fears for to-night, and he will sleep calmly and soundly enough, I dare say."

Jack calmly waited until Claude's footsteps had died completely away, and he was satisfied that there was no likelihood of his return to say anything, and then calmly and deliberately he pulled on his boots again, and put on his coat.

"It is all very well, Claude," he said, "for you to feel so much confidence in your safety in this place, but I cannot conquer the feeling that has been growing over me for hours, to the effect that some disaster is at hand. If I were to go to bed I should not sleep, so that it is of no use vexing myself by trying. I don't go so far as to say that I am a believer at all times in what are called presentiments of danger, but I will say that I never felt so strongly persuaded as I do now, that something will happen.'

Jack was cool and collected enough, notwithstanding this strong feeling of danger to himself and his friends that had taken possession of his mind. The firm resolution that he had taken some hours before of keeping watch for its approach nerved him.

By the light of the candle with which he was provided, he now set about looking carefully to his pistols, and as they had been loaded now for some hours, and exposed to the jolting of a hard ride, he carefully drew the charges and reloaded them.

"It's as well to have all right," he said, "and then one feels a degree of confidence that enables one to be cool and calm."

Jack's next effort was to hammer the flints of his pistols, so that at a moment's notice they would do duty without the possibility of a failure, and then he considered that he had everything in readiness, come what might.

His fixed intention was to keep watch round the farm, but as he did not wish his friends to have any suspicion that he entertained such a project, he resolved upon waiting until it was a matter of positive certainty that they were all asleep. He had taken a good survey of the position of his chamber before, therefore he knew perfectly well how to get from it with the least noise or alarm.

It would have been an odd sight to Claude, if he could only have seen Jack sitting in his room there by the light of a candle that was getting an alarmingly long wick, fully armed, and waiting until repose had stolen over the senses of all in the place, before he should sally out as though his object were a hostile one, instead of a protecting one.

But neither Claude nor Dick had the smallest suspicion upon the subject, and went to their rest with the full idea that Jack had likewise gone to his.

As he (Jack) there sat, there came yet more strongly on him each moment the presentiment of danger. Suddenly he started to his feet.

"No," he said, "I will not, and I ought not to disregard this feeling that is far from dissipating, but, on the contrary, grows upon me each moment with the greater strength—I will not cast aside this most mysterious warning of approaching danger, for, in good truth, it does amount to that—I will meet it!"

Jack now considered that he had waited long enough for the whole of the house to be in a state of repose, so, after opening his room door, and listening for a few moments, and hearing nothing, he at once commenced his arrangements for leaving his chamber.

His first act was, to close his door, and fasten it upon the inside, and then he cautiously opened the little window that looked out upon the outhouse roof. All was still without, and the little rain that fell had the effect of completely prostrating what small amount of wind there might have been. Jack heard that rain faintly pattering upon the large vine leaves that completely covered up the roof of the outhouse.

With an extreme caution, that his habits of life had taught him well how to assume, he now crept through the window, and carefully let himself down by the roof of the outhouse, until he came to its lowest edge, when he jumped into the garden. He was quite satisfied that he had been successful in doing all that without creating the smallest amount of alarm.

"That will do," said Jack to himself. "Now I shall be able to keep a good watch, and no one will be any the wiser, although, I flatter myself, that every one will be something the safer. Claude and Dick need never know that I was on the move all this night; but I would ten times rather have been prowling round this house than tossing upon my bed in all the fever of sleeplessness from apprehensions of some unknown danger."

There was no difficulty in walking completely round the farm-house to those who were acquainted with it. A couple of little gates, which Jack knew well how to open, were the only obstructions to his progress; and when he had set them wide open, he could take his slow march completely round the premises easily.

There was something very grateful and pleasant to the senses in the cool freshness of the night air, impregnated as it was with that soft, balmy rain that pattered gently upon the leaves of the trees. Jack leant against one of the little gates, and rather enjoyed the scene. The freshness of the air effectually kept off all feeling of fatigue from him; and he was just upon the point of trying to look at his watch, amid the darkness, to note the time, when a dull sound came upon his ear from a distance.

Jack placed himself in an attitude of listening, and he felt satisfied that imagination had not deceived him—Tramp—tramp—tramp! From afar off, he felt satisfied that he heard the sound of horses' feet.

From that moment, Jack felt certain that all his prognostications of some danger had not been for nothing; and that in keeping watch that night, he was really doing good service to his friends who slumbered in fancied security.

Slowly he bent down to the ground, until he lay at full length upon it, and placed his ear flat against it. Then he could, as plainly as though they had been just on the outside of the gate of the farm, hear the tread of horses' feet, each moment becoming plainer and plainer, which was as good a proof as needs be that they were approaching that spot.

One thing, however, was just possible, and that was, that the party of horsemen approaching might not, by any means, be going to stop at the farm. There was nothing to lead directly to that conclusion. It was possible that they might be going right on; and if such were the case, he (Jack) felt that it would be, as yet, quite premature upon his part to give any alarm.

"There is time yet," he said. "There is time yet. I will wait a little while, and judge more accurately of what are their intentions."

That the mounted party was coming by the high road from London to the

common, Jack's accurate knowledge of the topography of the spot enabled him to feel certain; and his object, therefore, became to get as near to the road-way across the common as possible, for the purpose of noticing their movements. He accordingly at once began to make his way. To do this he had to pass through the stable-yard; as he went, he assured himself that the stable where the three horses were kept was easily accessible. He then made a rapid passage through the plantation, which so effectually screened the farm from the common, and from the sight of all persons passing along its high road to the village, and soon emerged upon the common itself.

Jack now threw himself flat upon the grass, and listened. The footsteps of the horses sounded alarmingly close at hand, and he immediately rose.

A very few minutes, now, must, he felt, decide the question effectually, as to whether the horsemen were going straight on, or were going to swerve from the path, for the purpose of attacking the farm; and during those few minutes, poor Jack endured hours of suspense.

The path, or rather the high-road across Ealing Common, as it might now properly be termed, was a considerable distance from the plantation that shut in the farm, and upon the extreme edge of which Jack was only just within the shadow of the trees. From that high-road there diverged a path that led directly to the farm, and in the dim night air, Jack could just see the head of that path, by means of a stunted pollard that he knew grew there, and which sent up a few straggling branches into the night sky. He kept his eyes fixed upon that spot, as though upon it depended his destiny in all time to come.

CHAPTER CCXLIV.

THE ATTACK UPON THE FARM BY THE POLICE AND MILITARY.

It is rather a curious subject of inquiry, that of presentiment. We are apt to be led astray by coincidences of the purest accidental character, that it is almost impossible to come to a conclusion upon the subject.

Philosophers tell us, that if any result follows a certain action for a great number of times, we are justified in calling it a law of nature that it should do so, and certainly as regards presentiments of coming evil, the experiences of every one are sufficient to convince them that they are not unfrequent, and that the occurrence of something very unusual after them, seems to favour the supposition that they were a mute kind of warning of the coming distress.

But be all this as it may, certainly Jack had upon that night felt particularly uneasy, and a conviction had stolen over him, in a manner that he could not succeed in shaking off, to the effect that something would happen.

"I knew it," he muttered to himself, as he still kept his eyes fixed upon the the old tree; "I knew it well. I would not have slept to-night, and cheated myself into an idea of security, for worlds."

The night air swept past him with a strange and mournful kind of sound, as though unseen spirits were upon its noiseless wings, sighing for the evil that was about to ensue, which their pure natures enabled them to plainly foresee.

Jack trembled a little, but it was not for himself that he did so. It was for others that he held dearer than self.

Not very long, however, had poor Jack to reflect upon the situation in which he was, or to vex himself with anything in the shape of imaginative or unsubstantial terrors, for in a very few moments he saw the dark throng of people pause at the corner of the path across the common that led up to the farm.

Whether that pause were accidental or on the contrary, Jack only now awaited to see, and that was a question which was very speedily put to rest, by his observing the crowd of heads, that were only very faintly relieved against the night-sky,

slowly advancing towards the plantation, upon [the skirts of which he was then concealed by the deep shadows of the old trees.

"They come," said Jack, "they come."

With these words, he turned at once, and p'unged through the brushwood back to the house.



JACK CLIMBS A TREE TO RECONNOITRE THEIR PURSUERS.

From that moment, Jack seemed as if but one impulse could possibly animate his mind, and tha' was to awaken Claude Duval and Dick Turpin to the frightful danger that they ran. All fear seemed to have vanished from him; but mechanically he went on until he reached the part of the garden into which he had descended from the roof of the little building immediately beneath the window of the apartment allotted to him as a bed-room.

He began to climb up by the aid of the vigorous shoots of the vine that were there in abundance to assist him in so doing.

Jack felt that now the least alarm of a noisy character would only have the effect of bringing the enemies of himself and of his friends with the greater activity to the attack; and from their numbers, if it should really come to an encounter, there could be but little doubt as to which way it would terminate. If anything was to be done to save them, it was quite evident that it could only be by silence and caution.

Jack, full of this conviction, and it was a true one in every sense of the word, made his way to his chamber-window in a much shorter space of time than probably, under other circumstances, he would have been able to reach it. He sprung into the room. A touch at the door was sufficient to convince him that it was just as he had left it.

It was at this moment that a frightful pang shot across the heart of Jack, from a thought which, however unjust it was in reality, was not at all unnatural under the circumstances. He thought that it was just possible there might be some treachery in the house, which would account for the attack upon the farm.

If anything could be calculated more than another to unnerve Jack for a few moments, it certainly would be such an idea as that, and he was compelled to lean against the wall for support while he made the attempt to reason himself out of it.

"Oh, no—no," he said. "It cannot be. It is only a frightful idea engendered by this peril. Who is there here who would stoop to such an act? No, no! I will dismiss it from my thoughts."

It was much easier to say that he would dismiss from his thoughts such a notion than actually to do so; but, at all events, Jack made the attempt, and if he succeeded but ill, he would not let that non-success interfere with what he had to do, which was to rouse Claude and Dick.

The lock of his door readily yielded to his touch and he passed out of the room into the passage beyond it, from which he knew opened the bed-chambers of his two friends. At the first door he came to, he knocked rapidly, saying in a subdued voice, and yet one loud enough to be plainly heard by any one within the room—

"Up—up, I say. There is danger on foot.—Up—up, and leave this place at once!"

Jack then heard a loud noise as though some one had fallen out of bed on to the floor; and, in fact, such was the case, for it was Dick Turpin's bed-room that Jack had got to, and as Dick happened to be reposing very near to the edge of the bed, he had, upon the first surprise of the moment at hearing Jack's voice in such alarming accents, made a sudden turn that had precipitated him to the floor.

"Awake—awake!" added Jack. "Awake, there!"

"I am awake," said Dick. "What the deuce is the matter? Is the house on fire?"

"Worse!"

"Worse than that? Oh, you must be joking, Jack—for I think it is your voice."

Dick had scrambled to his feet by this time, and opened the door, where, by the light of a small oil-lamp that was upon a bracket in the corridor, he saw Jack.

"Good Heavens, Jack," he cried, "you look as pale as death. What has happened? Are you ill?"

"Oh, no—no, but in a few minutes—perhaps even now, as we speak, the house is surrounded by our foes. I saw an armed party on the Common, and the destination of it was this place."

"You saw, do you say, Jack?"

"Yes, I was keeping watch."

"I'll be hanged if I didn't think you would, and told Claude so, but he thought otherwise, and would not say anything further to you about it. I will

dress as rapidly as I can. The next door is Claude's—wake him up, Jack, directly, that's a good fellow."

"I will—I will."

There was no occasion for Jack to make any efforts to awaken Claude, for the little commotion, and the kind of disturbance that had taken place in Dick's rooms, had had that effect; and feeling certain that something was amiss, Claude had hastily dressed himself, and now came out to see what was happening.

"Hilloa! Jack or Dick," he said, "or both of you, what is amiss?"

"Save yourself, Claude," cried Dick; "save yourself. The house will be surrounded by a force that it will be madness to try to cope with. Every moment is precious,"

"Ah! say you so, Jack?"

"I do, indeed, Claude. You know the premises well, and I beg of you at once to make use of that knowledge to leave them as quick as you can. It is you, and probably you only, who are sought. Oh, Claude, away with you—away at once!"

"Hush! Jack, you know not what you say. Everything is to be lost by precipitation and nothing gained. Tell me exactly what the danger is, and how you discerned it?"

"Ah," said Dick, who was busy priming one of his pistols, "that is it. Let us know all about it, Jack."

"Alas! alas!" said Jack. "These may be precious moments, but if you must know, you shall. I could not sleep, and I went to walk in the plantation skirting the common."

"Or in other words, Jack," said Claude, "you went to keep watch, while we slept. Is it not so?"

"Well—well, do not heed that at present. It does not matter much; but as I was there I saw a throng of people in regular marching order making their way towards the farm."

"By the cross-path, Jack?"

"Yes, I waited in order that I might not raise a false alarm, until I saw them turn from the road into the cross-path, and you know that that conducts to nowhere but to here."

"True—true."

"Then the danger is sufficiently great," said Dick, "and I am now quite ready to meet it."

"Cicely!" said Claude; and then he at once returned to the chamber again which he had left. Cicely had heard that something was wrong, and had availed herself of the time that Claude had been conversing with Jack and Dick to dress herself, so that when Claude went back to the room, he found her up and ready to leave it. He had formed something like a determination as to what to do in the event of such an emergency as the present arising, and now he spoke earnestly to Cicely to induce her to carry it out.

"Listen to me, Cicely," he said; "Jack brings us the news that the officers are about the place. Now, let me beg of you to believe that you cannot aid me, but that, if I have the anxiety of your safety to add to my own perils, I may very likely fall. What I wish you to do is, to go at once to the sleeping-rooms of some of the females of the family here, and there remain until you hear from me, and not on any account to interfere with us in the conflict that may ensue."

"But you will be in danger?"

"Yes. It is my vocation to be in danger, Cicely. Heed it not. You and I have passed through very much greater dangers than this together. Let me not have the frightful feeling that you are involved in the dangers and chances of the conflict."

"Then it is veritable?"

"Perhaps not. I would not say as much to Jack, on any account, as it might have the effect of wronging his good and honest feelings towards me, but as the alarm comes from him, I feel that it is apt to be rather exaggerated than otherwise."

"Oh, Claude, you give me a faint hope by saying that."

"Let me hope, then, Cicely, that you will act upon that feeling, and go at once as I wish, to a place of safety, and leave me and my friends to settle this matter, as best we may."

"Yes—yes, I will—I ought."

"Now, indeed, I feel easy. Dear Cicely, I shall not forget this ready acquiescence to my wishes. Go at once. Do you know the way?"

"Oh, Claude, you forget that this house is most familiar to me now. There is not a nook or a corner of it that I do not know full well."

"Go, then, dear one, at once."

Cicely, after an embrace from Claude, left the room hastily, and proceeded, as he had directed her, to the rooms occupied by the family, who were not yet aware of anything being amiss in the place. She, however, could inform them, so that they could take the best course their judgments and their feelings should suggest under the circumstances.

In a moment after he had thus—to the greatest extent in his power—provided for the safety of Cicely, Claude was with his two friends, who had occupied the time they had been by themselves in seeing that all their pistols were in good ord.r.

"Any more news?" said Claude.

"No," replied Dick, "but the best thing we can do now, I think, is to make our way to the stables, and get out our cattle. If we are to leave, the sooner we do so the better."

"Come on, then," said Claude. "If we lose our horses, we lose everything but our lives; and I don't know that they would be worth much after that. But let us once get mounted and be off, and I don't care."

"Nor I," said Dick, "the danger will be then by no means a special one. Is this the way?"

"Follow me," said Claude, "I know it well."

They both followed Claude to the lower part of the house, and he was upon the point of unbolting a door that led into the stable-yard, when Dick suddenly laid his hand upon his arm, and said—

"Hush!"

"What is it?" said Claude.

The question answered itself, in a manner of speaking, for at the moment that he (Claude) asked it, he heard the tramp of feet in the stable-yard, and a voice said in short, authoritative accents—

'You will keep careful watch here; and you will understand that you are to make prisoners of whoever shall attempt to pass your post, and if any resistance be offered, you are to use your arms."

There was then the clash of some weapon upon the stones in the stable-yard, and Claude said in a low tone—

"Why they have brought the military upon us."

"It seems so," said Dick.

"It is but too evident," said Jack. "This is a planned attack, and one that will give us no small trouble."

"Never mind," said Claude, "we will beat them yet. Never despair. The soldiers don't go about this affair with a good heart."

"But we had some trouble with them at Winchester," said Jack.

"Yes, and they had some trouble with us, and I think that, upon the whole, they were the worst off."

"They were," said Jack. "They were, for it cost a few lives upon that occasion."

"And it may cost a few more upon this," said Claude, in a tone of determination. "If society hunts me, I shall not be very tender as to how I treat the hounds, I can assure you."

"But the horses—the horses!" said Dick; "what can be done to save them? Are we quite helpless as far as they are concerned, now, do you think, Claude?"

"I am afraid so; but there is something that is hopeful in this affair, and that is, that no interference seems to be made with them at present. A guard is posted in the yard, but the horses are not touched."

"That is something."

"It is everything. As long as our horses are safe, surely we can fight out everything. But I confess that this affair is one that looks a little serious, and that, in all likelihood, will call up all the energies and the means of defence that we possess."

"It will, indeed," said Jack. "Hush!—hush! Is that a bell?"

CHAPTER CCXLV.

A SERIOUS FIGHT TAKES PLACE IN AND ABOUT THE FARM.

Jack was right. A bell rung fiercely, or, at all events, in the silence of the night, it seemed to ring fiercely, whether it really did or not.

"Where is that bell?" said Dick.

"It is at the front door of the farm," replied Claude, "and its being rung at all, is a very tolerable indication to me that the place is surrounded."

"We are lost," said Jack.

"Not so," cried Claude, in a higher tone than in truth it was at all prudent to speak in. "Not so, Jack. No one is lost until he gives up himself, and that is a thing that I do not intend to do."

"Pardon me," said Jack, "I ought not to have thought what I said, and if I did think it, this was not a time in which to say it."

"Make no excuses, Jack," said Claude; "we all know very well that you never shrink from real danger, whatever you may say about it beforehand. It strikes me, though, that if we are to make an escape at all, it will be at this point where we are now."

"But the sentinels?" said Dick.

"I am sorry for them," said Claude.

The tone of voice in which Claude Duval uttered those few words was quite sufficiently indicative of what he meant, and both Jack and Dick were from that moment fully possessed with the conviction that Duval meant to make his way past the sentinels, even at the expense of their lives, if needs were.

Before, however, anything could be concluded, the party was perceived by one of the young men of the farm, who, with consternation in his face, said—

"Oh, Claude, what will now become of you?"

"I don't know, my friend," said Duval. "The only thing that very particularly vexes me is, that I am bringing trouble and annoyance upon your house. That is what I would, indeed, fain have avoided."

"Do not mention that. But my brother thinks that by your all three putting on smock frocks, and so disguising yourselves, you might pass for persons at work upon the farm."

Claude shook his head.

"That I doubt," he said. "It would be a very faint hope, indeed. I think, rather, that if you can manage to detain those who are at the front door in any way, we will make an attempt to leave this place by the back of it here."

"It shall be done. You know much better than we can, possibly, what is proper and what is not. I will go at once, and let my brother know what you wish us to do."

At this moment another furious ring at the bell announced that those who were at the door waiting for admission were getting rather impatient than otherwise. Indeed, it was quite a wonder that they had waited so long; and they certainly would not have done so, but that they had so completely surrounded the house by

a chain of sentinels, that they believed the escape of those whom they came to capture to be the next thing to an impossibility.

"Now," said Claude, "I will not kill this soldier who is in the stable-yard if I can help it. He is only here in pursuance of orders that he dared not disobey, and I have no doubt but that the job is as distasteful a one to him as can very well be imagined. I hope he will have the discretion to know when he is beaten, and not insist upon being killed."

"Will you go alone?"

"Yes, Dick. But you and Jack can follow closely. You will soon see what kind of a fellow I have got to deal with. The only thing will be to prevent him from firing his carbine, if he has one, or his pistols, if he has not, but that he has fire-arms of some sort is almost certain. Not a word now—caution is everything."

Claude now waited until he heard the sentinel walking away from the door, and choosing then that moment, he cautiously, yet quickly opened the door, and they all three passed out into the yard.

"Stand close up against the wall," whispered Claude. "We must let him pass again before anything can be done with him."

Fortunately, that side of the house was in very deep shadow, indeed, so that the three friends, when they stood quite close to the wall alongside the door through which they had issued, could scarcely have been seen by any one not previously aware tkat there was some one there to see.

The path of the soldier was about half-a-dozen paces from the house, a little removed from the shadow that it cast, so that he was in sufficient light, even upon that rather dark night, to be seen with something like distinctness.

It was the intention of Duval to pounce upon that man, and, if possible, disarm him before he could give any alarm of the presence of an enemy upon his post.

That the soldiers he would have to contend with were dismounted cavalry, Claude felt assured, as they were just the sort of troops that would be sent upon such a duty; and, besides, he well-knew that while the cavalry were frequently called upon to act upon foot, the infantry were never by any accident mounted; but what he wanted to find out before he made his attack upon the soldier was, what kind of arms he had. If it were a carbine, it would be much easier to rush upon him and disarm him, than if he had pistols merely.

With a slow and steady marching step, the soldier now made his appearance again; and as Claude watched him, he not only saw that it was a horse-pistol he held in his hand, but he found that the man's head was rather suspiciously inclined towards the door at which he, Claude, stood.

It seemed as though the sentinel thought that he saw a something there, but was not quite certain of that fact.

Under these circumstances, Duval hit upon a manœuvre, which answered the object of completely directing the attention of the man in another direction. He took from his pocket the largest piece of money he had, which was half-a-crown, and then threw it over the sentinel's head among the bushes beyond him. In its descent, the coin made a sudden crashing noise, that at once arrested the soldier's attention, and turning instantly in the direction of the sound, he cried—

"Who goes there? Answer, or I fire."

With one bound that at once cleared the space between him and the sentinel, Duval was upon him, and they fell heavy to the earth together; but Claude had got hold of the pistol, and wrenching it from the soldier's grasp, he cast it from him, and then fastening his hand upon his throat, he said in quite calm, clear accents—

"Your life is in my power, but I have no desire to take it. On the contrary, I would fain do you no injury; but if you will not be beaten, and insensible to what is going on here, how can I help it?"

"What do you mean?" said the soldier.

"Why, that you have only to shut your eyes and be stunned, that is all; and if you don't like to be so as you are, why, you will be so in reality in another minute; so you can take your choice."

"Confound you, you have nearly broken every bone in my body as it is. Be off with you at once, and don't say how you got away."

"I won't talk about it. You lie still—that is all we want of you, my man. It will be your best course."

"I know that," said the soldier. "It's better to lie still without a knock on the head, than with one, I take it."

"You are a sensible fellow," said Claude, "and that is just what I mean. It is no shame to you either, for here are three of us, all strong and well armed men, so you can have no chance."

"Ah, it's all right. Be off with you, but don't take my pistol, as that would soon be missed."

"Certainly not. You shall have nothing to complain of on that score, and no one need be one bit the wiser when we are gone, if you keep your own secret."

"Ah, all's right. Be off."

"I rely, then, upon your honour," said Claude. "Dick, where are you, and you, Jack, where are you?"

"Here, here."

"Very good. Get the horses out quickly as you can, and then there will be a chance for us."

"As quick as thought," said Jack.

Both Dick and Jack went to attend to the horses, while Claude thought it prudent to keep the soldier company, lest he should rise and make some attempt at annoyance.

"I suppose," said the discomfited sentinel, "that you are the man we came after on this wild-goose errand?"

"Probably. But who did you come after?"

"Claude Duval, the highwayman."

"Then you are tolerably right, for I am that man, my friend; and if I mistake not, you would gain nothing by my capture, but the doubtful reputation of having assisted at it."

"That's true," said the soldier. "We, that is myself and comrades, are only ordered her to assist the constables, and we get nothing for our pains but the trouble."

"Precisely so; and now I would advise you, when we are gone, that you resume your march to and fro in this stable-yard, and it will be your own fault if any one knows anything of what has taken place here."

"I shan't blab it, you may depend."

"And you may equally depend that I shall not," said Claude, who was not a little pleased to find the soldier so reasonably compliant with his wishes.

At this juncture, Jack came up to Claude, and said—

"The cattle are quite ready, and the sooner we are off now the better. Come this way, Claude."

"All's right. There's nothing now to fear from the soldier. Good-night, my friend."

"Good-night," said the man, "and I think myself well out of the scrape."

Claude followed Jack to where the horses were standing, now ready saddled. Dick had mounted, and Jack had his foot in the stirrup, when the door at which Duval and his friends had got from the farm into the stable-yard, opened, and there sallied out two of the police officers, and a party of the soldiers. A voice rose above other sounds, in accents that Duval knew well.

"I tell you, it is no mistake, for he is here, somewhere. I am quite certain about it."

That voice convinced Claude at once regarding who it was that he owed his present embarrassment to, for he knew it to be the voice of Tom Brereton.

Claude had not harboured for one moment any suspicions regarding the good faith of the people of the farm towards him; but yet it was pleasant to be so completely confirmed in his opinion of them and their honour towards him, as the fact of finding who it was that had brought the police and the military upon him did.

How Tom Brereton had acquired a knowledge of his presence at the farm, he did not very well know, as he had no idea that he had been watched by that eccentric individual; but that such must have been the case, was now but too painfully apparent.

The officers had lights with them, so that there was a tolerable glare cast into the stable-yard, by the aid of which Claude certainly mounted his horse with rare celerity, while it at the same time had the effect of giving quite light enough to reveal him and his companions to their foes, whenever they might cast their eyes in that direction.

Rapidly Claude calculated in his own mind what obstacles were in the way of his progress to the common, and it was a gratification for him to know that there was no formidable obstacle. A little gate, and a very low hedge of privet, were the only hindrances to the path, and both could be leaped with ease by the well-bred cattle that Claude and his comrades called their own.

Like statues of men and horses, Claude and his two friends stood waiting the time when, by chance, the officers should cast their eyes in that direction, and see them. The light of the flambeau that one of them carried, shone so fully upon Duval, that every particle of his clothing to the minutest button was visible.

"Hilloa, sentinel!" said one of the officers. "Has any one passed, or tried to pass this way?"

There was no reply.

Upon this, the soldiers made a dash into the yard, and one of them shouted out—

"Sentry, where are you?"

"He is killed!" said another. "Here he lies dead!"

They all gathered round the soldier, who thought it best to take Claude's advice, and seem to be stunned, if he were not. The opportunity for Duval and his friends to get away, was now very tempting, indeed, and was not likely to occur again.

"Come on," said Claude, "come on at once."

He spoke in a too low tone to be heard by any but his two friends. They, however, could quite distinctly catch every word that he uttered; and at once they put their horses in motion to follow him. Upon the ground there was a quantity of litter, that sufficed to deaden the effect of the horses' feet, which otherwise, upon the stones with which the stable-yard was paved, must have produced an effect that would in a moment have discovered them to the soldiers, and so they succeeded in proceeding in silence until they got to the little gate. Duval hesitated about the leap, for he thought it would be more brave and honourable of him to be the last to leave the stable-yard; but Dick, who was immediately behind, said—

"For Heaven's sake, Claude, go on."

"Pardon me, both of you," said Claude. "I will follow you on the instant."

Before Dick could get his horse forward, or say one word for or against such a proposition, there came a loud cry from one of the officers, of—

"There they are—there they are!"

"We are found!" said Claude.

"We are lost!" said Jack.

It was strange that they should both really mean the same thing, although they expressed it in such very opposite terms; but there was no time for reflection.

"Forward!" cried the sergeant, who was with the few soldiers that had been sent to search the stable-yard. "Forward!"

"Yes!" cried Claude, in startlingly loud accents. "Forward is the word. I want you after me. Come on!"

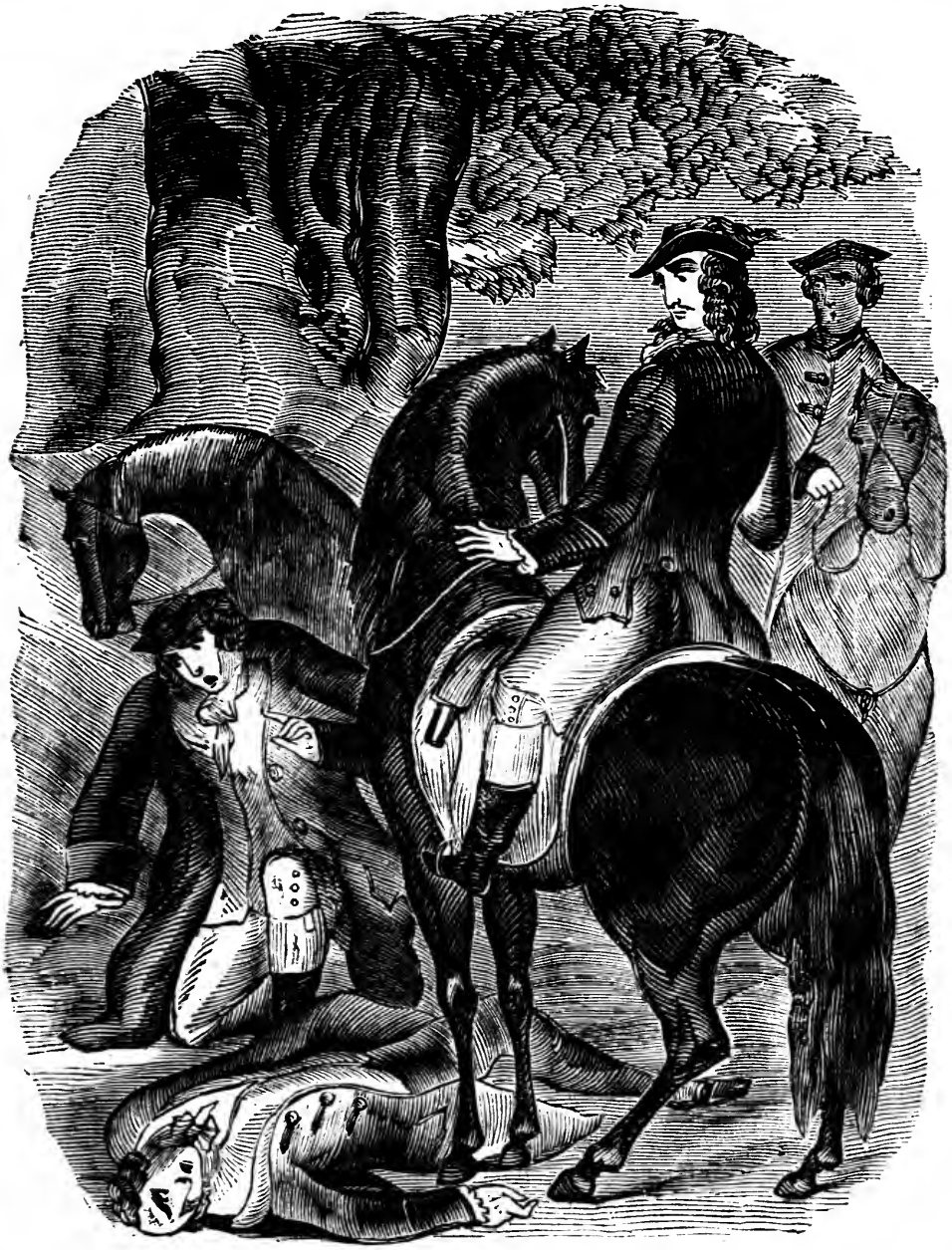
As he spoke, he sprung at once over the little gate.

CHAPTER CCXLVI.

CLAUDE PLAYS A GOOD TRICK UPON THE SOLDIERS.

Dick and Jack were not slow in following the example of Claude.

The sudden escape of those whom they had all but believed they had in their grasp, quite infuriated the officers, and they made an united kind of rush through



THE DEATH OF TOM BRERETON.

the farm-yard. The sergeant, with his men, found in a moment that to pursue men on horseback would be quite absurd, so he gave an order to fire.

The soldiers were sufficiently aggravated to do anything that could bring the affair to an end, and levelling their pistols, which they had brought from the holsters of their saddles, they sent a rattling volley after Claude and his friends.

Luckily, in the darkness of the night they could not take a very good aim, and if they had done so, the pistol is a weapon that certainly is not to be depended upon at any distance.

The discharge certainly failed to do any mischief.

"On—on," said Claude. "On, for your lives!"

As he spoke, the bugle of the military sounded one long note, and it was evident that it was for the purpose of giving notice to the party that still remained mounted upon the common to interrupt the fugitives. Claude had in his own mind a well-grounded suspicion that such was the case, and after proceeding a short distance he drew in.

Dick and Jack did the same.

"Hark ye, my friends," said Claude. "It is of no use to attempt to get away."

"Not attempt to get away?" cried Dick.

"No. I can imagine very well what the tactics of the enemy are. They have, as they think, driven us from our retreat in the farm-house, and the only thing they will think of doing now, will be to interrupt us on the common, where they, no doubt, have a force of horse ready for that purpose."

"It is so," said Jack; "and again I say we are lost."

"No. Here we are among the trees. The night is dark. If we can only persuade the horses to lie down among the brushwood, I think we might be safe yet."

"If that is the object," said Jack, "I know how to make any horse lie down in a moment. It is rather a secret; but I can do it."

"Do it, then, Jack, in the name of all that's good, for here comes the foe as closely upon us as possible."

Again the bugle sounded, and from the tramp of feet, it was quite clear that the dismounted soldiers were leaving the farm. Jack was not slow in carrying out his assertion that he could make the horses lie down. By taking hold of one ear of his own steed, and lifting one of the fore-feet, he gradually coaxed the creature to go quite down, and he then did the same by Claude's and Dick's steeds, and the creatures lay as still as possible, while their masters crouched down by their sides.

To be sure, three horses lying upon the ground, took up some space; but then the soldiers might not take that exact route, and if they did not, there was nothing to give them the least idea of the immediate vicinity of our friends.

Of course, they (the military) would be looking for some one on horseback; and with a complete faith in the notion that they had galloped right away on to the common, they would not be likely to be very particular in exploring the little woody spot which divided the farm from the common, and where Claude and his comrades were hidden.

"Forward, my men!" cried the sergeant. "You will find your horses where you left them, no doubt."

"Your comrades won't let the highwaymen pass, I suppose?" said a voice, "for now that they are fairly mounted and off, there will be no sort of chance of us officers taking them."

"Why, the best thing that can be done," said the sergeant, "is for the remainder of the troop to shoot them on the common. We don't want a twenty mile run into the country, I can tell you."

"Twenty mile!" said the officer. "They would think nothing of giving you a fifty mile run if once they had you in a line."

"The deuce they wouldn't!"

"No. Not they."

"Why, what sort of cattle, then, must they have?"

"I don't know, but sometimes I think their horses must be fiends, for they carry them through dangers and difficulties that would break down most completely any other steeds. But, Mr. Sergeant, everything seems to be wonderfully quiet on the common."

"So it does. Sound the bugle again."

The man who had the bugle sounded another long note as a signal to the mounted troop on the common to pursue the enemy; but as the said mounted troop could find no enemy to pursue, they merely looked sharply about them, and kept their station.

In the course of half a minute more, the dismounted soldiers had passed the spot on which lay the three friends and their steeds so quietly. The slightest sound from man or horse would have betrayed them. Upon themselves, of course, the adventurers could depend; but it was a very different thing regarding the cattle, and it was only a piece of extraordinary good luck that the horses made no sort of noise at that moment of the passing of the soldiers.

In the space of about two minutes after they had passed, neither of the three friends spoke; but then Claude in a whisper contrived to say something. His horse heard his voice, and immediately neighed.

"There," said Claude, "that would have done us."

"It would," said Dick.

"But what did you say?" said Jack.

"I was remarking," said Claude, "that the best thing we can do now is to go home again, as our enemies have left."

"Home again!" exclaimed Jack.

"Hush, Jack, not so loud. Be cautious."

"Yes—yes—I will; but what on earth do you mean, Claude, by going home again? It is so extraordinary a word for us to use, or to hear."

"Why, back to the farm, to be sure, I mean."

"Back to the farm?" said Dick. "You are not serious, Claude, surely, in that idea?"

"Yes, I am, though: and so will you be as soon as you have sufficient reason for being so. There can be no doubt now of two things."

"What are they?"

"One of them is, that the officers and the soldiers have pretty well searched the farm, and the other is, that both officers and soldiers are now quite convinced that we have left it, and taken our horses with us."

"Well?"

"Very well; then, the safest place we can go to now is where they don't think we are, and that is back to the farm again."

"There is reason in that," said Dick.

"And danger," said Jack.

"Yes, danger is everything."

"But much less in what I propose than in any other case, I think," added Claude, "that we could possibly just now adopt. What I wish is, that we should get our horses up, and as quickly as foot can fall, lead them back again to the stable."

"It is a bold step," said Jack.

"It is. But I incline to think that there lies its great safety and excellence. The devil himself, if he had no supernatural knowledge, would not think of looking for us on the farm premises again."

"You have convinced me, Claude," said Jack, "and the more I think of the plan, the more feasible it appears."

"Then, let us come on at once."

"For my part," said Dick, "I am quite sure that there could not be possibly a wiser and better course pursued; and if you will get up the horses, Jack, as quietly as you got them down, all will be well enough."

"That's easy," said Jack. "Among the few things that I may say that I understand thoroughly, I may mention horses, I believe."

Upon this, Jack made a sort of chirping noise, and the three horses got up at once as comfortably as though they had been sentient beings, and understood exactly what was required of them.

Claude could not forbear laughing at Jack's skill in the management of the creatures, and he said—

"I flatter myself that I know a trifle about horses; but you beat me out of the field regarding them, I admit."

"I have made the habits, manners, and feelings of the horse my peculiar study," said Jack, "for years, and I ought to know something about them by this time."

They neither of them mounted now, but led the horses by the bridles at a very slow pace after them through the little plantation. They trod as softly as feet could fall, and it would appear as though the cattle knew that silence was an object, for they placed their feet very gently to the ground.

Proceeding in this way for some few minutes, they reached the hedge that skirted the stable-yard; but it was quite impossible to get the horses through the hedge, so they had no resource but to skirt it until they came to the gate, or try to make a gap in it.

After a little consultation, they preferred the latter course, and with their pocket-knives, which were very strong, they began feeling for the thick bushes of the hedge, and cutting them away. A very few minutes sufficed to enable them to make an opening that the horses might step through, and then, with a saving of considerable space, they found themselves at once in the stable-yard of the farm, and not twenty paces from the stable in which the horses had been put up for the night.

"This will do," said Claude. "Now, I propose that we place the horses in the stable again, at once."

"And you may depend," said Dick, "the very best thing we can do is to stay with them."

"Be it so."

Claude opened the stable-door, and led his horse in. He was closely followed by Dick and Jack. They did not unsaddle the horses; but they let them each go into a stall, and then, as they stood by the door themselves, which they left open a short distance, so that they might be aware of the approach of any one, they endeavoured, by attentive listening, to ascertain, if possible, what was going on in the house and on the common.

The soldiers were evidently rather bewildered to know what to do; for at times a bugle was blown in one direction, and then in another, and the clatter of horses' feet, as the mounted party scoured the common in search of the fugitives, announced that they were not very willing to give up the chase.

That the officers would suspect there was some trick in the affair, and that Claude and his companions were in hiding after their escape, there could be very little doubt; but it was not likely they would think that they had had the audacity to come back to the farm, and actually take possession again of the very stable in which the cattle had been so short a time before the attack had been made upon the premises.

It was in the exceeding boldness of the act, that its great chance of safety lay.

As regarded the farm-house, all seemed tolerably quiet there for a time; but the adventurers could not feel assured that their foes had wholly left it without some better evidence than its mere quietude, and for such better evidence they resolved to wait.

The noises on the common grew less and less each moment, and Jack had just said that they might begin to consider the danger to be at an end, when a trampling of feet came upon their ears.

"Hush!" said Claude. "Far from the danger being at an end, I am afraid that it is only about to begin."

They now maintained a profound stillness, and from the noises they heard, they felt quite convinced that the soldiery and the officers were returning to the farm. That such a case of proceeding might naturally enough ensue, had entered into the calculation of Claude, and he felt that their only safety lay in the improbability of the stable being looked into again.

"Halt!" cried a voice.

In a moment the sound of footsteps ceased. A voice then said—

"Mr. Sergeant, we would not have troubled you to come here again, but if as your men say no person passed them, it is quite clear that those we seek must be hiding somewhere about this place. This plantation is the only shelter they can get, and three men and three horses cannot creep into a nutshell."

"Look about you, then," said the sergeant; "if you find them you may, of course, depend upon our assistance in capturing them; but it seems to me that they have given you the slip, and in some way or another got past our men on the common without being seen."

This conversation was going on in the little plantation close to the stables and gardens of the farm, but it did not appear from the tenor of it that there was any suspicion that the fugitives had taken shelter absolutely in the farm premises again.

Claude still maintained the opinion that in choosing the course he had chosen, he had done the wisest thing he could, and upon the whole, his two friends thought with him upon the subject.

At all events, if they were discovered, they were not much worse than they had been situated upon the former occasion, when they had to leave the stable-yard with so much precipitation. They could but at last have a race for their lives across the common, pursued by the soldiers, whose horses were by no means likely to be so fleet of foot, as those of the highwaymen, which were chosen for speed.

Still, it was a serious sort of thing to be in the stable, and to know that so close at hand there were armed men, who were intent upon their capture, dead or alive, and who, to save trouble, would in all probability prefer the former mode of settling the affair. After all, though, there was not much time to think, and men of real courage, when in the actual presence of danger, do not trouble themselves much with reflections upon its consequences.

The officers began looking about among the underwood of the plantation, and it did not apper that the soldiers thought it any part of their duty to assist them in that kind of search, but they remained merely as spectators of what was going on—perhaps, after all, in their own minds rather pleased than not at the non-success of the civil power.

"They are not here," said one of the officers.

"But they must be," said another.

"Very well, you find them."

"Where are they, then, if they are not here?—that is the question," persisted the other. "They must have vanished, you know, into the air like three ghosts."

"Very good," said the sergeant. "My officer directed me to come with you, and to remain a reasonable time while you searched for the men you want. I think a reasonable time has elapsed."

"Then you can go," said the officer, who seemed to be the principal spokesman of the civil force, "and you can tell your officer, that if he and his men had kept a better look out on the common, that Claude Duval and his comrades would not have escaped so easily as it is quite clear they have done."

"If you have anything of that sort to tell my officer," said the sergeant, "I will trouble you to tell him yourself, my friend, and then you can take the consequences of the telling. For my part, I beg to be excused. Right about, face—march!"

In another moment the soldiers were gone.

Claude gave Jack a sort of nudge with his elbow, as much as to say—"It's all right now, you see, Jack," but they neither of them spoke; for, to tell the truth, the officers were much too near at hand to make that a safe proceeding.

It was quite clear, too, that the officers were very far, indeed, from being satisfied with the whole affair. They were divided between the two opinions of whether the carelessness of the soldiers on the common had let Claude and his companions

escape, or that they were still hiding somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the farm.

Some inclined to one of these opinions, and some to the other; perhaps they all had their doubts both ways; and that it was that made them loath to quit the farm, and the ground immediately surrounding it. A bugle note and the tramp of horses' feet gradually dying away, sufficiently proclaimed the fact that the troops were leaving the spot; and at every step they made towards London again Claude and his friends felt as if an additional piece of safety were granted to them, and as though they had taken a large lease of their lives.

The officers walked through the plantation until they came to the little gate leading into the yard of the farm. They opened it and passed through, and one of them actually leant against the stable-door, while his companions got up a sort of wrangle about what was next best to be done under the circumstances in which they found themselves.

CHAPTER CCXLVII.

TOM BRERETON FINDS THAT HE IS IN DANGER.

"It's all through the infernal red coats," said one of the officers, "or we must have had them this time."

"That I believe," said another, "and I thought it would be a bad job from the moment that I heard they were to have anything to do with it; but it was of no manner of use for me to speak."

"Nor me either."

"Well," said a third, "it's no use either growling or grumbling over the affair. What's to be done in it, that's the question. Are we to give it up as a bad job, or to try still to make something of it?"

"It's all very well to talk of trying, but how are you to try? To my thinking, Duval is half-a-dozen miles off here by now."

"Half-a-dozen? he is twice that distance."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder, and here I did think that we had 'em snug; for, from all I could learn, their horses were in the stable, and they had all gone comfortably to bed. Now, wouldn't one have thought they was as good as nabbed then?"

"To be sure."

"And yet here we are, and no good done—and there's the very stable they had their cattle in as empty as nothing now. Oh, it's enough to make a fellow wild, it is."

As he spoke, this officer gave the stable door a kick that sent it wide open, but luckily he did not go in, and the darkness was quite sufficiently intense to prevent any fear of the friends being seen. The door itself had an inclination to shut of itself, and as it swung, slowly closed again, or very nearly so.

"Yes," said another, "there's the nest, sure enough, but the birds have flown, and it strikes me it's about as much use our staying here as nothing at all. I think the best thing we can do, is to get back again to London, and tell the beaks that it's no go."

"Where's that whipper-snapper of a fellow who brought us here, I wonder—Tom Brereton as they call him?"

"Oh, he walked off as soon as any of the real work began, and I have not seen him since."

"Where can he have got to? But it don't matter. Let us call up the people of the farm, and see if we can get anything out of them."

"You may try it, but it won't do."

"Do you think not?"

"I certainly do. We have good reason to believe that the folks at the farm-house know perfectly well who they have been harbouring, notwithstanding they

pretend that, having lodgings to let, they took the first offer they got, and did not know it was from Claude Duval."

"That's all the better."

"Is it?"

"To be sure it is, for if they knew Duval well, they, no doubt, know well where he is to be found, and so, perhaps, if they are paid well, they might assist us, now that we have got rid of the soldiers. Don't you know that everybody in the world is to be worked upon by threats and by rewards, and we can use both to these people."

"Try it, then."

"I will. In the first place, we can tell them that they will be prosecuted for harbouring a felon, and in the next place, we will offer them a handsome sum if they will give up Claude Duval and his friends to us, and I do think we shall prevail upon them."

"I hope so. One thing, of course, we may be quite sure of, and that is, that Duval must pay them, or they would not put themselves into a predicament to keep him out of harms way."

"Exactly, and if we offer them a better price for betraying him than he gives for keeping his secrets, they will give him up. I believe that's human nature, ain't it?"

"Rather so."

"Come on, then, and let us go into the house."

With this, the officers left the stable-yard, and made their way into the farm house, where, in consequence of the disturbance that had taken place, the family had kept themselves in readiness to meet whatever might happen in the further course of the night.

As soon as the officers were out of hearing, Duval spoke.

"Dick," he said. "This has been rather a close touch, has it not?"

"Very," said Dick.

"And it is one still," said Jack, "for they will come back again this way. What do you think of doing now, Claude?"

"Just nothing. I am inclined to think our experiences of their plans are such as to induce us to remain where we are."

"And I agree with you," said Dick. "There is nothing like the stable, you may depend upon it. They won't come in here."

"And there is another view of the question," said Claude, "that we may very well take, and that is to the effect, that I think, now that they have lost the help of their red coat friends, we might be too much for them. How many officers do you think there are?"

"Not above six or eight."

"Then, after all, it could but be a fight; and it is questionable whether three men who fight for their lives, and who are well armed, are not a match for six or eight who fight for money merely."

Dick laid his hand suddenly upon Claude's arm.

"Hush!" he said, "I hear footsteps. Not a word."

Upon this, they all three were profoundly still, and they could hear a very cautious footstep upon the flag-stones in the yard. It came in a slow, creeping manner past the stable door, and then it paused. Claude's idea was, that one of the officers, having some suspicion that those whom he sought were hidden in the immediate neighbourhood of that spot, had slunk back from his comrades for the purpose of listening for some sound confirmatory of that view.

Nothing could be more natural than that a wily officer of the police would do such a thing as that; but Claude soon found out that such was not the case. Suddenly, quite close to the door of the stable, a voice sounded, and Claude at once recognised it as the voice of his old foe, Tom Brereton.

"Oh, dear," he said, "I don't very well know what to do. This is a pretty piece of business. I made quite sure that Duval would be caught here, and that he would be comfortably hanged, while I retired to live as snug as possible upon

the reward; but now they can't find him. Oh, dear—oh, dear! and I am in such a fright, for fear he should find out it was all through me they are after him."

This was a little bit of news to Duval.

"I wouldn't have come," added Tom Brereton, "if I could possibly have helped it, only I was afraid if I didn't that they would try to chisel me out of the reward in some sort of way. I don't like danger at all, not I. Why a man possibly might get hurt where there's any danger. That's what I don't like it for."

"A capital reason," whispered Dick.

"Hush—hush!" said Claude.

"And now," continued Tom Brereton, "I may say that I am at my wits-end almost. As soon as the row began, I took good care to hide in one of the rooms, so that they did not get hold of me any of them, and now that it's all over, I just slipped out at the window; and I do think the least thing I can do, is to go to town again."

"I should like to get hold of that rascal," thought Duval.

"Ah! dear me, the reward is everything," added Tom, "and I so short of money, too, that I don't know what to do. It would be so comfortable to catch Duval, and make a thousand pounds by getting him hanged, that it would."

"Duval," whispered Dick.

"Yes—yes."

"Let us go out and bring that fellow into the stable. When we have him here, the devil's in it but we can keep him quiet."

"His fear will do that. You can go and get him in if you like, but be careful that there is no noise in the transaction, for if once he begins bellowing, he will not be able to listen to reason, and there will be no such thing as quieting him, without hitting him on the head, and that I should not like to do, he is such an idiot."

"He may be an idiot, but he is a vicious one," said Dick. "I will make him believe I am one of the officers."

"Do so. It will be good sport, at all events."

Dick cautiously issued from the stable, and just as Tom Brereton was commencing his complaints, Dick said—

"Hist! hist! Who is there?"

"Oh, murder! who is that?" said Tom. "Spare me—oh, spare my wretched life. I haven't done anything, indeed I haven't. Oh, oh!"

"Hush. I am an officer."

"An officer? Police?"

"Yes. Bow-street."

"Oh," said Tom, "I'm as glad to hear that, as if anybody had given me a guinea—at least, nearly as glad. Are you looking for Claude Duval?"

"I am. Can you give me any intelligence of him? I think you are the gentleman who gave the information to the police."

"Yes, I am the gentleman; but I'm sorry the police have not found the fellow. Do you think there is any chance of yet doing so?"

"Every chance. With your assistance, I think—indeed, I may take upon myself to say that I know we must lay hold of them."

"Excuse me, then," said Tom Brereton, "I ain't very well, and as far as the laying hold of the business goes, I'm afraid I ain't equal to it just now."

"You shrink from the danger?"

"Most decidedly I do, my friend; I don't like danger."

"But the reward?"

"Ah, the reward is all very well; but pray what would be the use of it if I had a pistol-bullet in my brains first? Let me ask you that."

"Oh, nonsense."

"It's all very well for you to say, 'Oh, nonsense.' Perhaps you are used to such things, and if you are, I can only say that I am decidedly not."

"Well then, I must adopt my other plan, which is not quite so glorious, because it is perfectly safe, and people will say nothing about our courage in the transaction, that is the annoying feature of it."

"Is it? That may be the annoying feature of it to you, but to me I can assure you it is the beauty of it, and if you have really any plan by which Duval



THE THREE FRIENDS WARNED OF DANGER AT THE VILLAGE INN.

can be caught without danger to us, you may count upon me going through fire and water. That is to say, if the fire is just upon out, and the water is decidedly shallow."

"You are quite a wag," said Dick.

"No, I ain't. You are joking now, Mr. Officer."

"Oh, no—no—I never joke. Don't say that of me. But don't you think it would be a capital thing if you and I could manage the whole affair alone?"

"No."

"No? You don't mean that? Surely it is you who are joking now, my friend. Come—come, you don't mean really to say 'No,' to such a chance, especially as it is without danger, too? Think of that."

"Why, yes; that's just what I do think of; but I can tell you that the Secretary of State has promised me all the reward, so I don't want any of the glory as long as I finger the cash. That's glory enough for me, and I'd rather be on the safe side than take any trouble for you and I only to do it."

"Well, all that is just as you please; so, I will now disclose to you my plan, and I can only assure you that in the first instance, it is founed upon positive information that Duval is still in this neighbourhood."

"You don't say so?"

"I do. I have seen him since the soldiers left."

"The deuce you have! Why didn't you lay hold of him?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, sir, I was rather afraid he would kick up a row. You have heard the old story of catching a Tartar?"

"To be sure I have; and that would be just my sort of feeling, if I were to come across him, and between you and me and the post, I rather think I should feel inclined to get out of the way: He's a desperate villain."

"He is; but just step this way, for I am afraid that what we may say may be overheard by some one, and that might bring upon us a pistol-shot or two."

"Murder! You don't mean that!"

"Yes, I do. As I tell you, Claude Duval is somewhere rather close at hand, and if he saw us, I daresay he would not by any means be very particular about how he popped us out of the way. I have been hiding in a stable close at hand to here, and if you slip into it with me, you will find we shall be able to consult quite free from any interruption, and in perfect safety, too, from any stray pistol-shot that may be sent at our heads if we stay here."

"Lord bless me, yes!" said Tom Brereton. "Let us get anywhere, so that we are safe. Danger is just about the only thing I don't like, for, as I often say, what's the use of a man's being well off, if he gets a crack on the head that unsettles his brains, or a poke in the stomach that spoils his digestion for the remainder of his life?"

"You are quite a philosopher, and I must only say that I agree with you so entirely, that I hope we shall be capital friends for the future."

"Well, I have no objection, you seem a very reasonable sort of person; but for my sake let us get into the stable as quick as we can. I am all of a perspiration with the idea of being popped at by one of Duval's pistols in the way you mention. I will follow you."

"Do so. This way, This is the very stable in which Claude Duval and his friends had their horses."

"Oh, the highway villains! Don't I wish I saw the day, when they shall all be hanging upon one beam, and the hangman ready to turn them off. That would be a sight, wouldn't it?"

"It would, indeed; but should you have no pity for them under such circumstances, my friend?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, that is a pity. But here is the stable."

With this, Dick gently pushed Tom Brereton into the stable, and kept guard at the door of it himself, so that he should not by a sudden rush, when he found he was betrayed, manage to get out of it, as he would very likely attempt to do in his right

"How precious dark it is," said Tom.

"Yes, that's the beauty of it."

"The beauty of it?"

"To be sure, because you can't be seen in it, if any one were to open the door suddenly and take a peep in."

"Oh, ah, in that case I grant you it's all right," said Tom; "and now I sha be right glad to hear your plan of nobbing Claude Duval and the two fellow that are with him, for I suppose the scheme includes them all three. It would be a pity to let the other two off, you know."

"The scheme does include all three. You may take your oath, that if you catch Duval, you will catch the other two. Now I told you that I felt pretty sure he was not far off, and to convince you of that fact, I don't mind now letting you know that he is in this stable."

Before Tom Brereton then could open his mouth to express his horror, Claude said—

"Tom, if you remain quite quiet, I won't cut your throat; but if you make any disturbance I will; so you have for the present your fate in your own hands. I am Claude Duval."

CHAPTER CCXLVIII.

DETAILS THE SINGULAR ADVENTURE AT THE BANK OF ENGLAND.

If absolute terror had not destroyed all power of reflection with Tom Brereton reflection itself would have induced him to be quiet; but as it was, he as nearly feel into a swoon as it was possible to do, without actually lapsing into that state.

"All's right," said Jack.

"And hark you, Tom Brereton," added Claude. "I am not perhaps so much now in the mood of showing mercy to your folly and your vindictiveness as I have been at times before, for you have sought the destruction of others just because they were associated with me; so I tell you in all seriousness to beware."

Tom Brereton managed just to gasp out the word "Mercy!"

"Yes," added Claude, "that is ever the way with those who know not what the quality of mercy is in themselves. They call for it in others the moment they find themselves in any fearful circumstances. How dare you ask for mercy of me?"

"I—I don't know! Oh, dear!"

"He is a fool," said Dick.

"Nearly an idiot in point of real intellect," said Claude, "and yet you would not believe what a world of low, malignant cunning lurks in his brain."

"Is it possible!"

"Oh, no—no," said Tom Brereton. "Spare me, do!"

"Silence, or this moment is your last," said Claude, for in his fears, contingent upon the not very bright character Claude was giving him, he was beginning to speak much louder than the safety of the confederates in the stable warranted under the circumstances.

"I'll put him in one of the horse-racks," said Jack, "and if he stirs, I will shoot him, so that he can do as he likes, you know."

"Anywhere," said Tom. "Oh, dear, kind, sirs, put me anywhere, so that you spare my life. Oh, pray do!"

Jack took him by the collar, and finding one of the racks, he placed Tom Brereton in it, and then daring him to say a word, or to move an inch, he left him to his meditations.

Claude was close to the door of the stable, and he heard the sound of footsteps rapidly approaching the yard. In a moment or two, a voice came very plainly upon his ears.

"The best thing you can possibly do," said the voice, "is to give us all the information you can."

"I have no information to give," said the young farmer in reply.

"Well, we shall stay here all night, for we don't believe yet but that Claude Duval is somewhere in this neighbourhood."

"As regards your staying here all night," said the young farmer, "you are welcome enough to do so, and if you catch Claude Duval, I shall be as much surprised as you will, you may depend. Will you walk in?"

"Oh, yes, we will walk in. The night air is none so very pleasant just now."

They all left the stable-yard, and the moment they had gone, Claude said to his comrades—

"It strikes me that now is the time for us to go. These officers will no doubt wait in the house, and we do not want a collision with them, merely for the sake of one."

"Certainly not," said Dick, "so let us be off."

"But what are we to do with our prisoner?" said Jack.

"I see no help for it, but to leave him here," said Claude.

"No," interposed Dick, "that won't do. He is just the sort of animal to give the alarm the moment our backs are turned, and then we shall be pursued, which is just as well avoided, even although we don't care much about it. My horse is quite fresh, and will carry double for a few miles without thinking anything of it, so I propose that I take him behind me and carry him off."

"If you will do it, Dick, it is the best thing."

"Oh, I'll do it."

"And I'll fetch him for you," said Jack.

Jack soon ferreted out Tom Brereton from the rack into which he had placed him, and Dick having mounted, Tom was placed behind him on his horse, and securely tied round his waist by a spare rein that Jack had in case of accidents. Then Claude and Jack both gained their saddles, and Claude, pushing open the door of the stable, said,—

"Off and away! Let us go quietly till we get over the heath, and then we will treat our steeds to a gallop."

"All's right," said Dick; "I don't see or hear a soul."

Everything seemed to be very quiet indeed in the farm-yard, and the adventurers began to have a good expectation of getting away without any collision with the officers. To be sure, Claude did not blind himself to the likelihood of the fact that the farm was well watched being no idle threat, and he kept warily glancing about him as he proceeded.

The gate that led from the farm-yard was open, so that they did not even lose the time that would have been consumed in dismounting from their horses, and they gained the little wilderness of trees that separated the grounds of the farm from the common in safety.

"This is capital," said Jack.

"Do not say anything yet," said Claude; "we don't know what may happen in a little while. Get your pistols ready."

"Oh, gentlemen," said Tom Brereton, when he heard the clicking of the pistol-locks, and felt that there was some possibility of a contest, "if there's to be any fighting, do let me go, for I don't feel well at all. You know it can do you no sort of good to keep a poor fellow like me in such a situation. Oh, do let me go, and I make a solemn promise that I will walk all the way to London, and not interfere with you in any way or say one word about you again as long as I live."

"Be quiet," said Dick,

"Oh, but do, sir, do!"

"Shoot him," said Jack.

"Murder, no! I am quiet—I won't say another word—I am quiet, indeed I am."

After this highly practical threat, Tom thought it best to hold his tongue, but he shook so with fear that he quite annoyed Dick, who had him so close at hand; but it was of no use asking him to be still, when, perhaps, it was really out of his power to be so, and Dick, therefore, put up with the infliction.

Claude took the lead, and passed right through the little thick plantation. He was rather surprised at getting quite so far without some degree of danger or something happening to let them know that the enemy were at hand; but yet he did not venture to congratulate himself upon an escape, for he could not believe that all the worst danger could go off so easily, like a mere puff of smoke.

Jack and Dick, no doubt, shared with him that opinion, for they were perfectly still, and the manner, indeed, of the whole three of them was that of men waiting for some catastrophe that they would have to meet as best they might.

The common was gained, and then even Jack, who might be considered to be the most cautious expectant of something amiss of the whole three of them, began to have hopes.

"We shall get clear," he said.

Hardly had the words escaped his lips, when there came the sharp crack of a pistol-shot upon their ears from some distance. That this shot was a signal of some sort, they felt convinced; and that it was not actually fired at them, the distance showed pretty clearly.

"Now for it," said Claude.

As he spoke, he urged his horse on, and instead of going by the regular cross path to the high-road across the common, he struck off to the left, country ways, over the green sward itself, and hardly had he done so, than he heard the bugle sound, that at once indicated to him that if the main body of the military had left the spot, some, at all events, remained to lend aid to the civil authorities. This was a contingency that Duval had not left out of his calculation; but still, at the most, it could only involve a few pistol shots after him, and as regarded speed, he knew quite well that his and his companions horses would at any time beat those of the soldiery.

"Forward—forward!" he cried; "the red coats will be upon us."

"Murder!" shrieked Tom Brereton.

Dick gave him rather a severe poke in the ribs with his elbow, coupled with an injunction to be quiet, and Tom was still again.

Dashing on towards the village of Ealing, they all three went, keeping as nearly as possible in a line behind each other, because by so doing, if they were fired at there was the better chance of escape, at all events, for two of them. Dick brought up the rear. Jack was quite willing to do so, but Dick would not let him. Perhaps, there was a little bit of calculation for the good of them all in this manœuvre of Dick's.

"They come!" cried Jack.

At these words, Claude looked round. He was very anxious to know the exact nature of the danger that awaited them, and the number, as it could be told at a glance, of their foes. He saw that there were two mounted men in plain clothes, and five, as he thought, of the military, so that, take them altogether, there were seven to three, which was rather fearful odds, considering all things, for it was not likely that any of the seven were men who would shrink from the fight.

"We can't tackle them," cried Claude; "we must show them a light pair of heels for it. Follow me: I will double upon them as soon as I possibly can. On—on."

The slight delay that had ensued while Duval was examining the number of their foes, and the diagonal line that he and his friends took in evading their enemies, while the soldiers and officers came on the high road converging towards the same point, which was the entrance to the village of Ealing, brought the two parties in closer contact than Claude would have desired; still, he hoped to reach the commencement of the village sufficiently before the enemy to enable him to make the chase that seamen call a stern chase, and in that case he knew that each moment would be to his advantage and to the advantage of his friends—for in fleetness, the horses of the highwaymen could laugh at those opposed to them.

Yet it was rather a ticklish thing, for the soldiers urged their horses on at a gallop; but Claude did reach the village first, though not so far in advance of the enemy as he hoped.

Probably the soldiers had a shrewd suspicion that the state of affairs would be very soon changed, and that if they did not succeed in doing something at once, they would not have much chance in a little while, for they suddenly fired their carbines at the party they were in pursuit of, and the report rang loudly in the morning air.

"Who's hurt?" cried Claude.

"No one," said Dick and Jack both at once.

"That will do, then. Now, then, we can bid them good-by."

They were upon the level road, and the pace they went at was so prodigious, that they soon left the soldiers far behind them. It is no exaggeration to say that they covered three feet of ground to the soldiers' two feet, so that the progress out of their way was rather considerable.

Claude, however, had no wish to go just then right away into the country, and he knew very well that to his right hand he would soon come to a lane that would lead him round by Hanger Hill towards London again, and he slackened his speed a little when he saw that the lane was close at hand.

"This way," he shouted, as he dashed up it.

"Hurrah!" cried Dick. "Here we are."

Claude pursued the lane for a mile before he drew rein, and then gradually pulling up his horse, he cried out—

"Now, who will get up a tree, and look for the Philistines?"

"I will do that," said Jack. "My horse will stand still, and spare me one-half of the trouble. I can get upon his back, and then standing, I can reach a bough that otherwise I should be some time getting at."

"Do it, Jack, at once then. Shall I hold your horse?"

"No, he will move if you do."

Jack patted the horse for a few moments, and the creature seemed to understand thoroughly what he intended it to do, for it stood perfectly still, while Jack clambered on to its back, and then stood on the saddle. He had taken his position under the bough of a large chestnut tree, which he could then just reach, and he quickly drew himself up into the body of the tree, and gained a position some thirty feet or so from the level of the ground.

"Can you see them?" said Claude.

"Yes."

"Ah, indeed; where are they?"

"Holding a council of war at the corner of the lane. They don't seem to know which way to go yet. Yes they do. They are going along the road, but reluctantly to all appearance. One of them points up this lane."

"Then he is the wisest among them."

"The others overrule him, and they all go on. We are quite safe. They are off and away."

"Come down, then, Jack."

"What am I to do with this fellow behind me?" said Dick. "I am rather tired of him, I can tell you; and the sooner you rid me of him the better."

"We will leave him here," said Claude. "Come, Mr. Tom Brereton, you know quite well that if we were to hang you to the first convenient branch of a tree we came to, it would be serving you as you deserve at our hands; but you are such a fool, that I cannot bring my mind to do it."

Tom Bereton made no reply.

"Untie the reins," said Dick, "and take him down. He is leaning with all the weight he can upon my back."

"He is dead!" said Claude.

"Dead!"

Dick gave such a start, that his horse took the alarm, and reared and plunged so, that he had some difficulty in getting the creature to be quiet again.

"Woa!—woa!—easy! You don't mean to say that he is dead, Claude?"

"You will soon see."

Claude unfastened the rein that had attached Tom Brereton to Dick, and then Tom fell heavily from the horse to the ground.

"There he lies," added Claude. "He is quite dead, and I can easily comprehend how it has happened. The fact is, Dick, he has saved your life!"

"Saved my life?"

"Yes. When the soldiers fired, the bullet that would have taken effect in your back, took effect in his, and the distance was too great for it to go through you both, or you would both have caught it."

Dick dismounted, and looked silently at Tom Brereton for a few moments Then he said—

"Well, I little thought when I offered to take him on my horse, that I was doing what would save me from death; but, after all, I must confess, that I would much rather him than myself caught the bullet."

"Particularly," said Duval, "as it was fired by his friends, and not by one of ours."

"Yes; that makes all the difference, I admit."

By this time Jack had dropped from the tree, and was looking at Tom Brereton.

"Ah," he said, "there's an end of him now, at all events. He won't trouble us any longer. The fool has brought his own destruction upon his own head."

"Hush," said Claude, "I hear the sound of wheels."

They all listened, and quite plainly heard the sound of carriage wheels in the lane. The vehicle, whatever it was, was not proceeding at a very great rate, so they had time to consider what they had better do.

CHAPTER CCXLIX.

THE FRIENDS ACQUIRE A VERY LARGE BOOTY.

THE approach of the vehicle, whatever it was, that was plainly to be heard, had the effect of hastening their resolves concerning what they were to do with the dead body of Tom Brereton.

"The best thing in the world," said Dick Turpin, "is to put it through the hedge into the meadow, and leave it to be found or not by any one who may chance to be passing across the fields."

"Very well," said Claude. "I'll take him. He and I were tolerably well acquainted while he lived, and so I don't much mind pulling him along now that he is dead. Come, Master Tom Brereton, you and I will go together through the hedge, and that is almost the last that I want to have to do with you."

With these words, Claude picked up the body, and forced it through a weak part of the hedge on to the green sward of the meadow adjoining the side of the lane, and then replacing as well as he could hastily the displaced brnaches of the briers, he rejoined his companions.

"Look out; it's a gig that is coming," said Dick.

Claude stood by his horse, and looked in the direction the vehicle was coming, and saw that, as Dick said, it was a gig. In it was seated a white faced man with a white cravat, so alarmingly tight, that it was evidently quite a matter of impossibility for him to turn his head in any direction without moving his whole body likewise.

At the sight of the three men and horses, the gig was stopped, and a look of intense alarm came over the countenance of the driver of it.

"Hilloa!" he said, "who are you?"

Claude walked up to him with an easy air.

"Why, sir," he said, "as you are a gentleman, we don't mind telling you that

we are on the look out for three highwaymen upon the road, and that the notorious Claude Duval is one of them.

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, I do; but, somehow, the villains have baffled us as yet, and we cannot find them, so we were just consulting what to do."

"And are you sure they are hereabouts?"

"Oh, yes; we traced them up this lane."

"Oh, what an escape for me! What an escape! I am the Reverend Peter Holmes, and am going to the Bank of England with a draft signed by the chairman and secretary of the Society for the Spiritual Regeneration of the younger children of Timbuctoo. The draft is for a thousand pounds."

"Indeed, sir! It is quite a good thing you did not encounter some unscrupulous person who might have taken it from you."

"Oh, but if they had, they would not have paid it at the bank, for they know me very well, and have orders not to pay the money to any one else."

"Then, sir, I presume that you are quite safe."

"Oh, but I have to come back with it, because it has to be decided between me and the chairman and the secretary—that is to say, we have to settle how it is to be used for the pious purposes for which it was collected."

"Exactly, sir. All we can do is to wish you good speed on your journey, and to beg of you to be very careful how you get back with the money."

The reverend gentleman seemed to be considering for a few moments, and then he said—

"Could I, do you think, in a reasonable way, make it worth your while to go with me to the Bank of England, and come back with me to my house, as a protection against the highwaymen you mention?"

"It is likely enough, sir. We should be very happy, of course, to give you any protection in our power upon the occasion, I am quite sure."

"Then, I tell you what, young man, you seem to be a very respectable officer, indeed, and I will give five guineas amongst you, if you can manage to protect me to the bank and back again, with my gig and my money."

"Allow me, sir, to consult with my brother officers a moment, and I daresay we shall find a means of meeting your wishes."

"Certainly—certainly, that is quite correct."

Duval, who could hardly keep his countenance, as he spoke to the parson who thus desired his protection, walked up to Dick and Jack, who had kept at a little distance, and said to them—

"Did you hear what we said to each other?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, I don't know a better chance of a thousand pounds than this. There is no doubt but it has been subscribed by fools, to go into the pockets of hypocrites, and we had much better have it than they."

"But how can it be done—shall we wait for him here?"

"If we all do so, he will be sure, after what I have told him, to get an escort of officers home with him. Now, what I propose is, that you two should wait here, while I go to the bank with him, in his gig, and bring him back to this spot with the money, where you two can rob us of it."

"A good joke," said Dick.

"Capital," said Jack. "Why, it wouldn't take you above two hours to go there and come back again. We can easily take a rest here until you return."

"You must take charge of my horse, too."

"Oh, yes. That, you know, you can leave us to do, Claude, with perfect confidence."

"I do, Jack; so now, I think, we understand all about it; and of all things in the world, I feel inclined to get possession of the money, that has been so stupidly subscribed to be so villanously used."

"Well, Mr. Officer," said the parson, "have you made up your mind?"

"Yes, sir," said Claude, advancing to the gig again, "my two comrades, as they have been specially ordered by the Secretary of State to remain here upon the look-out for Duval and his associates, dare not leave the spot; but I will leave my horse to their care, and ride with you to town and back again; and I can only say, that it will need to be a bold fellow who will take anything from



CLAUDE RETALIATES UPON THE BOY FOR HIS TREACHERY.

you while I am with you, for I am well armed, and so very scrupulous how I use my weapons when there is occasion."

As he spoke, Claude took his pistols from his pocket and began to examine the flints, which warlike demonstration had quite an effect upon the parson, and made him more than ever anxious to secure the services of one who would be so efficient a safeguard in case of danger.

"Very well," he said, "if you can manage to come, I shall be well pleased, and you may depend upon receiving your reward."

"You will be so good, sir, if you please as not to say anything to anybody about the reward, as we, of course, are bound to do these kind of jobs for nothing, you know, sir."

"Oh, no, I won't say anything."

"Thank you, sir, then I will accompany you with the greatest pleasure, and I certainly promise you that no highwayman shall have a chance of robbing you while I am with you."

"I am quite pleased," said the parson; "upon my life, I do feel now something like secure. The idea of me driving through these green lanes and such a hardened and diabolical ruffian as Claude Duval in them."

"It was a risk," said Claude, as he got into the gig. "Good-by, comrades. I shall soon be back with you."

"Perhaps you don't mind driving?" said the parson.

"Not a bit. I will do so with pleasure; and if you will permit me to go at a good pace, as I see your horse is quite capable of it, I shall be glad, as the sooner I rejoin my comrades the better. They might not, you see, sir, without me be quite a match for Claude Duval."

"Certainly—certainly. What is your name?"

"Bland."

"What, are you Bland, the well known officer of Bow Street?"

"The same, sir, at your service."

"I'm quite delighted, and I do believe from all I have heard of you, that you are a match for any highwayman that ever was. Now, indeed, I feel calm and secure, and I know that the money is quite safe."

"You may think of anything you like, sir, for the money is just as safe, to my thinking, as if it were in my pocket."

"Ha! ha! Mr. Bland; but I would rather have it in my own, you know."

"Of course, sir."

Claude put the horse to speed, and was soon clear of the green lane. Once upon the high-road, he knew that he was leaving his foes behind him; as, from the report of Jack, he was sure that they had gone right on towards Hanwell and Southall; so he went rapidly to London without fear of recognition.

It was lucky for Duval that he was dressed plainly. The fact was, that he always, when he went to the farm, dressed himself as unlike his general appearance on the road as possible, so that no one would be likely to know him seated quietly in the gig by the side of the parson.

"I hope, sir," said Duval, "that your benevolent intentions respecting the youthful population of Timbuctoo will be successful."

"Oh, ah, yes—to be sure."

"Is the mission a very successful one, sir?"

"Pretty well, pretty well. They are worthy ladies who subscribe to it; and as long as there is a reverend gentleman at the head of the affair, and another for the secretary, and a nobleman for the chairman, they don't mind."

'Don't mind what, sir?"

"Come, come, Mr. Bland, you are rather too curious."

"I hope not, sir. For my part I would rather see the money in your pocket, than hear of its going to Africa, for I am sure it would be of more use to you. There's an old lady, now, that I know something of, who has got ten thousand pounds to leave, and she don't know which of the societies to will it to."

"You don't mean that, Mr. Bland?"

"I do, sir."

"My dear Bland, and do you know her?"

"Quite well, sir, and she has asked me to inquire about the different societies for the conversion of the heathen, that she may be guided by my report."

Claude was merely throwing out a bait to gain the confidence of the

parson, as he was not a little curious to know how such affairs were managed.

"My dear Mr. Bland, allow me to assure you, that if you can only induce her to leave her money to our society, she will be highly gratified."

"What, when she is dead?"

"No—no. I mean that you will be highly gratified."

"I don't see how it is to gratify me, sir; for between you and me, I think all the money that is spent, or said to be spent, in converting little blackamoors, had better have been given to the poor and the destitute of our own country."

"Well, well, Mr. Bland, you are a man of the world."

"I rather think I am, sir."

"Not a doubt of it; and of course you do the best you can for yourself, like every one else in this sinful sphere."

"Rather, sir."

"Then, Mr. Bland, I feel that I may trust you with a degree of confidence that I should be very sorry to have in everybody. If you will induce the old lady you mention to leave her ten thousand pounds to our society, you shall have five hundred pounds for yourself. I give you my word for that amount."

"Five hundred pounds? That is not much out of ten thousand pounds. Make it a thousand pounds, and it's done."

"Done!"

"You will give me a thousand pounds if the old lady leaves her property to your society? That you clearly and distinctly promise?"

"That I clearly and distinctly promise."

"Then consider you have got it; and all I can say is, that if you send one penny piece of it to Africa, you are not the sort of gentleman I hope you are."

"I don't intend. Between you and me, my friend, I don't believe there is such a place at all as Timbuctoo; and if there is, all the little Heathens there may go to the ——, you understand, before they get any money out of me."

"All right."

The parson nodded and laughed.

"But how do you get the people to subscribe?"

"Why, our principal assistants are Lord Crashley, and a Mr. Gabble. They are both men eaten up with personal vanity, and they have no abilities to make themselves public men in a way that men of talent can do; so they take up what is known as the 'Public Charity Dodge.'"

"And the officials pocket the money?"

"Exactly."

"But don't these men subscribe a great deal of money."

"Oh, dear no. They only give their names as decoy ducks to others. Catch them subscribing! It's quite the other way; and it's an understood thing that they are never to be called upon for any money, so they put their names down for something handsome, and then never give it another thought. That's how they do it."

"Well," said Claude, "one must live and learn in this world; and, certainly, it don't improve upon acquaintance, I must say."

"Well, perhaps it don't; but don't you forget the old lady, Mr. Bland, and the ten thousand pounds."

"That you may depend I will not."

The horse in the gig under the skilful guidance of Claude Duval, went at a capital pace, so that Oxford Street was soon gained. There was not at that time—blessed quiet time!—one carriage in the streets of London to a hundred that are now, so that there was no difficulty in driving right on to the Bank of England, which now is only to be arrived at in any vehicle of less size than an omnibus, after half a dozen stoppages, and the risk of being smashed to pieces.

No one on the line of road took the smallest notice of Duval, although, no doubt, he passed many persons who would not have been a little pleased to have

cried out his name, and apprehended him. The parson leant back in the gig with quite a contented air, little suspecting who it was he was in companionship with in that vehicle.

The bank was reached, and while Duval waited in the gig, the reverend gentleman went to get his cheque changed, with the proceeds of which he very shortly returned. Claude was rather anxious to know if all were guineas, or if he had taken any notes, for the latter was not of much value to any one in the line of business that Duval was. The bag in which the parson had the money was heavy.

"All gold?" said Duval.

"No. Five hundred pounds in gold; and the rest in notes."

"Oh, that's pretty well; and, now, sir, I presume we have nothing to do but to get back again as quickly as we possibly can?"

"That is all, my friend; and you may depend upon your reward as soon as you get back to my house."

"I make no doubt of my reward," said Claude, "and did not from the first; and I cannot help thinking that it is a very good two hour's work."

"Pretty fair; but I hope you will sometimes have a better."

"Sir, you are exceedingly kind, and I can only say that I cordially agree in that hope, so very delightfully uttered."

"I told the officer who is on duty at the bank that I had you with me, and he said he knew you quite well, and would have come out to see you if he had had time."

"What an escape!" thought Claude. "And so he had not time to come and say, 'How do you do,' to a friend?"

"No; he was waiting to speak to one of the bank directors who was expected to come out every minute; but he told me to remember him to you."

This was a piece of real good luck, for if the constable at the bank had only stepped out to the street the plot must in a moment have been blown to the winds by his repudiating any knowledge of Claude Duval, and distinctly averring that he was not Bland, the officer.

If possible, Claude put the parson's horse more upon its mettle in going back to the green lane, near Hanger Hill, than in coming from it, so that Oxford Street was passed, and Tyburn Gate dashed through at a strapping pace. The parson, indeed, requested that he would not go quite so fast, so that Claude was compelled to moderate his speed a little; but still, with all that, the pretty little green lane was very soon in sight.

CHAPTER CCL.

CLAUDE REJOINS HIS COMPANIONS, AND THEY GO TO A WEDDING.

"WHY, here are some soldiers," said the parson.

At that word, soldiers, Claude looked up rather hurriedly, for he had lapsed into a sort of reverie upon the folly of people who part with their money to enrich charitable and religious societies, and thus deprive themselves of one of the greatest pleasures that the world can bestow upon human nature—the pleasure of personally doing good.

"Soldiers!" he said. "What soldiers?"

"Why, soldiers on horseback. Don't you see them, Mr. Bland?"

"Oh, yes."

Rather to his chagrin, we will not say alarm, for Duval was not the sort of man to be alarmed exactly, he saw coming evidently back, tired and dusty from their fruitless chase after him and his companions, the five soldiers and the two officers who accompanied them. Claude Duval felt in a moment that he was rather in very great danger indeed, or none at all.

"Yes," he said, "I see them, sir. They must have been upon extraordinary duty, for they look rather fatigued and tired."

The great thing for Duval to find out now was if either of the officers knew him personally. The strong probability was that they did, for, otherwise, it would not have done them much good to select them to accompany the soldiery.

"Oh, dear," said Claude, suddenly putting his handkerchief up to his face; "did you ever have the tooth-ache, sir?"

"Dear me, yes, but not of late years, Mr. Bland. Have you got it now, sir?"

"I have, indeed. Oh, such a shooting pain! It is really enough to drive any one quite mad. Oh—oh—oh!"

"Well, that is very unfortunate, indeed. But have patience: it cannot last very long, coming on in such a violent manner."

"Oh, can't it, though! Pray, sir, take the reins; I cannot see to drive. I do hope it will go away, soon."

Duval fell as far back in the gig as he could conveniently go, and almost entirely covered up his face with his handkerchief, so that but very little of him could be seen, and then he waited the coming up of the soldiers.

"Sir!" he said to the parson, "sir!"

"Well, what, Mr. Bland?"

"I have, by accompanying you to London, sir, gone out of the sphere of my duty, for you know, sir, as I told you, I was ordered, by the Secretary of State, to keep watch for Duval in the green lanes, and as both these officers know me, without a doubt—for what officer of the police does not know Bland?—I should be glad if the did not recognise me."

"But what can I do?"

"Will you be so good as to say that I am your servant?"

"Oh, no, I cannot, Mr. Bland. I am quite surprised that you should ask one of my sacred profession to lie."

"Why, it's as easy as thieving," said Duval.

"As what, sir?"

"Nothing—nothing. I did but jest, I was thinking of the society for the conversion of the little blackamoors at Timbuctoo, that was all, sir; but without any violence to your conscience, you can say I am a sick friend of yours, for if I get the old lady's ten thousand pounds, you know, I shall be a friend of yours."

"So you will, Mr. Bland, so you will, and as I certainly do not wish to get you into any trouble on account of neglecting your duty to come with me, I will shield you as much as I can."

"Thank you, sir."

By the time this little agreement was entered into between Claude and the parson, the soldiers had reached the spot, and the officers of police rode up to the gig.

"Gentlemen," said one, "did you meet any suspicious characters on the road?"

"No," said the parson.

"Oh—oh!" said Duval.

"What is the matter with the gentleman?" said the other officer. "Is he ill?"

"Yes," said the parson. "He is a sick friend of mine, poor fellow, and he is suffering great pain from the toothache, I assure you, gentlemen. Pray who are you looking for?"

"Claude Duval and his associates."

"Then I sincerely hope you may find them. I have been to London on some business, and should have been afraid to go but for the company of this friend of mine, who was a sort of protection to me on the road."

"And pray, sir, who are you?" said the officer who had first spoken, looking rather inquisitively at the parson and Claude. "We are bound to be rather particular who we let pass on the road, I assure you."

"You may be as particular as you like. I am the rector of the parish."

"You may be, sir, but we don't know it, and we don't take your word for it exactly. Pray consider yourself in custody."

"In custody!"

"Come—come, no resistance, if you please, or we shall clap a pair of darbies upon you and your friend in a moment."

"Darbies? Who is Darbies, my friend?"

Duval very gently put his hand into his breast-pocket, and grasped the stock of a double-barrelled pistol. He was resolved that he would not be taken without a struggle, but at the moment that he thought that struggle was quite invevitable, there rode up to the spot a livery servant on horseback, who was going towards town.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"Oh, that's right!" said the parson. "You know me. I think you are Mr. Price's groom, are you not?"

"I am, sir," said the servant, touching his hat.

"Well, then, I believe these police officers merely mistake me for Claude Duval the highwayman: will you have the goodness to say who I am?"

"Oh, yes, sir, certainly; you are the rector of the parish, sir, as everyone in this neighbourhood knows quite well."

"There," said the parson, "are you satisfied now?"

"Quite so, sir," said the officer, with a chagrined air. "But you will excuse us, sir, as we have a very difficult duty to perform, indeed."

"Don't say another word about it; as you are after that rascal Claude Duval, the highwayman, I can excuse anything that arises from zeal in the performance of your duty, in that particular; only I do think that I look more like a gentleman than a highwayman."

The officers were very much mortified that they had made such a mistake, and kept making excuses, while Duval was in an agony at the stupid delay of the parson, now that he might proceed without any hinderance to his doing so.

"Go on—go on," he said, in a low tone.

The parson touched the horse with his whip, and off they went again. Each moment that he left now his enemies behind him was a moment of intense gratification to Duval, for as they were proceeding to town, and he was going from it, the distance between him and them increased with great rapidity, and he was rejoiced accordingly.

"How is your toothache?" said the parson as he turned his horse's head up the green lane.

"Better."

"Ah, I told you how it would be, but you did not believe me. Folks, when they are suffering from pain, never listen to reason; but such a sudden and violent accession of the toothache could not possibly last long."

"You are right, sir; it is gradually dying away."

"Did you know either of those officers, Mr. Bland?"

"Oh, yes, both of them well. One of them is named Fat, and the other Taf."

"How very odd. Fat and Taf. Why, its just the letters reversed."

"Exactly so, sir. And now here we are where we started from, and my toothache, which I do believe comes on just at the convenient moment when it was necessary for me to hide my face from my friends, has gone again,"

"Why, you schemer," said the parson. "I don't now believe for a moment at you had the toothache at all, though I confess you took me in at the moment."

"Did I, though?"

"Yes, you did; you acted it capitally, I will say. But I don't see your brother officers yet. They ought to be hereabouts, I think."

"We shall see them, sir, in good time, never fear; but now that we are in this quiet lane, where we are tolerably secure from interruption, I will let you into a secret that very much concerns the one thousand pounds you have with you."

"Concerns my one thousand pounds! You don't mean it, do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, Mr. Bland, tell it to me at once. Do not keep me in ignorance another moment."

"I do not like to tell it to you very hurriedly, for fear it should be too great a shock to your feelings."

"Bother take my feelings! I have no feeling, and never had, but for my money. Anything that concerns my money is everything to me. Pray, Mr. Bland, do not keep me in suspense, for that is the worst of all."

"I will not, then. You will recollect that when I first met you upon this spot it was I who gave you the information that Claude Duval, the notorious highwayman, was about this neighbourhood."

"Yes—yes."

"Well, no one could be better able to give you that information, to a certainty, than myself."

"Of course not."

"Because I am that individual!"

"You are—that—oh, no—What—Murder!"

"I am Claude Duval!"

The parson opened his mouth and let his hands drop to his sides, as though he were about to give up the ghost. This ludicrous terror was highly amusing to Duval, who had a hearty contempt for the character of the parson, as he had himself explained it to him (Claude). For a few moments it seemed as though the rector were upon the point of fainting, but the thought, then, of the jeopardy that his beloved money was in, came over him and roused him to action, and in a shrill voice that echoed through the lane again, he cried—

"Murder!—murder!—murder!"

Duval immediately drew a pistol and placed the muzzle of it against his throat, crying—

"Another such shout, and it is your last in this world. I have but to press my finger slightly upon this hair trigger, and your brains are scattered in the lane."

The parson was silent in a moment.

"Listen to me," said Claude. "It is such men as you who bring true charity into contempt when it ought to stand upon the highest pinnacle in popular estimation, instead of being considered as one of the greatest humbugs in the metropolis. Nobody on earth now shall save your money from me and my companions, but if you will have it so, your life will likewise pay the penalty of your folly."

The parson had just sense enough left to comprehend what was said to him by Duval, and with a deep groan, he said—

"Oh, that I should have been such an idiot—oh, that I should have actually carried to town with me in my own gig the very man I so much dreaded! But say it is only a joke. Tell me again that you are Mr. Bland?"

"That I cannot do, for Claude Duval I am."

With this, Claude placed to his lips the small silver whistle that he always had in his waistcoat-pocket, and blew one loud clear note. It was answered by the appearance of Jack and Dick on the other side of the hedge, and Dick called out—

"Is all right?"

"Yes, Dick. Our friend, the parson, now knows who we really are, so pray make an appearance, and bring me my horse."

"Here he is," said Jack, as he threw on one side some portion of the hedge that they had employed themselves in effectually cutting down, so that it could be moved at a moment's notice by the hand. "Here he is, and as fresh as a rose in early morning, Claude."

"Oh, it's no mistake," said the parson, "it's no mistake! I see now that I am completely deceived."

"Yes," said Claude, "and now all I have got to say to you is—your money and your life, or your money without your life. Give it up quietly, and no harm will be done you, but if you resist, we must defend ourselves. We never resort to violence if we can help it, and we don't then unless it is quite forced upon us; so now, sir, you can please yourself."

"Take it—oh, take it," said the parson; and he drew a bag from beneath his seat of the gig, and handed it to Duval, who instantly placed it in his coat pocket.

"And now," said Claude, "allow me to introduce you to my two friends. If you please, reverend sir, this is Dick Turpin, of whom you may have heard?"

"Oh, dear, yes. Oh, the ——"

"And this reverend sir, is Sixteen-string Jack, of whom, in all probability, you have likewise heard something by popular rumours?"

"Yes, gentlemen, I have heard of you all. I can't compliment you upon your honesty, bnt if you let me go now at once, I shall say that you did rob me, certainly, but that it was done in as gentlemanly and good-humoured a style as possible, considering all things."

"We will not deprive you of the opportunity of saying that," said Claude; "but if I might advise so clever an individual, I should say that your best plan would be to keep the whole affair to yourself."

"Why so?"

"Because I don't think it will tell well; for, if you say much about the robbery, and make a racket in the country concerning it, I shall have to publish what you were good enough to tell me as the mode in which the money affairs of public charities are managed."

"That will do. Good-day."

"Let him go," said Duval. "Ha!—ha!"

"Ha!—ha!" laughed Jack and Dick. "Ha!—ha!—ha!"

The parson put his horse to a trot, and when he got about one hundred yards off he turned round in the chaise, and in a loud voice cried,—

"Ha—ha!"

Immediately, then, he laid the whip upon the horse's back, and went off at a furious gallop, but he need not have done so, for neither Duval nor his friends wished to pursue him.

"Well, he is a droll fellow," said Dick; "what did he mean by that, I wonder? One would think that he was in no laughing humour, at all events; but it was a hearty laugh."

"It was," said Jack.

"I don't comprehend," said Claude; "but it really is of no consequence. If he can laugh over his loss, let him."

"Yes—but," said Jack, "I'm afraid he is laughing over some scheme he has concocted against us; and as now he knows us all three well, it will be but wise to get away from this spot as quickly as possible. We do not know what force he may manage to bring against us."

"That's true," said Duval, as he mounted; "let us now be off, then, at once. We can give our cattle a gallop, for they must be well rested by this time; and I suppose they have feasted upon the fresh grass?"

"That they have, Duval. But where shall we go?"

"Let us get across the country towards Harrow. At the first post-office we come to, I will post a few lines to the farm, to let all them know that we are safe; for by this time they are tolerably anxious about us, no doubt."

"But they will have faith in our good luck," said Dick; "and I daresay they fancy we have distanced our foes by this time. Ah, this is the pace I like. It is a dashing one, and makes the blood dance in one's veins."

CHAPTER CCLI.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS MEET WITH A LITTLE DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE intimate acquaintance that Duval and his friends had with the neighbourhood was a great help to them, indeed. Without such a knowledge they could



DICK AND CLAUDE MEET WITH A SLIGHT MISHAP.

not have got across the country with the facility that they did; but now, by taking a northerly course, they in a very short time got to the Harrow Road, and halted at the little village of Harlesdon Green, which was then a very rural spot, indeed.

Even now that village, when you are fairly in it, is of a very primitive character

in some places; and the pretty rural lane leading to Willesden will well repay a visit.

Claude Duval stopped opposite the only inn which the village then possessed, and with a smile, he said,—

"I don't know of an easier adventure than our last, or one which to us has been productive of such large results with so little trouble. In two hours we have earned one thousand pounds!"

"Don't say we," said Jack. "You have had it all to yourself, Duval, this time. We have had little enough to do with it, Heaven knows!"

"Yes, Jack, I say we; for are we not by special agreement bound together for the purposes that bring us on to the road? Come, I am rather tired of the saddle. Suppose we make a halt here, and have some refreshment, for I think by this time we must be all in need of it?"

"With all my heart," said Dick.

"And me, likewise," said Jack. "This place seems as quiet as it is possible for any place to be so near to London; and there is a garden and a pretty grass plot in the centre of it."

"Then, let us ride in," said Claude; "I like to see to my horse while I take some refreshment myself."

The entrance to the garden was through a pretty little gate, and the three friends at once rode through it on to the little plot of grass that Jack had admired, and which the horses seemed to admire as much as he did, for Claude Duval had no sooner dismounted than his horse took a fancy to have a roll on his back, which he did, to the great derangement of the saddle and its appendages.

Claude laughed, and then there came bustling out of the house towards them the landlord, who was evidently in quite a passion.

"Hilloa, gentlemen!" he said, "this won't do. This is not the place to bring your horses into. We have capital stalls, and you will find good entertainment for man and beast; but we can't have the horses in the garden, you know."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Claude, "they will do no harm. Bring us the best you have in the eating line in the house, and a couple of bottles of the wine you can most recommend, and one bottle of brandy."

Such an order was to the imagination of the landlord rather magnificent, and he calmed down in a moment concerning the impropriety of the horses being upon the grass plot in the garden.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "of course, if you wish it, that is quite another thing. I like always to accommodate myself to the wishes of gentlemen as is gentlemen. Upon my life, it is quite a pleasant thing to see that horse enjoying himself in such a way. A very fine fellow, indeed!"

The landlord then bustled off to execute the order he had received, and Duval with his two friends sat down in a pretty little alcove in the garden, which was completely covered over by the boughs of a monster ash, of most luxuriant growth.

"Well," said Dick, "here we are; and if the refreshment of this place is as agreeable to us as this garden is pleasant and handy, we will come here again. I wonder, now, what sort of man the landlord really is as regards being trusted?"

"You would not," said Jack, "be so mad as to trust him, would you?"

"Oh, no; but it would be, you know, a wonderfully convenient thing to us if we could do so upon an emergency."

"This landlord," said Claude, "is human; and if it were worth his while to be a faithful friend to us, he would be such. Perhaps, at some other time, it will be worth the trying whether he would be so, and we must bear in mind that there are many men who would rather get from us a few guineas at a time, and often see us, than they would go through the notoriety and the obloquy of giving us up or betraying us to the police, and fingering a large reward at once."

"That I believe," said Jack; "but I am averse to making confidence. Hush! here he comes."

The landlord, followed by a very pretty young girl, now came to the alcove

and laid a cloth, upon which they spread abundance of cold meat and home-made bread, together with the wine and the brandy that had been ordered by Claude.

The three friends could not keep their eyes off the girl, she was so really beautiful. There was such a look of feminine archness upon her face, and her eyes sparkled, and such pretty dimples disported around her mouth when she laughed, that they were quite delighted with her appearance.

"Your daughter, my friend?" said Dick to the landlord.

"No, sir, my niece, and a very good girl."

"If she is as good as she is fair," said Claude, "she is good, indeed."

The girl blushed at the compliment, and hastily retired to the house.

"Ah, sir," said the landlord, "she is rather a wilful girl, though I own that she is good-looking. Now, sometimes the gentlemen of the hunt will come here for a glass of our old ale, and she won't be civil to them as she might be, you know. Lor! gentlemen, that girl might bring loads of customers to the house if she wouldn't be so coy."

"Oh, she is coy, then, is she?"

"Yes, gentlemen; but as I often say, what harm is there in a kiss, when it does good to the house? It might sell me a bottle of wine."

"So it might. You are a capital landlord, and a most exemplary uncle."

This irony was rather too fine for the capacity of the landlord, and he took it as a compliment, replying to it that he always did his best, and that business was business. He then left his guests to enjoy their refreshment by themselves.

It turned out that the wine was good, so that they really did enjoy the little spread amazingly; and after they had thoroughly satisfied their hunger, Dick said—

"Was the money all in gold, Claude?"

"No, half gold and half notes; but I don't know what we shall do with the notes. I suppose we shall have to let the Jews have them, to take to the continent, at their own price."

"That will be little enough."

"Yes, but to us they will be completely useless, for coming, as they did, direct from the Bank of England, of course the numbers were perfectly well known, and they will be stopped in all directions."

"But we might change them quickly."

"Yes; but we don't know who we may victimise by doing so, and perhaps be the ruin of some honest tradesman. We rob, but we do not rob indiscriminately."

"Certainly not. You are quite right, Claude, so the Jews must have them."

"I expect so; but now that we are in a quiet place where we can say that we have a few minutes to ourselves, the best thing we can do is to divide the money, for if anything should happen to me, it is not then all lost to you two."

With these words, Claude Duval took the bag from his pocket containing the parson's money, and laid it on the table before him. It was a stout linen bag, such as is used for cash at the banking-houses, and was tied up with a piece of whipcord very tightly.

"He has taken care of it," laughed Dick.

"I dare say they tied it up so well for him at the bank," said Claude, "as he says they knew him. I wonder how I should have got out of the scrape if he had brought the bank officer out to see his old friend Bland?"

"It would have been one of the most awkward things that can be imagined, Claude," remarked Dick. "In the middle of London, too! Your only plan would have been to have run for it, and tried to reach some of the old family kens that are about Bishopsgate."

"I suppose that would have been about the only chance. But here is the money. The gold we can divide, and the notes—Hilloa!"

Dick and Jack sprung to their feet, and Claude looked in amazement at the contents of the bag. A quantity of farthings and old buttons rolled from it, together with some folded pieces of a newspaper.

"Done!" said Claude.

Dick and Jack looked as blank as possible, and then Claude, all at once, burst into a roar of laughter.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" he said. "This is good. I don't think I will ever set my wit up against a parson again. He has fairly done us, comrades. Look here—see what our one thousand pounds has diminished to! Oh—oh!"

"Confound him!" cried Dick.

"Hang him!" growled Jack.

"Well, but isn't it a good joke?"

"Joke?" shouted Dick. "No, I don't think it is a joke at all. It's a swindle. How the deuce could he take it into his head to serve us such an abominable trick as this, I wonder?"

"I can only account for it in one way," said Claude, wiping the tears from his eyes, which had started there in his mirth. "You may depend when he started from home before he met with us he provided himself with this bag of farthings in case of meeting with a highwayman on the road here, and when I declared myself to him, he thought that he might as well try it upon me?"

"You recollect how he laughed when he got to a little distance from us, and then at what a pretty rate he went off?"

"To be sure I do, and we laughed likewise; but he has got the laugh at us now."

"But he shan't have it long," said Dick. "He lives somewhere, and the money is in his house, or else he has a few brains that can be reached by a pistol-shot, I think."

"Now, Dick," said Claude, "with all due deference to you, you are talking nonsense, old fellow."

"Nonsense?"

"Yes, arrant nonsense. I am to the full as disappointed as you are, but I am not savage over it. The parson was quite justified in serving us such a trick if he could. I don't mean to say but that I should like to give him something for his cleverness; but it must be something very different from the violence of mere revenge."

"You are right, Claude—you are right," said Dick, as he sat down. "I ough to know better, but it is provoking."

"There, Dick, we agree. Hush! the landlord's pretty niece is coming this way I think, for I see her in yonder path."

The young girl approached the little alcove, and without waiting for anything to be said to her, she said in a low tone—

"Go at once. If you know yourselves to be such as other men may inquire after, with intentions of violence, go at once, and do not let this place be made the scene of death, perhaps!"

Dick and Jack half rose.

"Sit still," said Claude. "What is it, my dear, that you would warn us of?"

"Two mounted men are at the front door of the house inquiring for three such as you seem, and they tell my uncle to amuse you here as long as he possibly can."

"A thousand thanks."

"Oh, no, I want no thanks, but all I ask of you is to come here no more, for my uncle will betray you, although you are his guests, and I——"

"And you? Pray go on."

"I have no more to say. Look to your own safety."

The girl immediately ran off towards the house again.

"This may be serious," said Claude.

"It's the parson, I'd wager a thousand pounds," said Dick.

"And I a thousand buttons and farthings," said Claude, "for here they are, and I shouldn't care who won the stakes."

"How can you joke in such an emergency as this?"

"He always does," said Jack. "I never knew him begin to be so jocular as when he did not know if his life were his own for the next five minutes."

"And why not?" smiled Claude. "I disarm fate of all he procures to injure me by laughing at him. You may depend upon it that to laugh at our misfortunes is your only true philosophy; and by continually making a practice of it, you get regularly into the habit, so that if anything happens amiss, it is quite a capital jest, and fails in all its powers of annoyance."

Claude was losing no time, though, while he was speaking, for he had risen from his seat and put on his hat. At the moment that he did so, a boy of the most scampish look raced into the garden, and deliberately taking Claude's horse by the bridle, he cried, as he tried to lead it from the place—

"Kim up—gee ho!"

"Well," said Claude, "that's cool."

In a moment or two he was behind the boy, and caught hold of him by what he thought was a fur cap he had upon his head, but it turned out to be his own head of hair.

"If you please," said Claude, "I prefer my horse here."

"Oh, dear, I'm cotched!" said the boy; and then diving his hand into his pocket, he got out a clasped knife, which he tried to open with his teeth.

"Oh, indeed," said Duval, "you are such a young viper, are you? Then I must get rid of you."

Close at hand was a blackthorn bush or hedge, that separated the public garden of the inn from the little kitchen garden of the establishment, and in a moment the boy found himself swung through the air, and then alighting exactly into the centre of the blackthorn hedge, which, with its millions of prickles, resented the intrusion in the most energetic manner.

The boy roared for mercy, but blackthorn hedges are deaf to such appeals. The noise that he made, however, was such, that the landlord cantered into the garden, crying out—

"What's the matter—what's the matter?"

"Nothing particular," said Claude, as he mounted his horse. "What's to pay, landlord, for what we have had?"

"Oh, gentlemen, you are not going yet?"

"Yes we are. Get out of the way, unless you want to be ridden over."

"But just step into the house. I have got some rare old pictures I should like to show you, some of which will make you laugh till your side ache again. Pray dismount, and come in."

"What is to pay?" cried Claude.

"Oh, dear, they will go! It's three guineas."

"Moderate! There's one of them, then," added Claude, as he gave the landlord a cut with his horsewhip across the shoulders that made him dance with pain.

Dick and Jack followed Claude's example, and the landlord got three such slashes upon his back for his reckoning, that he roared again. The friends reached the little gate conducting into the high-road, and there they found about eight or ten horsemen drawn up to dispute their progress, while two or three country fellows, on foot, with pitchforks, hovered in the rear.

CHAPTER CCLII.

CLAUDE FINDS THAT THE PARSON'S FARTHINGS ARE OF USE.

THE situation of affairs looked anything but pleasant now, for the party opposed to the progress of the friends did not seem, by any means, of the sort to give way, upon a trifling consideration, to the highwaymen.

The only symptoms of consolation were to be observed among the country

fellows in the rear, with the pitchforks; and they looked as though they would just as soon be somewhere else, and, indeed, no doubt they were quite prepared to run upon the first opportunity that presented itself for so doing.

"Hold!" cried one of the horsemen. "Bloodshed in this affair would only be folly: you are our prisoners."

"And pray, what for?" said Claude.

"On suspicion. That is quite enough for us; and I beg to inform you, that when I take a thing into my head, there's no such thing as getting it out again. I am called obstinate Jones, and am well known all over this part of the country for my determination; therefore, you had better give in at once, as you see I am opposed to you."

"Perhaps," said Duval, "you may get something in your head by your obstinacy, that you will be very glad to get out of it, but will not have the chance."

"What do you mean?"

"A pistol bullet."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Now, my friends, you hear what this fellow says? We have made up our minds to apprehend him and his two assistants, for we can have no doubt of what they are. Highwaymen they were, and highwaymen they are, and we shall be doing a public good by——"

"Pray be quiet, Mr. Jones," said another of the horsemen. "All this talking is of no avail. Allow me to say, that we are in such force that we ought to go in and win. Come on, friends; let us no longer parley with these fellows."

Upon this, the horseman made a dash forward to catch hold of Duval by the collar; but he was foiled by Claude giving just a touch to the rein of his horse, and swerving on one side, so that the man nearly fell to the road-way. Several of his friends, however, had followed him, and among the rest obstinate Jones; but, as yet, no fire-arms had been used by either side. It was a kind of failing with Claude, not to make use of his pistols until he was fired at by the foe.

The butt-end of the large horse-pistol that Claude had in his hand, very probably did quite as much execution as firing it would have done, and that he used liberally enough, for he laid it with such right good will upon the head of obstinate Jones, that down that worthy went as though he had been struck by lightning.

"Fire upon them!" said a voice.

A couple of pistols were discharged at Duval. The bullet from one of them knocked his hat off, and the other hit him on the shoulder without doing him any material injury.

"Forward!" shouted Claude, and his two friends knew perfectly well what he meant, and by suddenly applying the spurs to their horses, they all three succeeded in getting from the throng of horsemen that were pressing around them. Duval had a pistol ready for firing in his hand, but at the moment he thought of using it at the mounted men, one of the rustics with a pitchfork made a savage dig at his horse, and did indeed slightly wound the animal.

"Ah!" said Claude, "that I cannot and will not forgive."

As he spoke he levelled his pistol, and the bullet went through the fellows head.

The occurrence had at once the effect of dispersing the men who were on foot, and they scampered off as hard as they possibly could go, shouting for help as they went.

The horsemen, however, were not so easily shaken off, for although Claude and his companions had got temporarily free of them, they were well armed, and did not feel disposed yet to give up the idea of apprehending the three friends.

"Fire! fire upon them!" cried a voice. "They will have it."

"Stoop," said Claude.

Bang! bang! bang! went three or four pistol shots, and the bullets whistled over their heads.

"That will do," said Claude; "now for our broadside, since the enemy have tried their luck —fire!"

They all three fired at the horsemen, and then without waiting even for the smoke of their own fire-arms to pass away, in order that they should see if they had done any damage, they turned and went off at full speed.

"On—on," cried Claude. "Let us get clear of our pursuers, at least. On—on. They have no chance against us at a race."

This was a fact that both Dick and Jack knew pretty well, and although Claude's horse was a little restive on account of the wound he had received from the pitchfork, he went at a dashing pace.

The effort that was made to pursue them by four of the horsemen was so weak a one, that it is doubtful if any of the four really put their horses to speed in the affair, and they soon dropped off, leaving Claude and his friends to pursue their route at leisure. When Claude found out that such was the state of things, he pulled up, and said in a very anxious tone of voice—

"Who is hurt?"

"I am a little," said Dick, as he help up his hand.

"Not much I hope?" said Claude.

"Oh, no, it's a little scratch with a bullet, that's all. If it had only hit a little lower it would have rattled about among my finger bones, and if it had only hit a little higher, it would have gone past me altogether, which would have been by far the most comfortable course for it to have pursued, in my opinion; but as it is I caught it."

Dick's hand was bleeding, and Jack at once began to tie it up with a handkerchief.

"You escaped?" said Claude, addressing Jack.

"Yes, as far as I know. If there's a bullet lodged in my brains, I am not quite aware of it, that's all I have got to say about it. But you, Claude, I'm afraid they touched you."

"On the shoulder, yes; but, after all, it is nothing. As Dick says, though, if it had only been a little lower it might have done me harm, and if it had been a little higher, it would have been a little pleasanter."

"Let me bind it up for you."

"Oh, no. It has done bleeding; but if you will dismount, Jack, and see if that rascal has done any serious hurt to the horse, I shall thank you. It was a cowardly attempt."

"It was," said Jack. "Just place your hand on my horse's bridle, Claude. I don't feel any compunction at the fate of the fellow who would attack the horse. It was a dastardly thing."

"I'm afraid I blew his brains out," said Claude; "but the fact is, I can take am injury to myself pretty calmly, as Heaven knows I have taken and forgiven many; but I cannot stand by and see any animal ill-used, or attempted to be hurt by any one. Is he much damaged?"

"Hardly a bit, Claude. The point of the fork has just raised the skin on the shoulder here, in a long furrow, that is all."

"I am glad of that, indeed; but it was a cowardly thing to touch the creature in such a way. It won't lame him, Jack?"

"Not a bit."

"Then I feel a little better, for if it had, I don't know what I should have done. You can hardly calculate the kind of attachment that I have formed towards this animal that has carried me through so many dangers."

"I can easily understand it," said Jack, as he mounted.

"And I likewise," cried Dick. "Why, I wouldn't part with my gallant little steed for the best thousand pounds that was ever laid down before any man. But what is to be the move now, friends? It seems to me as if society at large were trying to make the roads unsafe for us, instead of us attacking society."

Claude laughed.

"That," he said, "is what they say of hunting the tiger in India. It is fine sport, they say, hunting the tiger, but when the tiger turns round and takes a fancy to hunt you, it is not by any means so remarkably pleasant."

"I should say it was not!"

"Ha! ha!" cried Jack. "Don't complain of nothing to do. Here's a coach."

"A family coach?"

"As big as a house, almost.—No—it's a mourning coach."

"The deuce it is!—Perhaps it's a funeral, and if so—No—it is only a single coach; but a mourning coach it is to all intents and purposes. Jack, will it be worth while to stop such an equipage, think you?"

"Hardly," said Dick.

"I don't know that," said Jack. "If there are persons in it, they are coming home from a funeral you may depend, and there is no reason why they should not have purses in their pockets, as well as any one else."

"True—true," said Claude; "so let us stop the mourning coach."

The mourning-coaches of those days differed in no respect to those that now lumber and wheeze along our thoroughfares; as they were then, so they are now, composed of old carriages blackened over to the sombre tint of fashionable woe. The vehicle which had so very unexpectedly come into sight of the three companions, was one of the oldest and most rickety of its class; and as it came along, drawn by the two stately long-tailed black horses, it swayed to and fro and kept up such a wheezing and groaning upon its springs, that you might have heard it a considerable distance off.

"It looks like cruelty to stop it," said Claude, laughing.

"A mercy, rather, to those who are within it," said Dick.

"Decidedly so," said Jack, "for if their teeth be not all what is called on edge by this time, they have no senses."

"Come on, then."

Claude galloped up to the coach, and while Jack and Dick without a word stationed themselves in the middle of the road, and each levelled a pistol at the coachman, Duval went to one of the windows.

The coachman understood pretty well what was wanted of him, and dropping the reins in a moment, he rolled off the box with an expedition that no doubt was very unusual with him, and dropping upon his knees, the moment he got to the ground, he cried—

"Oh, spare my life. Take all I have—which is nothing—but spare my life, gentlemen—oh, do!"

Dick was rather afraid that the horses might move on, so he held them while Jack was laughing at the terror of the coachman, and pretending to be only puzzled about where exactly to hit him; but in a moment or two the coachman thought of a notable device to protect himself, and in the most ludicrous manner that can be conceived, he held his hat between him and Jack's pistol, dodging it about as Jack moved the muzzle of the weapon, as though that would save him.

Claude, when he got to the door of the coach, at a glance saw that there were no ladies, and in a voice that sufficiently showed he was not to be trifled with, he cried—

"Your money or your lives, gentlemen! Be quick!"

CHAPTER CCLIII.

THE ADVENTURE WITH THE HEARSE, AND THE REFUGE AT KENSINGTON.

THE commotion that these words from the lips of Claude Duval produced in the coach was rather great.

There were no less than six persons in the vehicle, and they looked at each other, and then at the one man who had the audacity to attack them, for a few moments in wondering silence.

"Quick, if you please," said Claude. "I have no time to stand waiting your leisure. Your money, and watches, and rings, gentlemen, if you please."

"Well, that's cool," said one.

"Very," said another.

"Pray, my friend, are you aware," said a third, "that your conduct subjects you to the greatest suspicion of being a highwayman?"



CLAUDE COUNTERFEITS A LOVER AND TAKES UNTO HIMSELF A WIFE.

Claude could not exactly at the moment make up his mind whether those words were spoken in genuine simplicity, or were intended for a bit of grave irony at his expense; but he replied in a firm, clear tone—

"Gentlemen, I am not in a jesting mood. This is a matter of stern business with me. You see I am armed, and it is better to give up to me quietly what I require, than to force me to use violence."

"But we are six."

"If you were sixty, I would rob you. This is the highway."

"Well, that's an argument, certainly. I tell you what it is, Mr. Highwayman—gentlemen, when they go to a funeral, do not carry arms with them, and so I came without any, or you would not get my purse quite so easily. There it is. Take it."

"Thank you, sir. Now, gentlemen, be quick."

With some reluctance the purses were handed to Duval; but one, as he withdrew his hand, made a snatch at the pistol that Duval held in his left hand, and the barrel of which rested on the sill of the coach-window.

The attempt to drag it from Duval was unsuccessful, and with a shake of the head, he said—

"Now, sir, what if I were a hasty man, instead of being one with rather more than an ordinary share of temper? I should shoot you in a moment, if I were such."

The gentleman shrunk back.

"Oh, there is no danger, sir," said Claude. "I have stood a shot before now without returning it, and probably had I been in your situation, I should have tried the same thing."

"Who are you?" said the gentleman—"you are the devil himself, or Claude Duval."

"The latter, at your service."

"If I did not think so! Here is my watch. You will find it a good one, and here is my ring, that I value far more than its worth, which does not exceed a few guineas; but you must have it."

"Oh, no; keep it."

"Can you be so generous?"

"Ah, sir," said Claude, with a smile, "it is easy to be generous with what don't belong to one."

"I won't be robbed," said an old gentleman in a corner, who up to now had not said a word. "I won't stand it!"

"Oh, have I not had your purse, sir?" said Claude.

"No, nor you shan't either! There now. Be off with you, you vagabond! I never was robbed, and I ain't going to begin now."

"Then," said Claude, "I very much regret that I may possibly be of some inconvenience to these other gentlemen; but as I shall have to blow out the few brains you have, why I——"

As he spoke, Claude threw up the pan of his pistol, and sorted the priming.

"Oh, Lord, no!" cried the old gentleman. "Take the money! Oh, dear!—oh, dear! take the money: but I only hope I shall have the satisfaction of living to see you hanged some day."

"Thank you, sir—thank you. Your watch, if you please. Come, be a little quicker in your movements, if you please."

"Take it, you villain; and as I say, I only hope I shall see you——"

"Oh, you said that before, sir."

"Well, I have only to add to it that I would go twenty miles any day for the gratification, that I would."

"A very kind and christian-like idea," said Claude. "And now, gentlemen, I will bid you good day, and—Ah!"

Jack had blown a shrill call upon the whistle that he always had with him, and Claude knew that it was a warning of danger. Upon turning quickly, he saw Jack standing as high in his stirrups as he could, and looking across the fields.

"What is it, Jack?"

"The Philistines."

"Very well—I have completed the present job. Let us be off. Drive on, coachman, as soon as you like; your load is a trifle lighter, but not much."

"This way," cried Jack. "There is a strong force coming across the meadows. It is time we were off."

Duval's horse was a few inches taller than Jack's, and by raising himself in the stirrups, Claude was therefore enabled to take in a rather more extended line of vision. The sight that he saw in the meadows, about half a quarter of a mile off, was one sufficient to excite serious forebodings.

There were about twenty well-mounted men, with arms glistening in their hands, coming right on in the direction of the spot upon which the robbery had been committed.

"Humph!" said Claude. "This is a case in which it is wise to show your foes a swift pair of heels. Come on."

They did not pause another moment, but at a full gallop they dashed past the coach that was still stationary in the middle of the road, for the coachman had not yet summoned up sufficient courage to mount his box again and be off.

The speed at which Duval and his two friends went made them look more like three apparitions than living men, and they were very soon quite out of sight of the coach.

It would appear now, from the conduct of the strong force of mounted men that were coming by a short cut over the meadows, that they were well aware of the spot of ground upon which Duval and his comrades were stopping, and that their object had been to take them by surprise; for the moment the three highwaymen started off on such a gallop, the whole party renewed its speed, and speedily got into the main road, through a gate that a countryman officiously opened for them.

"There they go!" cried the man. "There they go—right away down the road. I was a-hiding, and seed 'em rob the coach—but I didn't say nothing, in course."

"And why not?" shouted the foremost of the horsemen.

"He! he!" laughed the countryman. "Why not? Ho! ho! That be a good joke. I beant a fool quite."

"Come on, my friends," cried the foremost horseman, now, paying no further heed to the countryman's protestations regarding his own wisdom. "Come on! We must have them now. It may be a long chase, but they must give in at last. On—on!"

With a cheer, for their numbers gave them courage, the whole party now put their steeds to speed, and dashed on after Claude Duval and his friends on the high road.

The principal disadvantage that the highwaymen now were under, consisted in the fact, that the whole of that part of the country in which they were had got gradually alarmed, and was cognisant of their presence somewhere or another about that spot. In every individual they saw an enemy, and, unfortunately, their course was towards London, and they were such a short distance from the metropolis, that there was, in truth, every likelihood of meeting foes in front, as well as by being hotly pursued by those behind.

This was a state of things that, no doubt, would have appalled men more accustomed to face extraordinary dangers than were our friends; but of all persons, they were the least likely to allow themselves to be beaten down by the difficulties of their present situation.

After the hair-breadth escapes they had had from time to time, and the adventurous kind of life they had led, we must not suppose that a trifle would subdue their spirits.

Confident in the speed of their horses—confident in their own courage, they rode on, until an unexpected circumstance began to show Claude, that since speed would be much longer out of the question, and since force would not avail against so many foes, they must have recourse to finesse to save themselves.

The circumstance that altered the whole aspect of affairs was, that Claude found his horse beginning to fail him, and upon glancing to the ground, he saw that the wound the animal had received from the dung-fork, and which had looked to be so superficial, was bleeding profusely.

"Hold!" he cried, and he drew up within as small a pace as he conveniently could. His two comrades shot past him for some distance before they could

stop their steeds, but they did so as soon as possible, and turned and came back to him.

"For mercy's sake let us get on," cried Jack. "Every moment now is most precious to us."

"It is," said Dick. "What is the matter, Claude?"

"Everything. Look at my horse."

"Good gracious!" cried Jack.

Poor Jack was not exactly the man he was once, when he was upon the moment equal to any emergency; but still he had some of the old spirit left in him, and he saw in a moment what was necessary to be done for the horse that was wounded.

With a marvellous celerity, he tore open the vallise that was at his saddle-back and got out a bottle, from which he smeared a kind of white ointment on to his handkerchief. Then plucking from the road-side a handful of fine grass he made it as flat as he could and placed it over the wound of the horse. The handkerchief then he placed over it, and the white composition that he had taken from the bottle caused the handkerchief to adhere so fast to the coat of the horse, that the poultice of grass was well kept on, and the bleeding stopped.

"What was it?" said Claude.

"A blood vessel," said Jack, "that, no doubt, was grazed by the pitch-fork, and which would have given no trouble if the horse had had a night and a day to rest, but which has given way with the hard gallop he has had."

"Ah! no doubt."

"Mount and be off again," said Dick.

Claude put his foot in the stirrup, but the horse shook and hung its head, and he withdrew it again.

"It's of no use," said Jack mournfully. "The creature would go down with you the first step, Claude."

"Then we are in for it," said Dick, "and no mistake. Hark! how those fellows are coming on. It's like thunder."

"Fly!" cried Claude. "You two can save yourselves. I implore you do so. Leave me here. Good-by both of you. Be off."

CHAPTER CCLIV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN HAVE TO ABANDON THEIR HORSES.

"Just say that again, Claude," said Dick, "that I may be sure of what you mean, my old friend, for I don't exactly think it was you who advised me to leave a friend in distress."

"Nor I either," said Jack.

"Nay, but self-preservation is the first law of nature. I cannot go with you, so you must go without me."

"Not I."

"Nor I; and as far as that goes, Claude, what is to hinder you from mounting my horse? I don't mean to say that the creature will carry double for many miles, or that it will make such good speed as when it has only one on its back; but it will go for a time."

"I should only impede you, Dick."

"Claude, you impede us both now," said Jack. "Is this fair to keep us here parleying with you, while our enemies are gaining on us at every step?"

Claude saw that if he were to persevere in his opposition he should run the risk of sacrificing his two friends. He no longer hesitated, but managed to scramble up behind Dick.

"That's right," said Jack; "now let us be off."

"And abandon my gallant steed?" said Claude. "Oh, that is, indeed, a pang to me. Stop, Dick. I will shoot it first. It shall not fall into the hands of my enemies."

"Hold!" said Jack. "You don't know what you are saying, Claude. Do you think your enemies have any animosity against your horse? Quite the contrary. They will take capital care of it, and who knows but you may recover it again?"

"There is hope in that. Off and away, then!"

By this time their pursuers had made great progress, and the position of Duval and his friends became one of the most doubtful character. Nevertheless, they did gallop off, and Dick, seeing a turning to the right that appeared to lead somewhere among trees and fields, took to it, for he felt by the manner in which his horse plunged forward, that it could not long sustain both his weight and that of Claude's.

"On—on!" cried Jack. "They see us, I do think."

Dick urged his horse forward until they came to a little kind of brook, and then the creature made an attempt to leap it, and fell, throwing off both its riders. Claude was not hurt, but Dick was a little stunned.

"Oh, this will be fatal!" said Jack.

"Not so," said Claude; "we have a few minutes yet that we can call our own. Yonder is a cottage. We must get in there for safety. I advise that we strip the horses of all their garniture, and turn them both into yon meadow. Who shall say that they are ours? The officers will see them quietly grazing, and probably take no notice of them."

"A good idea," said Jack.

On the moment, he began to carry the thought into operation. Dick was too much confused by his fall to know very well what they were about, and he allowed Claude to lead him to to the cottage, while Jack took the saddles and bridles from the horses, and hid them under the hedge, and then he turned both the animals into the field.

"You are not much hurt, Dick?" said Claude.

"Oh, no—no! only a little tap on the head. The trees are not spinning round and round with me half so fast as they were a moment or two ago. I shall be all right soon."

"I am rejoiced to hear it."

Jack soon came on at a quick pace behind them, and the sound of his feet had the effect of rather alarming Dick a little. He faced about hastily, saying—

"Your pistols, Claude—your pistols! Where are they? I hear some one coming."

"It's only Jack. All's right, Dick."

"Oh, Jack, is it? How confused I am still, to be sure. And where are our horses, old fellow?"

"All safe."

"Oh, well, if you say they are all safe, I know they are, and no mistake."

"On—on with you!" cried Jack, "or we shall be seen."

"This will do," said Claude, as he pushed open the door of the cottage, although at the time he did so he did not by any means feel sure that it would do, and had a strong suspicion that they might have to fight for their lives yet.

The cottage belonged to a labourer and his family. Fortunately, the only portion of the family that was at home was a girl of about twelve years of age; but the labourer and his wife were there, and they both started to their feet at the moment of the entrance of Claude and his friends.

The man was smoking a pipe, and he called out—

"Hilloa! Who are you, I wonder? You don't make much ceremony in coming into a man's house, I take it."

"Hush, Robert," said the wife, "they are gentlemen."

"Gentlemen be hanghed! I don't care. I pays my way, and since I have got the fifty pounds my brother Bill left me, I don't care for nobody, not I."

"There is no safety here," said Dick.

"Yes," said Claude. "Let me manage the affair."

Advancing, then, to the man, Claude looked him steadily in the face, saying—

"Hark you, my friend. I am Claude Duval, the highwayman, and these are two friends of mine. The officers are after us, and if you give us up, you will get a good reward—as much as five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred pounds! Oh, won't I!"

"No, you won't."

"What?"

"I say you won't, because if you do, your throat will be cut by some friends of mine as soon as they can conveniently spare time to do it; but if you hide us from the officers, I will give you this bag of money. It contains the splendid booty for which we have got into this scrape—a thousand pounds."

"A thousand pounds!" cried the labourer, staggering back.

"Yes, a thousand pounds. Our lives are worth, to us, more than that sum; but it is all we have with us—Hide us somewhere, and the money is yours."

"Oh, won't I!"

"That is right. There is not a moment to lose."

"Oh, Robert," said the wife, "where can you hide three men?"

"In the dry well," said the girl.

"Ah, yes, that's the very place," said the labourer. "Come this way, and I'll defy the devil himself to find you. Perhaps you won't like the place, though?"

"We will tell you that when we see it."

The man led the way to the back garden of his cottage, and showed Claude and his friends a dry well of about twelve feet only in depth, down which they could jump with ease, and which would just about hold them standing together.

"Now, I tell you what," said the labourer, "you three get in there, and I'll let down an old piece of tarpaulin on to your heads, and above that again I'll throw some straw and garden litter; and if that don't hide you, the deuce is in it."

"Don't smother us," said Dick.

"Oh, never fear, you'll get air enough."

"Hark!" said Jack. "Do you hear the horses' feet in the lane?"

They all listened, and they heard a loud voice say—

"Let a couple of men, with their fire-arms ready, stand by that stile, and another two of them keep guard at the beginning of the lane."

"Quick—quick! In with you," said the labourer.

The friends no longer hesitated, but got into the old dry well. The piece of tarpaulin was let down upon their heads, and the litter was thrown upon it. The weight was nothing, but the concealment was perfect.

"Claude," whispered Dick.

"Yes—yes. Are you all right, now, Dick?"

"Oh, yes, yes; but, I say, the parson's bag of dummies will do good service yet, won't it?"

"Capital!"

"Oh, don't talk," said Jack; "and don't you be laughing, Dick. How can you?"

"Oh, but it is such a capital thing."

"Hush! Oh, hush!"

The attention of the whole three of them was now directed to a scene of great confusion that took place in the cottage. It was quite evident that the pursuers were impressed with the idea that the three highwaymen had sought shelter there, and that they were in some hiding place about the little building. The labourer was expostulating, the officers were screaming, and occasionally the shrill voice of the woman protesting were heard above the other sounds.

"Do you want to knock my place down?" said the labourer. "What is the use of banging the walls of my little bit of a crib at that rate, I should like to know?"

"Oh, you ruffians!" shouted the woman, "what do you mean by it? Do you think that Heaven knows how many highwaymen can get under a chair, or up the chimney? Perhaps you had better look in the flower-tub, or the tea-caddy for them."

"There's my silver thimble up stairs," said the daughter; "would you like to look inside that for them?"

"They are here—they must be here!" cried a voice. "They can't disappear underground!"

"I don't know that," whispered Dick.

"Hush!—oh, hush!"

At this moment, a party of the officers sallied out into the garden, and began to look about them with rage and disappointment, for there was positively no perceptible hiding-place in it.

"Confound you, where are they?" cried one.

"How should I know."

"Do you mean, now, to tell us that a party of rascals did not a little while ago rush into your cottage, without even so much as asking your leave to do so?"

"Why, if you came to that, they did."

"Ah, now it is coming out, is it? Upon my word, you are a pretty fellow! And so, you admit that a set of vagabonds did make a rush into your cottage?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ah—good! Hilloa, friends, come round and listen to this fellow's confession. He is getting a little alarmed now, I take it, and is about to tell the truth at last. Let me interrogate him."

The officers collected around the labourer; and he who thought he was very successfully getting the truth out of him, continued—

"Do you admit that, a little while ago, a party of men broke into your cottage in a violent manner?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ah, well, that is something. Oh, I knew we should get it from him by a little perseverance—I have experience in such cases. Now, my friend, you are adopting a very prudent course. What did those men say to you when they came into your cottage a little while ago?"

"I was smoking my pipe."

"Yes, yes; well, go on."

"And they pushed open the door, and in they came."

"And what did they say? that is the point."

"Oh, you ought to know, for you spoke first. You know very well what you said. It was,—'Hilloa! is there any highwaymen here?' or something of that sort."

"You villain!"

"Lor, what for? You asked me if any rascals had broken into my cottage, and I couldn't gainsay you, for only five minutes ago that was just what you all did. It's the honest truth; and I'm only quite astonished that you should think I meant to say no to it,"

The officer was in such a rage at being thus tricked, that he could not find words in which to convey his indignation. He stamped and swore, to the great amusement of his comrades, who were quite willing to have a laugh at his expense, and then one of them said, in a loud voice,—

"It's clear enough, if those we have been after have been here, that they are now gone again. There isn't a hiding-place for a cat in the whole premises, that I can see."

"What's this?" said another, approaching the well.

"Why, we make that into a kind of litter-bin," said the labourer; "but if you like, I'll fork it all out."

"Oh, no—no."

The officers now collected in a knot, and whispered to each other. The con-

sultation was anything but satisfactory, and was rather a lamentation over their non-success in finding the highwaymen, whom they had actually traced to that spot, and who then had disappeared as completely as though they had vanished into thin air like ghosts. The whole affair was quite inexplicable, for, although, in consequence of that cottage being the only one upon the spot, the officers thought it more than probable Claude and his friends had taken refuge there, yet they felt quite satisfied that now there they were not.

Yet the principal officer made one last appeal to the labourer.

"Listen to me, my good friend," he said. "You have had your joke, and there's an end of that, and now let us proceed to business. If you can take us to where we shall find those whom we seek, here is a twenty pound note at your service."

"Don't I wish I could!"

"I'll make it fifty pounds. Come, now, that will do, won't it?"

"How can you go on aggravating a poor man with your twenty and your fifty pound notes, in such a way? It's enough to unsettle a fellow for life, that it is. I don't know, I tell you, anything about the men."

"Now, my fine fellow, listen to me. The principal person that we seek is no other than Claude Duval."

"What, the great highwayman?"

"You may call him great if you like, but we consider him only a notorious criminal, for whom the gallows is waiting, and if you can tell us where to lay hands upon him, here is a hundred pound note you shall have."

"Oh, gracious! do you want to drive a fellow mad? Why, I'd give up my own father for half the money."

"Very well: good day."

With an astonishing abruptness, the officers left the cottage. They now felt pretty well satisfied that the labourer really knew nothing, and that they must have made a mistake in supposing that Claude and his two friends had entered the cottage; and yet that they were still somewhere close about the spot, they could not doubt, for that they had entered the lane, and were not come out of it, was a fact that it would have required a deal of evidence to induce them to doubt.

The officers collected together in the lane, and took serious counsel with each other, as to what should, or what could be next done. He who was the principal among them, spoke,—

"There is some trick in it," he said, "that's quite clear, and the only way in which we shall find it out will be by watching. There's some hiding-place hereabouts, that we might be months seeking for, and then never discover; but they must come out of it some day."

"The horses, too," said one, "that's one of the most singular parts of the whole affair to me, for, beyond the one horse that we have got hold of, and which they abandoned because it was hurt, we have seen nothing of the others."

Even as this was spoken, Dick's and Jack's horses were quietly nibbling at the young grass within his sight; but so natural did it seem for horses to be in a meadow, that he never suspected they belonged to the highwaymen. Had the cattle not been divested of their harness, of course there would have been immediate suspicion; but as it was, they created none.

"Now, listen to me," said the principal officer. "I have a proposition to make to you all."

The others listened attentively.

"I propose that one of you get gently up into a tree, and there wait while all the rest of us trot off as though we had given the affair up as a bad job altogether. We must go above a mile, when we will turn round, and come very quietly back, and keep under the hedge at the top of the lane. The one who will be in the tree can then, if he sees anything of the highwaymen, fire a pistol, which will be a signal to us to push on."

"That will do," said the others.

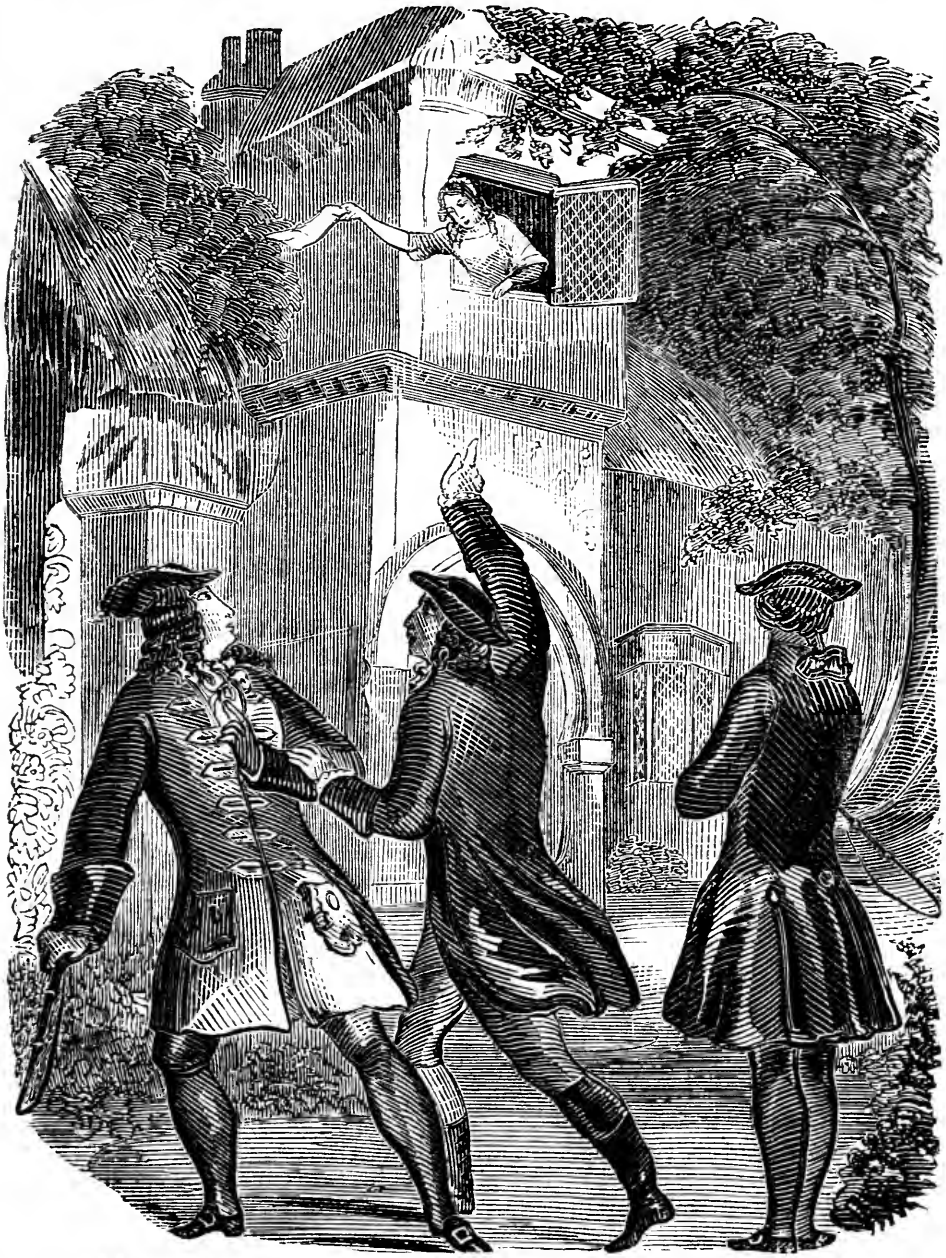
"Very good. Now, which of you will go into the tree?"

This was a question that seemed to be much easier asked than answered; and

after considerable contention among them, it was settled by drawing lots, and the one that it fell upon to go upon the troublesome and dangerous duty, looked as grim as possible about it.

"Well, if I must I must," he said; "so here goes."

With these words he commenced climbing a tall chestnut tree in the lane.



THE LABOURER'S DAUGHTER APPRISES THE THREE FRIENDS OF DANGER.

CHAPTER CCLV.

SHOWS HOW CLAUDE ESCAPED AND MET WITH A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

It was quite evident that the officer upon whom the lot had fallen to keep watch in the tree, was anything but pleased with his position, perched up in its branches.

"I say," he cried. "Hilloa!"

"What now?" said he who was in command of the party.

"Why, I only wish to call your attention to the fact, that I am a nice mark for a pistol bullet here, if Duval should take it into his head to fire at me."

"Oh, you keep quiet and you will be all right."

"Shall I?"

"Of course you will. If you don't fire at him, he won't fire at you; and if he should take it into his head to do so, you know you have all the chance of escaping the bullet, by its hitting against some of the branches of the tree."

"Yes, that's a comfort."

The other officers who had escaped the duty, and who, until the lots were being drawn, had looked rather serious over the affair, for fear it should come to their chance to have the onerous post, now seemed quite amused at the dolorous light in which their comrade viewed the affair, and they were all on the laugh.

"Now, let us be off," said the principal officer, "and, no doubt, Martin will be able to give us some information soon. Good-by, Martin."

"Oh, good-by! Are you going?"

"Yes—yes."

"Very well. Perhaps you will remember me in your prayers."

They all laughed at this; but Martin did not seem to see the remotest joke in it at all. When they galloped off, which they did purposely with as much clatter as they could, poor Martin looked down from his perch in the tree as disconsolately as might be.

"Umph!" he said; "it's all very well for a fellow to be perched up here to give notice when there's anything going on below; but I rather think if I do, that Claude Duval and his friends will not be very particular how they will have a pop at me with their pistols."

Full of this idea, Mr. Martin got up a little higher into the tree, and shielded himself as well as he could from the possibility of being seen from below; but still he considered that if he gave the alarm by firing a pistol, that that would be quite a sufficient indication of his whereabouts in the tree, to draw down upon him all the danger that he so much dreaded from the highwaymen.

With a shake of the head he said—

"I will take a thought of it before they get me to fire a pistol here. If I think it is a tolerably safe move to do so, why I will; but if I don't, why I won't, that's all."

With this highly prudent resolution, which was so very much against the probability of his giving the alarm his comrades anxiously expected, Mr. Martin, more for the sake of his own safety than from any ardent desire to come into collision with Claude Duval and his friends, kept what might be called a very particularly bright look-out.

"I don't see anything," he said, "and I'll be hanged if I hear anything either. Perhaps, after all, they are off. Well, I shan't wait above half an hour here, I'll be hanged if I do."

While the officers were making their disposition of affairs, in order yet to give themselves a chance of capturing Duval and his party, the labourer went into his cottage again, and sat down very calmly with his wife, while he smoked, and tried to look as if nothing were the matter.

The fact is, that he fully expected the officers would be upon the look-out after his proceedings, for that they still had a strong suspicion of his knowledge of the hiding place of Duval, he was quite acute enough to suppose.

"Wife," he said, "what shall we do?"

"What do you mean, Robert?"

"Shall we give them up even now, and get what we can, or shall we yet chance it for the thousand?"

"Oh, father," said the young girl, "it would be very cruel, besides very unfair, to give them up now."

"You hold your tongue, you young hussy, will you? I don't want you to say anything about it. Who asked your opinion, I should like to know?"

Thus rebuffed, the girl hung down her head, and shrunk to the farther end of the cottage. The labourer tapped the ashes out of his pipe upon the top bar of the little grate, and then he said—

"What do you think of it, wife? You don't speak."

"A thousand pounds is a very large sum, Robert."

"It is."

"It's almost enough to take one's breath away to hear speak of it, and it would make us for ever, I rather think, wouldn't it, Robert? Why, we should never know how to get through it."

"Ha!—ha! it would be easy enough got through. But that ain't the question, after all. The thing is, what are we to do?"

"Why, take the money."

"But the confounded police are on the look-out, I think."

"And what can they do, Robert?"

"Well, I don't know. Not much, I should say. Of course, they can take a fellow up for harbouring a felon; but, then, if one is put to a little inconvenience, a thousand pounds is capital pay for that. Where's the girl gone?"

"Out into the lane, I think."

"Call her back. I don't half like her interfering in the matter."

The woman went to the cottage door, and called the girl back, and she came with fright in her looks.

"Oh, mother, mother, there is a man in the old chestnut tree. I saw his foot just now!"

"Well, my dear, it's one of the officers, no doubt; but never you mind, it's no great matter to us. You go into your own little bed-room, and be quiet, that's the best thing you can do, while your father and I settle this affair."

"Yes, mother; but, you know, it wouldn't be fair to give them up to the officers, now, would it?"

"Be off with you, do. If your father hears you going on at this rate, and once gets angry, I don't know what he might not do to you; so go away at once, will you?"

A lively fear of her father seemed to come over the girl at once, and she hastened off and got out of his sight, while the woman went into the cottage front-room to inform her husband of what the girl had seen.

"That's just what I expected," he said. "They will hover about the place, and think to find out something yet."

"And what will you do, Robert?"

"I'm nonplussed, wife."

"Then, Robert, if you are nonplussed, it isn't at all likely that any one else will know what to do."

"Well, I reckon, I am rather a clever fellow, I must say; but yet there are circumstances, you know, wife, that bother even a clever fellow. You know that, though I now have to work, or at the least had to work till lately, when the fifty pounds was left us, I was a tradesman once; and if it hadn't been for my hard-hearted creditors, who would insist upon being paid, I should have done very well, indeed."

"Not a doubt of it, Robert."

"But it wasn't to be; and so, you see, with all my cleverness, I was forced to come and live here, the more's the pity. But touching these three men in the well, I—Oh, Lord, what's that?"

"Is all right?" said Claude, as he suddenly popped his head into the cottage from the back-door of it.

"Oh, dear, have you got out of the well?"

"To be sure. Why, you hardly supposed we were going to stay there one moment longer than was absolutely necessary? We would rather, I can assure you, let well alone."

"The officers are quite gone, then," said the labourer, giving a wink to his wife to say nothing about the man in the chestnut tree. "They are off at last, and you are safe."

'We heard the sound of their horses' feet, or we should not have left our secure retreat, I assure you. Come on, Jack and Dick. All's clear now, and safe."

"Oh, so safe," said the man of the cottage; "and I only hope, gentlemen, you won't forget your promise."

"It's a large sum," said Duval, as he took out the bag that he had got from the parson. "It is, I may say, a very large sum; but, yet, as I promised you it, you are entitled to it."

"There's one thing," said the labourer, rising, "that I think you ought to promise me, and that is, that if you happen to be taken, after leaving my place, you will say nothing about this money; for if you do, the law will come down upon us for it."

"Of course it will; but you may make your mind easy about that. If we are taken, it will go hard with us, and it would not do us one farthing's worth of good to deprive you of the money; so you may keep it so far as we are concerned."

"Then I'll hide it at once. Wife, get me a chisel."

The wife brought him a powerful chisel, with which he got up easily one of the flat red tiles with which the cottage was floored, and scooping a hole, he said—

"Now give me the bag."

"There it is," said Claude. "It is a large sum, but what is money without one's life?"

"What, indeed?" said the labourer, as quite complacently he conveyed the bag into the hole in the floor, and replaced the tile over it.

CHAPTER CCLVI.

THE REFUGE IN THE OLD MANOR-HOUSE, AND ITS RESULTS.

If the man at the cottage had been only half such a clever fellow as he thought himself to be, he would have looked into the bag first, before he conveyed it so snugly into the hole in the floor, and then he would have found out that it was anything but gold that he was so cleverly hiding; but he did not, and Duval could only congratulate himself, that, after all, the parson's mock bag of money had turned out to be so serviceable.

"Now then," he said, "my friend, we will leave you."

"I wish you luck," said the man.

Probably of the two he would much rather that Claude and his friends should not be taken; but still as he was paid he did not care much about it. If he had cared a straw, he would have told them of the man in the tree; but upon that subject he kept silent. His great object was to get the large sum they promised him, and then to get them out of the cottage.

When the door closed upon them he was quite delighted; he sat down to laugh. While he is so laughing, we will accompany our friends to the outside of the cottage.

"Done!" said Duval, as he looked smilingly at his two friends, "that fellow, with all his rascality and all his cupidity, is done."

"He is," said Jack, "but let us get our horses as quickly as we can now, and be off."

At this moment something hit Duval on the head. It was a little pebble, and upon looking up to see where it came from, he observed the labourer's daughter at the upper window of the cottage, for there was a room, or rather a kind of loft, above the sitting-room, in which she usually slept.

The girl placed her finger upon her lips to signify that he was not to speak, and then she threw out to him a little piece of paper, upon which was written—

"Thare his a man hin the bighest chestnut tree."

"Ah," said Claude, "this is news worth having. Look at this, Jack, and you too, Dick. We have to thank the girl for this."

He looked up to the window, but she was gone.

"A man in the chestnut-tree," said Jack. "The biggest chestnut-tree. Where is that?"

"In the lane," whispered Dick. "Hush! I see the branches of it now, and there cannot be a doubt but that this is a fair enough warning to us of danger. What is to be done now?"

Claude considered for a moment or two, and then he said—

"You two go and get the horses; I will settle with this gentleman in the tree. No doubt he is placed there to give an alarm to his friends, who are not far off. I see our position quite well now, and I shall look upon his conduct as that of a spy. It will be hard, indeed, if I can't hit a man in a tree with one of my pistols. Get the horses quickly."

"It is our only resource," said Dick. "Come along, Jack."

Dick and Jack made what haste they could to the meadow where the horses were grazing, and Claude went to the tree, about which there could be no mistake, as it was double the size of any other that grew around it.

As he neared it, he saw the branches at one spot shake a little, and that convinced him that the information he had had from the girl was perfectly well founded.

Whether or not the labourer had deceived him, he could not take upon himself to say, nor did he care much at that moment, as he had too much else to think of.

Taking a pistol from his pocket, he with great deliberation pointed it at the tree, and took a steady aim.

"Hold!" cried the officer from amid the branches. "Don't fire, Claude Duval, whatever you do. I know you very well. If you fire, you will have all my comrades upon you, for a pistol discharged is to be the signal, and I don't want to throw away my life that you may be hanged. You be quiet, and I will, so I hope you will listen to reason."

Duval laughed.

"Certainly, my friend," he said. "I never throw away a shot, and I always do listen to reason."

"I thought you would, Duval; you can be off all right with your friends, now, for the others won't gallop up till they hear a pistol shot, and I won't fire one till they can't do you much harm."

"You will excuse me, my friend," said Duval; "but I shall be much the better pleased if you drop your pistols to the foot of the tree now."

"Oh, but they may go off in falling."

"No, you can shake out the priming."

"Well but——"

"Oh, I see you are full of excuses, so our treaty is at an end."

Claude again levelled his pistol.

"Hold! You won't hear what I have to say," cried the officer. "I was only going to remark that if my brother-officers found that I was without my pistols, they would suspect what of all things I would wish to conceal from them, namely, that you and I had met."

"If that is all, you may make yourself easy. I will leave your pistols at the foot of the tree, so that you can get them when you descend."

"That'll do. Here they are."

Down came one pistol, and then the other, and Claude was satisfied that the officer's fears were quite sufficient to induce him to keep faith with him. It took only a moment or two to take the charge from the pistols, and then Claude threw them to the foot of the tree, saying—

"There are your arms. You will find them all right. And if you keep your own secret, no one need ever know to your detriment that you and I have had this little bit of conversation."

"It's not likely I'll tell, Duval, if you don't; and, of course, though I don't deny that I am bound to arrest you if I can, yet I am not such a goose as to throw away my life for it."

"Far from being a goose," said Claude, with a laugh, "I look upon you as a very sensible man, indeed, I assure you. Ah! here are my friends with our cattle."

At this juncture, Dick and Jack made their appearance with the two horses, and Jack said to Claude—

"Dick's horse, I do believe, although it is a few inches higher than mine, is less able to bear your extra weight than mine is. You had better mount behind me."

"Why, no, Jack," said Claude, drily. "The fact is, that fastened by the bridle to a gate a little lower down the road, I can see a horse."

"Oh, that's mine," cried the officer in the tree.

"You mean it was yours," said Claude. "It is mine now."

"Don't take it. I'm a ruined man, if you take the horse. I only borrowed it, and it's worth forty pounds if it's worth a halfpenny. Oh, Claude, don't take that horse whatever you do. I'm a man with a family, and what are they to do for victuals if you take the horse?"

"Why, you don't mean to say," said Claude, "that you feed your children on horse-flesh, do you?"

"Oh, dear!—Oh, dear!—There it comes."

Jack had gone to the gate that Claude had indicated, and fetched the officer's horse, to the immense chagrin of that individual, who kept up, now, quite a lament of groans upon the subject.

"Hark you, my friend," said Claude Duval; "you or some of your party shot or injured my horse, and I was forced to leave him behind; so this is but a fair exchange and no robbery. I would rather have my own."

"Come—oh, come," said Jack. "Come, Claude. Every moment that we linger here is fraught with danger."

"But, I tell you, I borrowed the horse of Mr. Stanhope," cried the officer, "and I—Oh, they are gone!"

Claude and his friends went off at a sharp canter, and the officer was left in the tree lamenting.

The route that the highwaymen took was, naturally enough, the very reverse of that which they had heard the officers take, and they soon came to the end of the lane, which terminated in a gate leading into the meadows.

Such a petty obstacle as a gate was not very likely to stop the career of such personages as Claude Duval and his two friends. Jack jumped the gate at once, but Dick, after the fall that his horse had had, did not like to risk him in a leap just then.

Duval was about putting his horse at the gate, but Jack cried out to him—

"Don't try it, Claude, with a horse you know nothing about. He may not be able to do it."

"I think he can," said Duval. "Don't you baulk me again, Jack."

"Well—well, I warn you."

"Thank you. If I break my neck, you may depend that I won't blame you for it, Jack."

With these words, Duval rode his horse at the gate, and to his great gratification, the creature went over it in beautiful style.

"Forty pounds," cried Duval, "did he say this horse was worth? Why, it would be a good eighty pounds that would be required to buy him, I take it: he is a famous hunter."

"Capital—oh, capital," said Jack. "I never did see a creature take a leap in better style. I do believe he would go over anything."

These words were scarcely out of Jack's mouth, when from a little pathway that was close by the side of a hedge that formed a continuation of the fence of the field, there rushed a young lady, who, clinging at once to the bridle of Claude Duval's horse, cried in frantic accents—

"He has come—he has come at last! Oh, God! Yes, he has come! Here he is! I know the horse, and I know him! Oh, he has come at last, in answer to my prayers!"

Duval was perfectly thunderstricken at this sudden appeal to him, and at the appearance of the young lady, who had rushed forward so very unexpectedly, that she might have been an apparition for all he knew to the contrary. Jack and Dick, too, looked quite paralyzed with astonishment, and for the space of time in which you might have counted twelve, not one of the three of them could speak a word.

"Yes—yes," added the young lady. "At last—at last I shall die happy—very happy, now that he has come. Do I not know the horse? Oh, yes. It is—it is my Stanhope!"

"Stanhope!" said Claude.

"Yes—yes. You know that you promised to come long ago; and now that you are here, the circle of friends that have been walking out with me, and jeering and gibbering at me for so long, have all taken to flight. Ha, ha, ha! I am happy, now, for you have come!"

"I am all amazement," said Claude.

"Father—father!" shrieked the young lady, in a voice that echoed again through the meadow. "Father, he is come—oh, he is come!"

"She is mad," said Dick.

"Quite mad," said Jack.

The young lady paid no attention to these remarks, but kept calling "Father!" until an elderly gentleman, with a lady about his own age, made their appearance in great haste and agitation.

CHAPTER CCLVII.

CLAUDE OFFICIATES AT A MARRIAGE, AND TAKES LEAVE OF THE BRIDE.

The elderly lady and gentleman were both evidently in very great grief, and the lady cried out—

"Oh, Emma—Emma, do come home. How is it that you are here with strangers? Come home, do, my dear child."

"No, mother—no," cried the girl. "This is Stanhope. He said he would come and marry me. He swore that he would, and you have nearly driven me mad among you by saying that he would not: and lo! here he is."

"Alas—alas!" said the old gentleman.

"This will kill me," said the old lady. "Oh, gentlemen, how came you to encounter this poor young creature? You can well see that her wits are gone. I pray you leave her to us at once."

"No—no," shrieked the girl, clinging to Claude's horse in such a way, that he was afraid to move for fear the animal should trample upon her feet. "No—no, I tell you this is Stanhope who said he would come and marry me."

"What a dreadful delusion!" said the father.

At that moment it flashed across the mind of Duval that the officer had said the horse was borrowed from a gentleman of the name of Stanhope, and he felt quite sure that it was the sight of the animal, which she no doubt well knew, that had induced the poor crazed girl to mistake Claude for the real owner of it.

The father tried to force her from her hold of the bridle of the horse, but she only uttered the most piercing shrieks, and called upon Duval, in the name of Stanhope, to protect her.

"Sir," said Claude to the father, "come round to the other side of the horse that I may speak to you. It is quite evident that this girl must be soothed, not cowed in any way."

"But alas! sir," said the father, as he stepped round to the other side of the horse, "what can I do?"

"She mistakes me for Mr. Stanhope."

"It seems so, sir; and yet you are not much like him; he is a much fairer man than you. It is his heart only that is black."

"Is he so bad?"

"He was the ruin of that young girl, and you see, from the remains of her beauty, what she might have been. Under the solemn promise of marriage he effected her ruin. Her intellect has given way with the full knowledge of his perfidy, and her mad idea now is that he will yet come to marry her. My son has met him in a duel, and wounded him so that he is laid up now, and richly he deserves the suffering that he no doubt endures. You see, sir, that we can do no more now but suffer."

"Understand me, now," said Duval, "that I do not know this Mr. Stanhope, and, to my knowledge, never set eyes upon him; but I can well understand how it is that your daughter, in her crazed intellect, has mistaken me for him, as this is his horse."

"This his horse?"

"Yes, sir; but don't run away with an idea that I am a friend to this Mr. Stanhope. I borrowed the horse of one who borrowed it of him, that is all, I give you my word of honour that it is so."

"I am satisfied, sir, and do not doubt you; but it is a most unfortunate thing that she should chance to meet you upon this horse."

"Be not too hasty, sir, in coming to that conclusion."

"How can I help it, sir? If you have any power over her imagination, by the fancy that she has of your being Mr. Stanhope, let me beg of you to exercise it at once by urging her to go home."

"I will try it. Emma!"

"Yes, Charles, yes. Oh, it is he!"

"I am coming up to the house. Pray go on with your mother."

"Oh, yes, anything you wish. We shall be married soon. Oh, God, what joy this is! They all said you would not come, but I knew you would, Charles; and you have come to prove your own truth and constancy."

"Yes, yes, Emma. Go on with your mother."

With a look of the most quiet obedience, she now placed her arm in that of her mother's, and allowed herself to be led off.

"Is she really so tractable?" said Duval.

"Quite the reverse," said the father, as he turned aside to dash the tears from his eyes. "Oh, Heaven, is there no thunderbolt to reach the head of the villain who destroyed my child?"

"Listen to me, sir," said Duval, who truly pitied both the girl and her parents. "It is quite clear that this scoundrel, named Stanhope, will never come to redeem the promises he has made to your child."

"Never—Never!"

"And it is equally clear, that if he does not come, she will continue in this desperate state of mental disease."

"She will be worse, much worse now, after you are gone. I dread to meet her again."

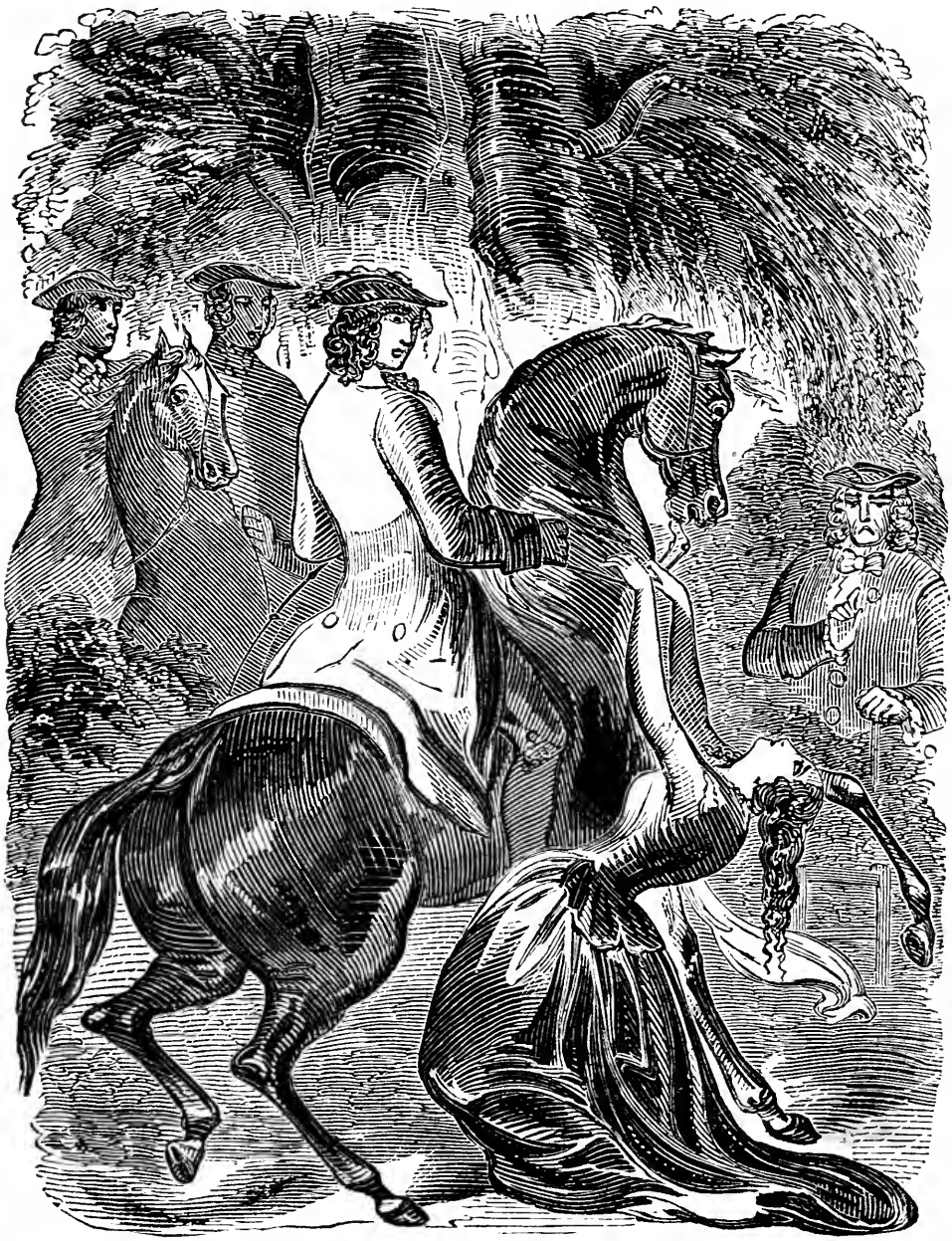
"Then let me advise. The only thing that I can see, is for you to make her believe that I still really am the Mr. Stanhope she takes me for. Let me marry her."

"Marry her?"

"Yes, in a sham way, you know; one of my friends will personate the parson and perform the ceremony, immediately after which, I will tell her that I have an appointment in London, so that I must leave her. You can then, when I am

gone, tell her that I am in the army, and unexpectedly ordered abroad. After that you can choose your own opportunity of telling her that I am dead, and, of course, she will feel grief, but how much better will that be than her present state."

The father looked thoughtful.



CLAUDE MEETS WITH AN ADVENTURE WITH A POOR MANIAC.

"Come, sir," said Duval "I propose all this to you out of pity to the young girl, as I do, from my heart, think that it will have the effect of changing the whole current of her thoughts, and probably of entirely recovering her from the state she is now in."

"It is feasible."

"It is, indeed, to my thinking; and anything is worth the trying, in a medicinal

point of view, that promises for her an amendment of her present sad state, do you not think?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then, try it, sir. Do not hesitate. It is true that I am a stranger to you, but if I can be of such service to that poor, afflicted girl, I shall feel that it was a happy chance that brought me upon Mr. Stanhope's horse to this spot."

"Sir," said the father, "I must own to you that I feel a kind of repugnance to this plan."

"I do not wonder at it; but the case is so singular, and so distressing, that I have been induced to make you the offer that I have, with a view to saving you from further evil; but if it should still continue, upon reflection, to be repugnant to you, I have but to take my leave."

"Oh, no—no, do not go. Allow me to speak to her mother upon the subject, before I give you my final answer."

"I think that is only what ought to be done."

"Then, sir, will you be so good as to accompany me to my house, now, and I can only say, that whether your proposal, which I feel is dictated in all kindness, be acceded to or not, I shall feel always grateful to you for having made it."

"Do not think of that," said Duval, "I make it from sheer and genuine sympathy with that poor afflicted young thing."

This was strictly true, and the tone in which Claude said it, was enough to convince any one of his real sincerity of purpose.

"Is it asking too much, sir," said the old gentleman, "for me to ask your name, and who you are?"

"I am a gentleman," said Duval, "and if you will permit me to preserve an incognito, I would rather do it than impose upon you by telling you that I am what I am not."

"Very well, sir; I have no right to pry into your name, or your condition in life. Will your two friends likewise accompany us?"

"If you please."

There was no need to explain to Jack or Dick the affair, for they had both been sufficiently near at hand to hear it all, so that they followed Claude and the old gentleman across the meadow to the house, the chimneys of which they could just see peeping up from among the trees of a garden that was close at hand.

Claude dismounted, and slung the bridle of his new horse over his arm, as he walked by the side of the old gentleman; and it was quite evident that the latter was getting each moment more and more charmed by the manner of his new acquaintance.

"Ah, sir," he said, "I suspect that in not telling me your name and station you are concealing from me rank, and, perhaps, nobility, instead of anything that can be discreditable to you."

"Pray permit me to be silent upon that head," said Claude. "It may happen that at some future time we may meet, and then you may know me in my proper character. Until that time shall come, allow me to be your unknown friend."

"Certainly, sir, at your pleasure; and I can only say, that be you whom you may, my feelings of gratitude towards you will suffer no diminution whatever."

By this time they reached a garden gate that led from the meadow into the well-kept grounds of the house, and it was quite evident to Claude, that the owner of the place must be a man of some worth, for it was extremely well and trimly kept.

CHAPTER CCLVIII.

CLAUDE HAS TO LEAVE THE MANOR-HOUSE IN A HURRY.

We have not yet had time to do more than hint at the personal appearance of the young lady who, in that sad eclipse of the intellect under which she laboured, mistook Duval for the greatest, and, we may say, the only enemy she had ever had upon earth.

She was not above nineteen years of age, of the most delicately fair complexion that Claude had ever seen. Her hair was of that sunny auburn, which is really auburn, and not the sandy apology for that colour which is usually so called. Her eyes were of the most beautiful and liquid blue that imagination could picture, and although her figure was a trifle small for a connoisseur in female beauty, it was yet so exquisitely graceful, that no wonder Claude, with his appreciation of female beauty, was at once charmed and distressed.

He was charmed at the sight of such a piece of feminine loveliness, and he was distressed to think how that once glorious gift of reason that had lighted up all those charms had fled.

Jack and Dick both felt the warmest sympathy for the young girl, and they were quite willing to run some personal risk, if it would but in any way conduce to her welfare.

The house was an old-fashioned one, with a great number of odd corners and quaint gable-ends to it, and the windows were in many places of the old-fashioned diamond-shape panes, that are now so completely obsolete, except when they are purposely used to imitate the architecture of a former age.

"You have a charming old place here," said Claude to the father.

"Alas—no! It was once charming, but now all their beauties have but the effect of adding to our distress, for we recollect what was their appreciation by our darling, who to us is as one of the dead."

"Do not despair; you should recollect that this madness of hers is not the result of a disease, but of a powerful sad impression that has been made upon the mind. Such is the kind of insanity that is curable."

"You really think so, sir?"

"I do, indeed."

"Those are words of comfort. I should not know how to make enough of you if by this plan that you propose you should succeed in restoring my child to something like serenity."

"Try it, sir. If it fail in doing so, it at the least has the negative gratification that it cannot make her worse."

"I do not think it can. But it is time, sir, that I should tell you who I am. I am a Mr. Moffat; and after practising as an attorney for a number of years, I have returned home."

"An attorney?"

"Yes, sir. I hope that you have none of the worldly prejudices against my profession, for I assure you there may be honest attorneys."

"I do not doubt it, sir. I pray you not to suppose for a moment that I have any prejudice against you."

"I thank you, sir. The fact is that this, Mr. Stanhope is the son of a nobleman, who was an old client of mine, and that was how he got such a footing in my house."

"I understand."

They had now reached an elegant room upon the ground floor, and Mr. Moffat, after apologising for being there alone for a little while, went to consult his wife upon the proposal Claude had made concerning Emma.

"Well," said Claude, when he was alone with Jack and Dick, "what do you think of this adventure?"

"I approve of it," said Dick. "Let us do all the good we can as we go along in the world."

"And I likewise approve of it," said Jack, "on the same principle. By adopting such a course, too, we make friends; and in our position of life, we never know when friends may be servicable. Several times it has happened to me, when I have been in great straits, and must have been sacrificed, that I have encountered people who felt bound to me by some old tie of grateful feeling, and they have saved me."

"I quite concur with you, Jack, in that," said Claude, feelingly. "Heaven knows that no one has greater cause than I to feel grateful to my friends; but yet, upon the higher principle of endeavouring to soothe the afflictions of this young girl, I would act, if I were to be assured that from the moment that I should cross the threshold of this house I should be forgotten."

"That I can well believe of you, Claude. But some one comes."

The door of the apartment was opened, and the father and mother both appeared. Tears were in the lady's eyes, and advancing to Claude, she said, in a voice of great feeling—

"Sir, not only do I accept the kind offer you make regarding Emma, but I do think, under Providence, that it may and will be the means of calming the mind of that afflicted one."

"I hope so from my heart, madam."

"We all hope so," said Dick.

"Then," said the father, "let it be soon done. Poor Emma is getting impatient to be once more in company with him whom she supposes in her madness to be Mr. Stanhope."

"Let me speak to her," said Claude, "and I will soon soothe her to calmness. At a time like this, anything should be done that possibly can to make her think that all is well. Pray let her come into the room."

The mother moved to the door; but before she could reach it, it was rapidly opened, and the young girl came into the room.

"Where is he?" she said. "Where is my Charles? Why do you keep me from him? I told you all that he would come, and you would not believe me, and so I do think that at times you nearly drove me mad. But he is here. Ah, he is here now!"

She advanced towards Claude again, and grasped him by the arm. He had his hat off now, and she looked in his face rather composedly as she said, in a low plaintive voice—

"Are you not my Charles?"

"Yes," said Claude. "Can you doubt it?"

Her countenance cleared in the moment, and the little doubt that had obtruded itself by the aid of the small glimmering of reason that still remained to her, vanished at once.

"Oh, yes—yes," she said. "I know you are my Charles, and all is well now. Who could speak to me in such a tone, but he who loved me? And now, father and mother, I would have you take notice, that he has come, although you said he would not."

"We acknowledge that, Emma," said the father.

"Yes, my child," sobbed the mother, "it is as you say."

"Now, my dear Emma," said Claude, "will you listen to me quietly, and pay great attention to what I am about to say?"

"Yes—oh, yes. How I shall listen to you! I do not wish to listen to any one else in all the world, Charles."

"Then, Emma, you must know that I have come down here, at some inconvenience to marry you, for since I knew you and saw you last, I have gone into the army. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, quite. And you have come to marry me, Charles? You are an officer in the army, now, you say?"

"Exactly; that is quite right. I have come to marry you; but the moment

the ceremony is performed, my military duties will call me to London, and perhaps a little way out of England; but you will recollect that you are my wife, and you will be patient. Only think how many soldiers wives have to wait the return of their husbands."

"Alas! I shall mourn."

"Yes; but you will feel much happier than you have felt."

"Happier, Charles! Oh, yes, I shall be myself again. My state will be one of Heaven, in comparison to what I have suffered. I shall be your wife. That will be to me everything, and those about me will know that such is the case, and I will try to be happy, even although you are away from me."

Claude glanced at the father and mother. The latter was weeping, but the father said in a low tone—

"It is more than I expected. She looks already more happy."

"And she will be," said Claude. "Now, Emma, you see here two friends of mine, one of them is a brother officer, and the other is the chaplain of our regiment. He will perform the marriage ceremony for us, and when you hear that you are my wife, I hope and trust that you will throw off all gloom and discomfort, and try all you can to make your fond parents happy and contented with you."

"I will, Charles. Yes, I will,"

"That is enough. By so doing, you will always preserve your place in my best affections, and let me be where I may, I shall think of you with the fondest regard."

"Ah, Charles, when you say that, you know that I would promise you anything in the world. But I ought to have a bridal dress of white, with roses upon it, and my hair should be bound with a silver wreath."

"You will do very well as you are," said Claude. "Recollect that I have no time to stay. My horse—the horse that you know quite well—waits without to take me to London again."

"Oh, yes—yes! I had really quite forgotten that. How foolish I am, to be sure. But I shall soon get better—much better. Did I not always say that you would come, Charles? Ah, I knew you better than they did, for when you told me that you would have me and no other, then I saw the moon look down upon you, and death would have come to you from its silvery beams if you had broken the vow."

"I should have deserved death," said Claude. "But, come, we will have the marriage performed in this very room, if your parents are agreeable."

"We are," said the old couple.

Claude beckoned to Jack to come and play the part of the chaplain; and then Jack, in a low, solemn voice, said,—

"I presume there is a book of prayers in the house?"

"Yes, sir," said the father. "I will fetch you one in a moment or two, if you will please to be seated for that space of time."

"That will do," said Jack. "I trust that when this ceremony is over that the young lady will know a peace of mind to which, I fear, she has been for some time a stranger."

"I shall—oh, yes, I shall!" cried the poor bewildered creature. "I know well that I shall. Where is the book of prayers? We are all quite ready, and my Charles has come all the way from London to marry me. You see, mother, that he has come?"

"I do, my dear," said the mother, who was hardly able to speak for emotion; "I do, my dear; and I sincerely hope that his coming will contribute greatly to your happiness, my child."

"I shall be as happy as the day is long. Nay, I fear that I shall be so merry and so full of spirits, now, that you will hardly know me; and I shall feel much better, here." She pressed her hands on her head as she spoke. "And then at night the fearful dreams will not come to me as they used to; and I shall not

see fingers pointed at me in my own chamber, nor hear the hideous laughter of creatures that do not belong to this world."

"Hush—hush!" said Claude. He saw that she was getting excited, and that the colour on her cheek was deepening, and he heard that her voice was rising to a high and unwonted pitch. "Hush! It is quite impossible that we should be married now, if you are not much more still than you are, dear one."

She shuddered a little, and then in a low tone, as she crept closer to Claude, she said,—

"Oh, yes, I will be as still as the grave!"

CHAPTER CCLIX.

THE SINGULAR MARRIAGE TAKES PLACE, AND A STRANGE VISITOR ARRIVES.

THESE last words of the unhappy girl were spoken evidently under great terror that Claude would leave her again; and after a moment or two she looked up into his face with a glance of great sadness, and said,—

"I am not mad!"

The words seemed to be spoken as much in the light of a question as an assertion of sincerity; but Claude Duval thought proper to say all he could to reassure her.

"Mad!" he replied. "Oh, no—no! I am sure that no one can possibly call you mad. It is too absurd, that. You are quite as sane as any of us; and here comes a servant with the prayer-book, no doubt; and the chaplain here will at once unite us."

"Oh, yes—yes! That is joy, indeed!"

An old servant who had been dispatched to the library for a book of common-prayer, now made his appearance, and it was placed in the hands of Jack, who, partly from a feeling of superstition which would cling to him, and partly from pity for the unhappy young creature whom it became necessary to deceive for her own peace, looked as serious every bit as though he had been a real clergyman called in upon the spur of the moment to perform the ceremony.

"Now, Reverend Sir," said Claude, "we are perfectly ready if you please. Pray proceed with the ceremony."

Claude meant this as a hint to Jack to get it over as quickly as he could, and Jack replied—

"Take your places. I, too, am quite ready."

They all half-surrounded him in a kind of half circle, and Jack, in an impressive tone, read the marriage service. The formalities were all gone through with great gravity, and, finally, Jack closed the book, and with a slight inclination of his head, said—

"May the marriage be a blessed one, and produce all the good which every one here present hopes and expects from it."

"Amen!" said the father.

The young girl now turned to Claude, and with a shriek of joy she fell into his arms.

"Joy, joy!" she said. "I am indeed a wife. No more can the finger of scorn be pointed at me to drive me mad. I am a wife—I am your wife, Charles!"

"You are, my dear one; and now remember what I was compelled to tell you before this marriage took place. My horse is at the gate!"

She burst into tears and sobbed bitterly.

"And must you go? And must you really leave me? My own, my husband!"

"I must, indeed."

"It is imperative," said Jack.

"There cannot possibly be any delay," said Dick.

The young creature could not speak for her tears; and as a tray, with wine and other refreshments, was brought in, the father spoke to her.

"Now, my dear, let me hope that although the military duties of your husband call him away from you, that you will feel a calmness and a peace of mind to which you have long been a stranger, and that we shall all feel happier——"

"Oh, yes, yes, father," she said, interrupting him, "and I will write a long letter every day to Charles."

"Nay," said Claude, "you must not attempt to do that, for I shall be so short a time probably at one place, that it is doubtful if any of such letters would at all reach me."

"But you will write to me?"

"Do not expect it. You know the life of a soldier is one that scarcely may be said to belong to himself. Rest content that you are my wife, and that I will come to you as soon as my military duties will permit me."

"Yes, madam," said Jack, "that is just the fact; and I can only assure you that even in coming here now to render you that tardy justice which he felt conscientiously compelled to render to you, my gallant young friend here is commiting a breach of duty."

"And, therefore, must go at once," said the father.

"I am ready," said Claude, who took it now into his head that the father seemed rather anxious to get rid of him. "I am ready; my horse is at the gate."

He moved towards the door, but with a shriek, the girl followed him.

"No—no, not yet!—Oh, not yet!"

"Nay, but——"

"Oh, do not say me nay! You will take one cup of wine with us before you go.—Father, where is the cup of gold, that we consider the cup of honour? Where is it, father? Fill it for him who is entitled to it."

"It is here," said the father, as he handed a handsomely chased gold cup to Claude. "Drink sir, and then, as you must leave us, a short leave-taking is the best."

A loud ringing of the bell at this moment struck on the ears of the whole party.

"What is that?" said Dick.

"The great bell at the gate," said the father. "It is only some visitor for me; but the servants will show him into one of the other rooms. We shall not be intruded upon."

"I don't know that," said Claude. "Some one comes, that is quite clear."

The sound of a footstep approaching the room now came clearly upon all their ears.

"This is vexatious," said Jack. "Who can it be?"

"Let it be whom it may," said the poor blighted girl, "let it be whom it may, they shall congratulate me upon my marriage, and they will be the first to know of it."

The door was flung open, and a gentleman walked into the room, crying out as he did so—

"Well, old friend, how are you? You see that I have at last fulfilled my promise of coming down here for a little while, from the cares of my affairs in town, to——Oh, I beg your pardon; you have company!"

"Yes," said the girl, stepping forward, and holding Claude firmly by the cuff of the coat. "This, Sir John, is my husband?"

"Your husband?"

"Yes," said the father. "This is the husband of our dear girl, Sir John, and as you are a magistrate of London, I only wish you had been here to sanction with your presence the ceremony."

"The devil you do!"

"Yes—yes. Hush! All's right. Hem! Oh, yes."

"Why, what on earth is the meaning of all this? What is all this nodding

and winking about, eh? What does it mean? What do you want me to do or say?"

"Nothing—nothing!"

"Oh, nothing!" cried everybody.

"Nothing at all," said Dick, "Now, I think, we will go."

As Dick spoke, he sidled to the door of the room, but the magistrate, with sudden vehemence, cried out—

"Why, old friend, are these gentlemen acquaintances of yours?"

"Oh, yes—yes."

"Well, if ever I saw Richard Turpin, the highwayman, in all my life, and I have had him twice before me, and he robbed me once upon the Fulham Road, here he is!"

Everybody was profoundly still for a few moments, and then the father, as he clasped his hands together, said—

"A highwayman? Oh, no—no!"

"But I say yes. I don't know the others, but this is the famous Dick Turpin, the highwayman, I will be upon my oath."

"Oh, my dear, sir," said Dick, "you make a very great mistake, indeed. I may be like Turpin, the highwayman; but there are in the world the most extraordinary likenesses."

"There are, indeed, my friend, and I can only say, that yours is so extraordinary a one to Turpin, that if you ride into London, the authorities will hang you on the strength of it."

"This is insulting!" said Claude. "I will now leave this house at once with my friends. Farewell dear wife—farewell, until we have the happiness of meeting you."

"Charles, Charles, must you indeed go?"

"Indeed I must. Jack, where has that Sir John gone?"

The magistrate had hastily left the room.

"Danger!" said Dick, as he took a small double-barrelled pistol from his pocket, and shook the powder in the pan. "Danger, most certainly, by all that's interesting!"

"This comes," said Jack, "of going out of one's way to do a kind thing by any one."

"Do not say that," said Claude. "I will not regret that I went out of my way for such a purpose. Good-by, dear."

Claude kissed the girl, and then darted to the door of the room. Jack and Dick had already left it, and stood in the passage beyond it with a pistol in each of their hands.

"All's right," said Claude. "Don't make any noise."

The father followed them hastily.

"Oh, tell me," he said, "tell me truly who and what you really are?"

"A highwayman," said Claude, "and my name is Claude Duval."

"Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"The same. But do not you join all the world in abusing me, or I have tried to do you some good, as I think you will admit, and I leave your house, taking nothing with me but my danger. If you wish to do me a good turn in requital of the trouble I have taken to restore your child to peace of mind, have our horses taken care of, and let us at once mount and be off."

"You shall—you shall. Oh, if I could only see my friend, Sir John, and tell him that I would have no sort of interference with you in my house, all might yet be well."

At this moment the magistrate made his appearance, followed by a man with a remarkably large face, who had such a cunning expression that it was quite fearful to look at him.

"Now, Stevens," said the magistrate, "I have often heard you say you knew every highwayman and cracksman in and about London. Look at these three gentlemen, and just tell me who they are."

"Oh dear, yes, sir, I will; hum! ha! Oh, dear me. Oh! oh!"
"Why, what's the matter with you?"
"Nothing, Sir John; oh dear, nothing at all!"
"Then who are they?"
"Must I speak, Sir John?"



CLAUDE BARGAINS WITH THE GIPSY FOR CONCEALMENT IN THE CAMP.

"To be sure; I order you."
"Then, Sir John, that ere one that's rather big is Claude Duval, and that other one is Dick Turpin, and that other one there in the shade is either Sixteen-string Jack's ghost, or Sixteen-string Jack himself."
"The devil they are!" said Sir John.

Upon this, Claude Duval stepped forward, and holding his pistol, that he had taken from his bosom, carelsssly in his hand, he said,—

"Now, sir, I think I know you; you are Sir John Richards the magistrate, and I think I likewise know your very cunning friend here, Mr. Stevens. He and I have encountered once before, when I made his rather long face an inch or two longer. Now, gentlemen, you both know who we are, and it is difficult to conceive that you should know so much without likewise knowing a little more."

"And pray what is that?" said the magistrate.

"Simply, that we are not the sort of men to give up easily, and that when we are three and you only two, it don't look a very likely proposition that you should apprehend us."

"But it's my duty to do so."

"Oh, dear me, Sir John," said Stevens, "that's all very fine. The duty of everybody, Sir John, is to take care of his own skin, and to see that his own bones are safe. If I might humbly advise, Sir John, I should say—let 'em go."

"That I cannot do, Stevens. I order you to take these men into custody immediately, and if you are resisted, you are authorised, you know well, to call upon every one in the king's name to assist you in the capture. If you should come by a violent end in the affair, I will take care that honourable mention is made of you afterwards, and your death will be a shining example to other officers in all time to come."

"Oh, dear," said Stevens, "don't mention it, Sir John. I'd a great deal rather shine in life than in death."

"Do you refuse, then?"

"I decline, Sir John, I decline."

Claude laughed.

"Upon my word, Stevens," he said "you have much more discretion than your master here, and I admire you very much for it, and will do you a good turn if I have ever the opportunity. I am particularly anxious that there should not be a disturbance in the house. Good-day, Sir John, good-day. Keep your temper, Sir John."

CHAPTER CCLX.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS ARE BETRAYED BY THE GIPSIES.

The advice to keep his temper with which Claude favoured the magistrate, seemed, by the appearance of that personage, to be very much needed, for he was beginning to get red in the face. No doubt, the idea of being so near the effecting of three such important captures, and yet missing them, was very galling to the magistrate.

The father of the poor maddened girl plucked Claude by the sleeve, saying,—

"This way—this way. Come away, for the love of Heaven!"

"Yes," said Claude. "My horse?"

"It is here; follow me. My poor girl is rapidly getting ready to ride after you, and the only thing to stop her, is to convince her that you are gone. Come, oh, come!"

"I am as willing as possible," said Claude. "It was your friend, Sir John, here, who detained me. Good-day, Stevens."

"Good-day to you, Claude Duval," said Stevens. "I dare say you and I will meet again at some time or another, and then, let who will get the better of it, there need be no malice."

"None in the least, Stevens. Farewell."

Duval hastily followed the father, and Jack and Dick, who by no means had expected that the affair would have gone off so quietly, kept close to him. The

magistrate sat down in one of the hall chairs, and fanned himself with his hat, while Stevens rubbed his great, rough hands together, and looked at him.

"A nice article you are, Mr. Stevens."

"Thank you, Sir John—Hem! Ha! Wait a bit, Sir John."

"What for?"

"Just to keep our brains in their proper places. Lord bless you, Sir John, that Duval, who is a civil enough fellow till he is put very much out of his way, would no more have scrupled to blow your brains out than he would to tread on a fly."

"You don't mean that, Stevens? I don't think I ever heard of a magistrate's brains being blown out."

"Yours, then, Sir John, would have made a beginning."

"The deuce they would!"

"Yes, Sir John, and no mistake at all, Sir John; but—but——"

Mr. Stevens crept closer to the magistrate, and in a mysterious whisper he said—

"I'll nab 'em."

"'You will?"

'Safe, Sir John. I'll nab 'em. Lord bless you, Sir John, it's all right; only, if we can nab 'em without any danger, it will be just as well, you know. I'll do it; but—but——"

"What the deuce are you making those abominable faces for? What do you mean by grinning at me like an old pole-cat, and saying nothing but—'But—but?'"

"Oh, Sir John! Oh, dear! Oh—Hem! If I do nab 'em, what am I to get Sir John—how much? That is the question, Sir John."

"Oh, it is, is it? Then you don't feel inclined to do it in a politic sort of way, and for the benefit of society?'

"Society may be robbed, and murdered, and d——"

"Hush! Don't let me hear such language, Stevens. I undertake, that if you take those three desperadoes into custody, you shall have the whole of the reward offered, as well as being highly recommended to the Secretary of State.'

"Oh, well—hem! it's as good as done now, Sir John; and so I will be off at once, and if anything should happen to me that I don't expect at all, why it will be nothing at all to nobody, for I'm a single man, and nobody cares for me, and I never cared for any one, that's a comfort. Hem—ha! Oh, dear!"

Mr. Stevens rubbed his hands again together, and then glided out of the hall.

"He'll have 'em," said the magistrate, "I feel that he will have 'em as sure as fate; he is quite a wonderful man is that Stevens, and have 'em he will, and the world will be rid of three fellows that make the roads perfectly unsafe. I am afraid to go five miles out of London myself with a penny-piece more than is just sufficient to pay the tolls."

While this little interesting conversation was going on between Sir John Richards and his man Stevens, Claude and his friends had been conducted by the father of the insane young lady to the garden, where sure enough their horses were, apparently ready for the road again.

"We are safe," said Jack, as he at once mounted, "I feel that we are safe now."

"Yes," said Dick, as he too sprung into the saddle. "I feel now all right, and can laugh at the danger we have passed."

"Not so can I," said Claude.

"Indeed, and why not?"

"You do not know that man, Stevens, as I know him. He is one of the most consummately cunning fellows that ever stepped, and I feel as confident as though he had himself told me of it, that he has some scheme on hand to take us. That it may fail, no doubt, and that by courage and resolution we may defeat, it. I will not for a moment doubt; but that he has such a scheme, take up your minds. And now, sir, allow me to bid you good day, and I

sincerely hope you will not think the less of what little good we may have done your child, because we happen to be what we are—Knights of the Road."

"No," said the father, "and I can only say, that if either of you get into any trouble or difficulty, I hope and trust you will write to me, and all that is in my power will be done for you, in spite of my friend Sir John Richards."

"Thank you, sir. Farewell!"

Jack and Dick likewise made their farewells, and then they all three trotted across the meadow at the back of the garden, and soon reached the lane with the gate at the end of it, by the spot where Claude had been at first so much surprised by the kind of salutation he had got from the young lady.

"Hurrah!" cried Dick. "I, for one, defy Mr. Stevens, and all his meshes. I am mounted, and my bonny Black Bess will carry me through the flimsy cobwebs of his devices."

"Don't make too sure," said Claude.

"You alarm me, Claude," said Jack. "It is so seldom that you indulge in any forebodings, that you thoroughly alarm me when you do. Tell us what you think this cunning Stevens will attempt."

"I only wish I could, Jack. If I could tell that, I should not feel the slightest shadow of uneasiness about it, for when once you know so much, all the cunning of the scheme is lost, and open violence only remains, of which we are not afraid."

"But," interposed Dick, "you don't mean, Claude, to say now, in sober conscience, that you think this fellow, Stevens, can do anything that we need care about?"

"We shall see," said Claude. "He is the only man in the police who has what one may call a diabolically inventive genius, and one never can calculate upon what he is about."

"Then, in the name of all that's abominable, let us leave him as far behind us as possible. Put your horses to speed, and let us have a five mile canter."

"Agreed—agreed. Be it so."

They all three upon this set off at good speed, and the five mile canter that they promised themselves would very soon have been accomplished, but for rather an untoward accident occurring to prevent it.

They thought that it would be decidedly their best plan to take a route across the country by the lanes, so as to get into quite another line of high road as early as possible, and they had got about a mile and a half of the distance, when Dick suddenly pulled up, crying out in an alarmed voice—

"Hilloa! what is this?"

"What's what?" said Claude Duval, as he on the instant stopped his horse. "What do you mean, Dick?"

"The worst meaning ever I had in all my life. My Bess is dead lame."

"Lame?"

"Yes, to be sure. I have been suspecting it for the last half-mile, only I was so loth to believe it, that I did not like to pull-up; but I can no longer disguise the fact from myself, now that lame she is to all intents and purposes."

"Perhaps it's only a stone in the foot."

"I hope so."

Dick hastily dismounted and lifted, one by one, the feet of his mare.

"No," he said, "there is no stone, and I can't see anything amiss. It is, after all, just possible that she was doing it for fun. It may have been nothing, after all."

"Or, perhaps," said Jack, "a stone, which fell out the moment you changed her pace. Mount again, Dick, and let us be off."

"I will—I will."

Dick was in the saddle again in a minute, and then it became but too painfully evident, that the horse could not or would not move faster than a painful kind of walk. Before any comment could be made upon such a remarkable occurrence, Jack called out,—

"Why, my horse is taken in just the same sort of way. It is as lame as it well can be in all four feet."

"And mine," said Claude Duval, with all the coolness in the world; "so here we are at a dead fix."

"But what is the meaning of it, Claude? Are the horses bewitched? Are we to believe in necromancy, and evil eyes, and all that sort of thing? How else do you account for it, Duval?"

"Stevens!"

"What?"

"Stevens," repeated Claude, in the coolest way in the world, as if the affair really did not much matter to him. "Stevens."

"The devil!" said Dick.

Jack pulled a very long face.

'And so, Claude, you really think that we owe the lameness of our cattle to that cunning fellow, Stevens the officer?"

"There's no sort of doubt of it, Jack. It is a piece of his most infernal management to keep us about the neighbourhood until he can get together a sufficient force to attack us. I did not entertain a doubt for a moment but that he would try something or another."

Dick seemed to be thoroughly bewildered at this catastrophe, for the lameness of his horse, to him, quite amounted to own that he was entirely unable to suggest any mode of escape from the many perils that surrounded them. Jack almost shook, as he thought that this was only the commencement of the scheme by which that prince of wily officers, Stevens, was going to circumvent them.

"Claude—Claude," he cried. "Are you thinking of what to do? Shall we yet look to you for our means of escaping from this most dreadful dilemma."

"I hope so," said Claude, rousing himself. "We are not going to give in if we were all struck lame ourselves, as well as our horses. Let us lead them on at once—it is the only thing we can do, and trust to reaching some place of shelter as soon as possible. We are well armed, and it shall cost Mr. Stevens and his friends dear, if they make an attack upon us. They may prevent us from escaping, if they like."

"Yes," said Dick, "they have done that, but it is questionable if that is not about the worst thing they could have done us, as far as regards their own safety."

"We will fight to the last."

"Hush," said Jack. "Don't talk about fighting, just now; of course, if it comes to the worst, we will fight; but cunning is best met by cunning. Wait a bit while I look thoroughly at the horses' feet. It will be a great thing to find how and why they are lamed."

"It will—it will. Look your best, Jack, and you don't find it out, nobody will, that's one comfort."

Jack took one of his horse's feet in his lap, and with his handkerchief he carefully brushed from the hoof all the dust that it had collected from the road; after which, he felt it carefully, and then he said—

"Oh, here it is!"

"What?—where?" cried Dick and Claude in a breath.

"Here," added Jack. "A small piece of some adhesive kind of substance, no doubt impregnated with something very irritable to a horse's foot. Here it is, not, as you see, larger than a sixpence; but I had the greatest difficulty to get it off, it stuck so hard."

While Claude and Dick could hardly find words to vent their indignation in, Jack took from the off-foreleg hoof of each of their horses, a similar little plaster to what he had found upon his own, and the mystery of the lameness was discovered.

"What it is I don't know," said Jack, "but it has so much inflamed the feet of the horses, that they are only fit for rest and a poultice a-piece on the foot, now.

I don't think the mischief will last, as we have luckily found it out rather promptly."

"Oh, if I catch that fellow," said Dick, between his clenched teeth, "I should only like to know what was on the little plasters, and make him swallow a pailful of it."

"Hush!" said Claude, "some one comes. Take the horses to the side of the road, Jack. I will meet whoever it is."

"And I with you," said Dick.

"No, Dick, one is best. It is but a single footstep that I hear. Be assured that if I want assistance I will call to you. In fact, you will hear what passes."

"So I shall."

The person who was approaching turned out to be a gipsy boy driving a miserable-looking ass. At sight of Claude Duval, he stopped and seemed rather hesitating about whether it would be safe to advance or not. Once, too, he glanced over his shoulder, as though there was danger behind him, which made it a most important point with him whether it were better to advance or retreat.

"Come on, my lad," said Claude, who saw his hesitation. "Come on. There's nothing to fear. All's right with us."

Upon being thus encouraged, the gipsy boy came on, but in proportion as his fears of the persons towards whom he was advancing diminished, he showed more alarm at some undefined danger in the rear, for he kept glancing behind him with looks of terror mingled with anger and rage.

"What's the matter, boy?" said Claude; "you don't seem to be very well pleased at something?"

"How should I be pleased?" said the boy. "Are blows with the thong of a whip pleasing, because you can't tell what you don't know?"

"Certainly not; but you don't mean to say that any one has been serving you in that fashion, do you?"

"I do mean to say it, and I say more, which is, that I will have my revenge!"

The boy was passing on, but Claude stopped him, and placing a small coin in his hand, he said—

"Tell me who it is that has served you in such a way, and if you are so anxious for revenge, who knows but I may help you?"

CHAPTER CCLXI.

CLAUDE FINDS THAT THE APPEARANCE OF SAFETY IS NOT THE REALITY.

THESE words of Claude's seemed to have some effect upon the boy, for he at once stopped, and throwing the rope of hay, which formed the only halter he had for the ass, over his arm, he said—

"You will help me to revenge?"

"I think so. But there's no harm done if I cannot. You must tell me how it was, and who it was that cut you with the whip."

The boy turned his flashing eyes in the direction that he had come, and raising his arm, he said—

"At the other end of the lane, are twelve men on horseback, well armed. They are waiting for some one to lead them on in search of some highwaymen, so they said, and when I got up to them and would have passed on in peace, they asked me if I had seen three men on lame horses, and of course I had not, and told them so; but they would have it that the words of my mouth were lies, and they lashed me with their whips."

"Ah," cried Jack, "this is worth knowing."

Claude made a sign to Jack to be silent, and then he addressed the boy, saying—

"Tell me who and what you are, for upon that knowledge will depend whether I can help you to your revenge or not."

"I am a gip."

"That I see; but how comes it that you are alone? It is seldom that one of your people is met in this way. Where is your tribe, boy?—or have you none?"

"None? Where is the true gip without his fellows? I am not alone. Will you trust yourself upon this old bank with me?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Come on, then."

With wonderful agility, the gipsy boy made a kind of a rush at the bank by the side of the lane, and gained the top of it, where there grew a think hedge of blackthorn, alders, and many other indigenous shrubs, through which it was impossible to catch a glimpse beyond; but the young gipsy, with practised skill, dashed aside the branches until he made a clear space, and then he cried—

"Behold! In yonder valley by the sparkling water-course that at times borrows light and beauty from the sun of other climes, is my tribe—my people!"

Claude looked in the direction indicated by the young gipsy, and at some distance off, in a picturesque hollow, he saw the brown and ragged tents of the wanderers, and a thin wreath of blue smoke rising above the surrounding vegetation, as though to mark the spot.

"The boy watched his eyes, and then said—

"You see them?"

"I do."

Claude at once sprang down again from the hedge, and approaching Jack and Dick, he said in a low tone—

"What say you to asking of the hospitality of the gipsies for a while? I am sure that this boy knows some hidden and secure path to their encampment, and they will do anything for money. We will pay them well; and it is so essential that our horses should be in some place for safety, that I can get over all the risks of the application on the score of the chances of its success."

"It is a risk," said Dick.

"Yes," said Jack, "as regards the gipsies, it just comes to this, that you are either when with them as safe as they can possibly make you, or they will betray you to a certainty."

"What motive can they have to betray us?" said Claude Duval. "If they think at all, and have any feeling upon the subject of our position in society, that feeling ought to be in our favour."

"True."

"Then, shall I speak to the boy about it?"

"Use your own judgment, Claude," said Jack, "and I will follow you. If you think that it is the best chance for us, I'll believe it really is, and will brave all the risks of it."

"So will I," said Dick. "The falling lame of my horse, has placed me in such a predicament, that I am willing for anything that promises her a night's rest, poor thing."

"There is one thing," said Jack, "that looks well in this affair. We have found out so soon the mischief that Claude's friend, Stevens, did, that it cannot be very great, and a poultice to the horses' feet during the night will, in all probability, make them right by the morning."

"Then risk the gips," said Dick.

"What poultice would you use for the horses' feet, Jack?" said Claude.

"Ah, it's as well I should tell you what to do, in case anything should happen to me, Claude."

"Nay, Jack, nothing was further from my thoughts than the attempt to provide against such a contingency."

"I know that; I did but jest. But yet I will tell you both. You must pluck a handful of the flowering mallow, or marsh-mallow, as it is called, and pound it down as well as you can, with a small quantity of warm water. The juice will be quite green, and you must soak a rag doubled three times in it and apply it to the hurt in the horse's foot."

"Thank you, Jack; and that will cure it?" said Dick.

"It will. If it don't, it's a kind of hurt that horse never had before in all my experience."

"Then I will speak to the boy at once," said Claude, "since we are so far agreed about it."

He then stepped back to the hedge, from which the boy had now jumped, and was carelessly holding the halter that was around the ass's neck.

"Listen to me," said Claude Duval. "Your people have no objection to money. You have found out its value in all lands, and when the hand of sickness is upon any of you, you know well that money is your best friend."

"It is."

"When you want to cross the sea, too, you must have money; for although upon land you can take up the staff, and pack up your tents, and walk through the wilderness, the sea stops you, and you must pay money to those that have ships to transport you to the south."

"That is true."

"Very well, then; I and my two friends want to be concealed until to-morrow morning. Will your tribe, do you think, enable us to do so, by hiding us among them?"

The boy considered for a moment or two, and then he said—

"Yes. The tribe will do it. There is the consent of but one to ask; it is our queen. She is with us now."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Her name is Zahara, and her home is the plains of Lower Egypt, but she is here now, and she will consent."

"Quick—quick!" cried Dick. "I am certain that I hear the sound of horses' feet in the lane, Claude."

"And so do I," said Jack.

The gipsy boy flung himself down upon the ground, and laid his ear close to it for a moment. Then, springing to his feet again, he said—

"They come. Follow me at once."

"And our horses?" said Dick. "We cannot leave them."

"The horse will be safe with its rider. Come on."

The lad immediately led the way along the lane until they came to a portion of it where there was a gate leading into a field. It appeared to be fastened, but the gipsy boy had found out a means of lifting it from its hinges, so that the party could pass through it with the greatest ease. Immediately upon the other side of the gate was one of those mysterious, double hedgerows, which are common enough in some parts of the country of England, and which look as though they had at one time been well-kept paths, but by the establishment of some other and better road, had been suffered to go to vegetation, and to become completely wild with weeds and trees and bushes again.

It was down this double hedge-row that the gipsy boy led the three friends and their horses.

In some places their route was so overgrown with weeds, and so interlaced by the long prickly arms of the blackberry, that it was no easy thing to get along, and more than once Claude Duval had to take out his knife and cut away some obstructing branch of a bush before they could get past.

"Will this lead us to the encampment of your people?" said Claude to the boy.

"It will," he replied. "It is the way we come and go; but a man can easily make his way through this tangled brake when a horse cannot. It is awkward for the cattle; but we shall soon be through it now."

This lane—for such it might really be called, although it had evidently been completely abandoned for many years—was about a quarter of a mile in extent, and finally ended in a spot where the grass and the tall rushes sufficiently evidenced there was abundance of water. In fact, as the adventurers trod upon the ground it yielded to them, and the impression of each footstep rapidly filled up with water.



CLAUDE LIBERATING HIS FRIENDS FROM THE LO K UP.

"Why, this is a regular swamp," said Dick.

"We shall soon be out of it," said the boy. "Follow me."

The ground now rose a little, and the boy led the way around the slope of a little eminence, when suddenly upon rounding a clump of three tall trees, the party came right upon the gip y encampment.

The sight that now presented itself was singular in the extreme. The encampment consisted of about a dozen tents, and occupied a space of ground of considerable extent. A group of naked children were playing before the entrance of the nearest tent, and upon the sudden arrival of the strangers, some very singular kind of horn was blown, which made a harsh screaming sort of noise.

Immediately upon this, there emerged from some of the other tents several men, who, with looks of anger, seemed to demand what the intruders wanted there.

"Wait here," said the boy. "I must go and explain what you have said to the people. Do not move from this spot, I pray you."

"We will not."

The boy left them, and to every man he met, he muttered something in the singular patois of the people, and each one to whom he spoke followed him, and they all made their way to a rather larger tent than the others, and which stood somewhat apart.

"Well," said Dick to Claude, "it is just possible we may be safe here. How much do you intend to offer them?"

"Oh, I shall ask them to name their price."

"It will be cheap at anything," said Jack, "if we can but get a night's rest and safety for the horses in this place."

The consultation in the larger tent did not appear to last very long, for the boy was seen coming back to the strangers rapidly. Upon reaching them, he spoke quickly.

"All is well," he said. "The gips do want money, and they will get it from those who are not of their people. Come on."

"Then our proposal is accepted?" said Claude.

"It is. Follow me."

The boy led the way, and the three adventurers followed him at once, each leading his horse, and it was a mortifying thing to them all to see that at each step it was quite evident the horses got worse and worse on their feet, so that it was really no easy matter to get them along at all. The boy paused at the entrance to the larger tent, and shouted out something in a language that neither of the friends had the least conception of.

Through a slit in the canvas, then, a hand was projected, grasping a bottle, which in a moment was cast to the ground and broken.

"That will do," said the boy. "Come away. You will be well and properly provided for."

"But what was the meaning of breaking a bottle at the sight of us?" said Claude.

"Merely to signify that until the pieces united again of themselves, we would not give you up to your enemies."

"Very well, that is all right."

A couple of men, now, without speaking a word, began to erect a rough tent. When it was finished, one of them said—

"It is for the beasts. Perhaps you will not disdain to join the fireside of the poor gip?"

"Certainly not," said Claude. "We would rather be with you than away from you. But, I tell you candidly, that we expect the officers of the police are in pursuit of us, and we must, in case they come here, be hidden in some way."

"Our people," said another of the men, "are over the wold now, and we shall have due notice of the approach of any one. It will be time enough then to look for hiding places."

"But you have come to no understanding as to what we must give you," said Claude.

"That we must leave to you," said the man. "We can see many things; but not into the fugitive's pocket."

"Very well; we will be as liberal to you as we can, and I do not think you will lose anything by leaving to us your reward."

The three horses were now led into the tent that had been prepared for them, and Jack at once set about his preparations for curing their feet. As he had come along the lane between the tall hedges, he had been able to gather as much of the marsh mallow as he wanted, so that he was quite prepared to commence operations at once, and in the course of a quarter of an hour, he had, by the assistance of Claude and Dick, made the horses comfortable enough.

The gipsies looked on in silence; but it was evident that they were interested greatly in what was going on. When everything was done for the cattle that could be, Claude said—

"Now we are ready to sit down in your tents, and to partake of such hospitality as you may be able to afford us."

"Strangers," said one of the gipsies, whom they had not seen before, but who seemed to be in some sort of authority in the tribe. "Strangers, it so happens that the present period with us is one of ceremony connected with our ancient faith, and we must not eat nor drink with the children of another people."

"Very well," said Claude, "as you please; but I was not aware that there were any particular periods in your faith, if you have any which make such a rule imperative."

"We have a faith."

"Pardon me. I had no intention of offending you by making the remark at all. I merely spoke of my own ignorance. That was all."

"It matters not. Come on."

The gipsy went before, and halting at the door of a tent, he said something in his own language, and then holding aside the torn and dirty canvas of which the tent was composed, he added in English—

"Enter."

The three friends stooped and entered the tent, in which there was a miscellaneous assemblage of the tribe, to the number of sixteen or seventeen, only three or four women being of the party.

CHAPTER CCLXII.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS LIGHT UPON EVIL TIMES.

The gipsies seemed to be all talking together as Claude and his companions entered the tent, and it was astonishing to note the little attention which the arrival of the new comers created.

The man who had played the part of their conductor to that tent, showed them some rough seats made from boughs of wood, and there was likewise a kind of table similarly constructed.

"Sit here," he said, "for although the gipsy may not eat nor drink with the Nazarene at this time, he will make him welcome in his house."

Claude glanced at Dick rather uneasily, and Dick inclining towards him, said in a whisper—

"Is there anything amiss?"

"I don't know that there is; but I don't like the idea of their refusing to eat or drink with us."

"Nor I," said Jack.

They all three spoke in such low tones that it was quite impossible the gipsies could overhear what they said. But yet they found that many an inquiring glance was bent upon them, and in the flashing of the dark eyes that succeeded them, Claude found there was more of cunning and mystery than of cordial welcome.

Whatever, however, might be his opinion of the character of the gipsy tribe he had got among, he, Claude, felt that it would be a most dangerous thing now

to manifest anything in the shape of mistrust, so he only made up his mind to keep as wide awake as possible.

"We have nothing to offer you but water from the spring, and some cold victuals," said one of the men to Claude.

"That will do."

Upon this, a jug of water was placed before them, and a wooden bowl containing a not very dainty collection of the leavings of some dinner-table.

Dick shook his head. "The water for me," he said, "and as for the eatables, I think we can leave them for our friends the gips."

"With all my heart," said Claude, "they don't look very tempting."

At this moment a loaf of bread was flung into the tent on to the floor, and one of the gipsies, pointing to it, said to Jack—

"If you want bread, take it."

"You don't call that," said Dick, "the politest way in the world of handing a bit of a loaf to a gentleman?"

"Never mind," said Jack. "Never mind."

"Oh, but I do though," said Dick, as he lifted the loaf from the ground, and with almost the force of a cannon-shot, threw it back again out of the tent.

"We don't want any, thank you," he cried.

A howl outside showed that the loaf had hit some one, and the gipsies looked scowlingly at their guests.

"You have but yourselves to thank," said Dick, "for this. The only civil thing we could do was to follow your example; and as you threw the loaf at us to know if we wanted it, we had no resourse but to throw it back again, if we did not."

"Quite right," said the gipsy who appeared to have authority ever his companions. "It is quite right. Nothing can be possibly better, and we take no sort of offence at anything so very natural as your conduct."

Both Jack and Claude regretted that Dick had been so hasty upon the occasion; but since it was done, it could not be undone, and theytneither of them liked to say a word to him about it.

They all three drank the water in the jug, and then one of the gipsies came up to the table and said—

"Are you done with that?" pointing to the jug.

"Quite," said Claude. "It is at your service."

Without another word, the man took up the jug, and opening the canvas at the entrance of the tent, he flung it as far as he could, and when it fell, of course it was smashed to atoms.

"Well," said Dick, "upon my word we have got among very delightful company, indeed, I rather think."

"Hush," said Claude. "Let them have their own way. It is just possible enough that they have some religious ceremonies of their own which compel them in the fanaticism of the moment to behave in this way to us. But our stay will be short among them."

"The shorter the better," said Jack. "But see, we are nearly alone."

The gipsies one by one had left the tent, until there were but a man and a woman remaining, and they, too, were going towards the entrance of it, when Claude spoke—

"We will walk out of the tent," he said, "into the air, if you require it for any purpose. We have no wish to dispossess you."

Without a word in reply to this speech, which certainly required one, from its courtesy, the man and woman left the tent, and the three friends were alone completely.

"Well," said Dick, "I don't like this sort of thing at all. What do you think of it, Claude?"

"Be careful, Dick. We are surrounded but by walls of thin and tattered canvas, recollect; and every word we say is, no doubt, listened to. If we accom-

plish the end we have in view, of procuring safety till the morning, all will be well enough. We will pay them for that, and then we will depart in peace."

"Yes, but I must confess I should have liked a more cordial kind of reception from them. I wonder, too, what has become of the boy who brought us here? He seems to have completely disappeared."

"Claude," said Jack, suddenly, and he rose to his feet, "I know you are struggling against the conviction, in your own mind, that things are not as they ought to be here. Speak to us candidly, and say if it be not so."

"It is," said Claude, as he rose. "I will not remain with these people longer. They will not break bread with us, nor eat salt. They are not friends of ours."

"Let us to the horses, then, at once, and get away," said Dick.

"Yes—yes."

At this moment a wild kind of yell came upon their ears from without, and before they could take a step towards the opening of the tent, down it came in one mass of confusion upon them, and they were most completely entangled in the quantity of loose canvas and old rags of which it was composed.

"Betrayed!" cried Claude.

"Lost—oh, lost!" cried Jack.

Dick managed to get one of his pistols out and fired it at random. There was a loud cry, and then all was still for a moment; after which there was a bewildering shout, and a rush of men towards the fallen tent.

In the course of three minutes, Claude, Dick, and Jack were dragged out from the wreck of canvas, and found themselves in the grasp of a couple of officers, who, by the assistance of others who had nothing to do but help them, soon succeeded in handcuffing the whole three of them, and in tying ropes round their legs, so that any attempt to escape was out of the question.

The gipsies raised a wild kind of shout, more like the howling of a band of savages than anything else; and then Mr. Stevens the officer came up to Claude.

"Well, Duval," he said "Hem! Ah! I rather thought I should do it, somehow or another; but I didn't think to do it quite so easy."

"Oh, so this is a trick of yours, is it?"

"Yes, Claude Duval. Hem! I don't bear any malice, you know, and it's all in the way of business, you know, or else I shouldn't have thought of it."

"Oh, don't make any excuses."

"I must just search you, if you please, gentlemen, for your ease, that's all. You see, I was bound to take you, if I could, and so I have, you see. Hem! ha!"

"You are a genius, Stevens."

"Oh, dear, no; I did think you would have suspected that boy with the donkey, that I did."

Claude looked chagrined.

"And so, that was a take-in, was it?" he said.

"Oh, dear, yes. He did it pretty well; but yet I hardly, do you know, expected that it would have answered—A clever youth."

"So clever," said Dick, "that if ever I get hold of him I will put a final stop to his cleverness for the rest of his days."

"Hem! Ha! Oh yes. No doubt."

Poor Jack looked dreadfully cut up at this unexpected capture; but Claude laughed only, and said—

"Why, Jack, this is, after all, only a little resting. They can't keep us, you know that well enough."

"Oh dear! can't we?" said Stevens. "Hem!"

"Claude—Claude," said Jack, "the end has come."

"Not a bit of it," cried Claude. "All's right enough; I don't mean to give in, I assure you. There's plenty of time."

"I fired a pistol," said Dick. "Did I hit any one?"

"Yes," said Stevens. 'One of the gips. A man with a pair of ear-rings on, I believe,"

"Why, that's the very fellow who took us in hand when we came here, and seemed to be a sort of leader among them."

"Oh dear, very likely. Hem! Ha! He is quite dead. The bullet went into his right eye and came out at the back of his head, so it was rather a finisher."

"Well," said Dick, "for a chance shot, it was about the best I ever fired."

Stevens soon possessed himself of all the pistols that had belonged to the highwaymen, with the exception of one that Claude had so well hidden that it escapes even his scrutiny.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "I beg to inform you that we will take you to London at once in a cart, and if you make any attempt to escape or to be mischievous on the way, I can only say that I shall blow your brains out, as soon as look at you."

"Bravo, Stevens!" said Claude.

"I am not joking."

"No," added Claude, "nor am I; and I tell you what it is, Stevens, you are a very clever fellow, but I still think that you will find yourself in the wrong box, after all."

"In the witness-box at the Old Bailey you mean, and you in the dock."

"Very good—very good! It's all right. Where's your cart?"

"Hem! Ha! You are a nice young man, Claude Duval, and you are a nice man, Dick Turpin, and you are an engaging person, Sixteen-string Jack; but there will be a terrible crowd when you are all three hanged on next Monday come a week. Hem!"

"Look here," said Claude, as he pointed as well as he could with his manacled hands to his head. "I will bet you this against yours, that we are not hung on Monday come a week."

"Bet me what? your head?"

"Yes."

"Done, then, Claude Duval. Hem! Ha! I shall ask the sheriff to let me take my stake, and I dare say there are people who would pay a good price for it."

A wailing cry now arose from a throng of the gipsies that had congregated around the dead body of the one of their tribe who had fallen, and Dick raised his voice, and spoke—

"The reward of treachery!" he said. "The reward of treachery. It has done you a deal of good to sell our blood. There will from this day forth be a curse upon your tribe. I curse it!"

"No—no!" shrieked a female voice.

"Yes," said Dick, "and the curse will stick to you, too, as long as your tribe is a tribe."

Upon this the gipsies made a rush towards Dick, but the officers with the pistols in their hands interposed.

"Dear me," said Stevens, "my good friends, what do you want?"

"His blood!" cried a gipsy. "We must have his blood and place it when the moon is at its full to the east, and then the curse will go from us. It is the curse of blood, and only may be so removed."

"Really, gentlemen," said Stevens, "I am sorry to disoblige you; but this is my prisoner and you must kill and eat me first before you get him; and the first man who attempts to lay a finger upon him, I will send to the other world to keep him company who lies yonder in his gore. Hem! Ha!"

The gipsies shrunk back.

At this moment one of the officers appeared with a cart, and Claude and his friends were placed in it. The gipsies were consulting among each other, and then just as the officers were all mounted and ready to go, there rushed out of the

large hut an old hag of a woman, with a piece of scarlet cloth wound round her head, and in a screaming voice she addressed them in their own patois.

Whatever she said had the effect of rousing them to a state of fury and desperation, for catching up what weapons they could upon the spur of the moment, they began to advance threateningly towards the officers who surrounded the cart.

CHAPTER CCLXIII.

THE FIGHT WITH THE GIPSIES.—TREACHERY HAS ITS REWARD.

No doubt after what had happened, the gipsy tribe would have been but too glad, if such a thing had been possible, to have retraced its steps, and instead of bartering with the officers the fugitives for gold, would have felt greater satisfaction in defending the highwaymen, and trusting to their generosity for a recompense.

They had chosen the course, though, and the past was not be recalled. Vengeance for the death of their comrade seemed to be the principal feeling that actuated them.

The officer, Stevens, now, by his cool and courageous conduct, excited the admiration even of his captives. In a clear loud voice he spoke to the gipsies—

"Now listen to me, gipsies. These three men are my prisoners. I have taken some pains to get them, and I mean to keep them. When once I take a prisoner, I never part with him till I get a receipt for him from the proper authorities, and I warn you all that I will defend them to the last drop of my blood; and as I happen to know that my comrades here are of the same way of thinking, the most prudent thing you can do is to be as quiet as possible."

"Revenge!" cried the gipsies. "Blood for blood! It is the law of our old religion, and we will carry it out. Blood for blood!—A life for a life!"

"Hem! Very good, gentlemen. Come on, then."

With a frantic yell, which had the effect of rather frightening the officers' horses, the gipsies made a rush towards the cart in which the prisoners were, for the purpose of getting possession of Dick; and there can be very little doubt but that if they had succeeded, his life would not have been worth a moment's purchase.

The gipsies, however, had to do with men of cool nerves and steady valour—men who, with arms in their hands, knew they could hold their way, and who were not to be intimidated.

"Steady," said Stevens. "Steady."

The officers stood firm.

"Fire!" said Stevens.

In a volley, the pistols of the officers were discharged, and the rabble rout of the gipsies reeled back.

Again, then, there rose the shriek for vengeance, and those who had escaped from injury from the first volley, again rushed forward.

"Fire!" said Stevens; and again the officers sent a fearful volley among their assailants.

The smoke cleared away, and the gipsies were in full flight, with the exception of some dozen dead and dying, who lay upon the ground, deserted by the others.

"That will do," said Stevens. "They would have it, and now they have got it. We are for London."

The gipsies were evidently too much sickened of the affairs to attempt to rally again; and so, without any further molestation, the officers turned round and began to make their way towards the nearest high road.

"Well," said Claude, "this is a pretty affair, Mr. Stevens."

"Yes—Hem! Rather."

"It is not for us to regret it, for those rascals deserved amply all they have got, that is quite clear enough. They are a bad lot."

"Oh, very bad, indeed," said Stevens.

"And pray, what did you give them for betraying us, if it's a fair question, Mr. Stevens?"

"I don't mind telling you in confidence, Claude Duval, but, of course, you musn't let it go any further—that they agreed to do the job for five pounds."

"Five pounds?"

"Yes; that was all they got, and I paid them beforehand. It has cost some ten or twelve of them their lives, and you your liberty, and will hang you three shortly, and will put a good round sum in my pocket."

"And all for five pounds?" said Claude.

"Yes, it's cheap. Hem! Ha! Very cheap, indeed," said Stevens, as though he were speaking to somebody who really had no more concern in the affair than just to come to a passing opinion upon it.

"The price of blood should be rather high," said Claude. "To sell three lives for five pounds is too little."

"I said it was cheap."

"Too cheap to be good. Mr. Stevens, you may depend it will not answer. I shall win my wager of your head."

"Oh, dear no, you musn't do any such thing. You can easily imagine that I could not do without it in my business."

"Oh, that don't matter to me in the least."

"Certainly not; and I don't at all expect you to take that into consideration for a moment. But there is Sir John Richards. I told him if he waited just at that corner that I would bring you to him."

It was galling to Claude Duval to hear Stevens talk in such a style; but he made no remark upon it at the moment, only he resolved that he would strive more than mortal man had ever yet striven, that the day should come when he would pay him off with interest some, if not the whole, of that cool superiority with which he now showed off over him and his two friends.

"Cheer up, Jack," said Claude. "All are not lost that are in danger."

"It's all owing to that confounded mad girl's affair," said Jack.

Claude smiled, as he replied—

"No, Jack, don't say that. Who knows but that if we had never gone into that house, we might not have encountered a greater danger still out of it?"

"How could we encounter a greater danger than this, Claude?" said Jack, holding up his manacled hands.

It was a pang to the heart of Claude Duval to see that sight, and to feel how helpless he was at that moment to be of any use to alter their condition. Claude, however, would not allow any one to see that he was so deeply affected, but he turned it off with a sad smile, saying—

"Never mind, Jack. Live in hope."

"And die in despair," said Jack.

It was quite clear that poor Jack was in no mood to be reasoned with just then. As for Dick, he was looking rather moody and savage; and suddenly looking up, he said—

"Mr. Stevens?"

"Well, sir; what now?" said Stevens.

"My horse—all our horses. What has become of them?"

"They had not been ten minutes in the tent, where you thought you had them so secure, when we had possession of them."

"And it was you who stuck those infernal little plasters on their feet?"

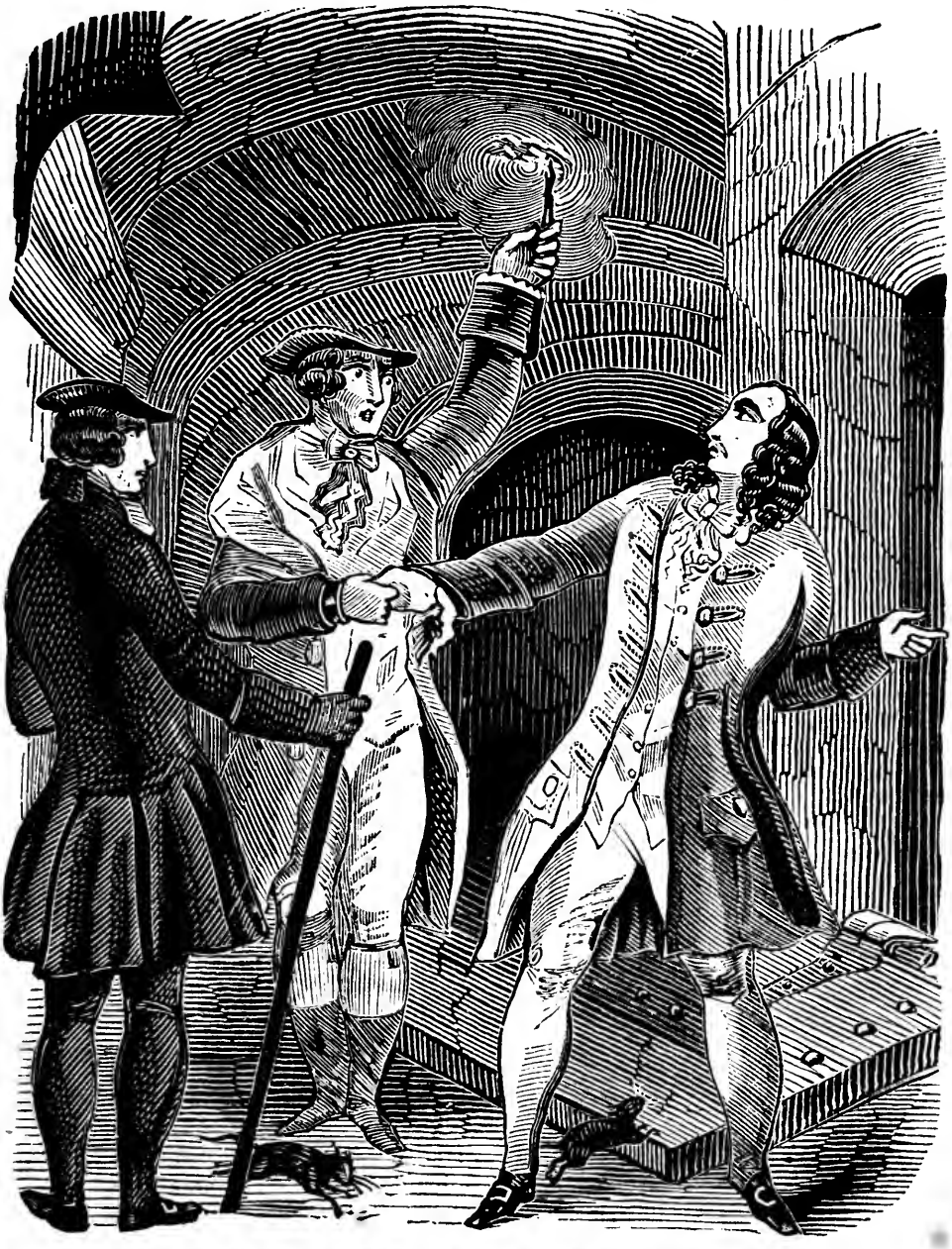
"It was, Dick Turpin. Before I went into the house with Sir John Richards, I saw your three horses. The other two I did not know, but I did know your Black Bess, Turpin."

"Go to the devil!"

"It was not a pleasant trick," said Jack, "to lame a good steed."

"They will be all right," said Stevens. "I never use a thing of that sort that I have not an antidote for; and if it is any satisfaction to you to know it, the horses are as good as ever they were."

"Take care of my horse, Stevens," said Claude, "for when I get him on to the road again, it will provoke me not a little to find him out of condition.



CLAUDE AND DICK RESCUE JACK FROM THE BOW-STREET LOCK-UP.

Don't grudge the oats, whatever you do, and mind you bruize them well, for he is used to it."

Stevens made no answer to this cool speech of Claude Duval's, which was so anticipatory of freedom again; but, riding up to Sir John Richards, he said in his odd kind of way—

"Here they are, Sir John. I've brought 'em."

"Why, you don't mean it, Stevens?"

"Yes, I do, Sir John. Here they are, all three in the cart. You can go and look at them, if you please, sir."

"Well, upon my life, so they are! What a trouble now and a bother it would spare if they could be hung at once, wouldn't it, Stevens?"

"Indeed it would, sir. If you think proper, it can be done at once."

"Why no—I rather think that would exceed my commission as a magistrate, Stevens. But I heard a deal of firing. What was it all about?"

"A row with the gipsies, sir. They tried to get the prisoners away from us, and we were forced to fire, or they would not only have done that, but murdered us besides."

"Then if you have killed any of the rogues and vagabonds, it is justifiable homicide, Stevens; so let us get off to London, as quickly as we can. Oh, you vagabonds, your time has come at last, has it? The gallows groans for you, it does. Only see, now, what a disgraceful end you have come to. This is the result of all your finery, and your gallivanting on the road, and your galloping here and your galloping ther , and your scarlet coats and your lace ruffles."

"Have you learnt that bya heart," Claude, "or did you think of it only just now?"

"Come, come, sir; no impudence."

"That's just what I say myself—and I warn you that if you go on with any more of your speeches, I will recollect them when we meet in some lonely place on the road."

"I'll take my chance of that, you thorough bad one," said Sir John; "and if you are not hung this time, I shall recommend that the gallows be burnt for old fire-wood."

"It will make a good bon-fire," said Claude.

The magistrate disdained to hold any further parley with his prisoners, but turning his horse's head towards London, he directed Stevens to bring them on with all speed.

The distance was not so great as to make it necessary to have a halt upon the road, so that none of the chances of a long ourney presented themselves to our three adventurers for escape, and, to all appejrance, their situation was something even more than a critical one, since they were evidently being conveyed to London without any of those chances that, if they had been taken anywhere else, might have come in their way.

When they were quite near to the metropolis, Stevens turned to the magistrate, and spoke respectfully, saying,—

"Newgate, I suppose, Sir John?"

"Well, I don't know. They will have to be brought before me in the morning. Suppose you put them in the Bow-street lock-up for the night?"

"As you please, sir; but Newgate is the safest."

"Oh, pho! Don't let them think that we are afraid of them, and so are forced to carry them to Newgate at once. The fact is, there is too much fuss made about these fellows, that's the truth, and they think they are quite wonderful people on that account. Take them to the lock-up—you will find that strong enough; and, besides, in your hands, which they will still remain in, they haven't much chance."

"Very good, Sir John—hem!—it shall be as you please, and if they escape me, why, they have but another to get the better of, and that's Old Nick."

This little dialogue was overheard by Claude, who, giving Dick a slight nudge with his elbow, said,—

"Dick, we are to go to the lock-up in Bow Street."

"Are we really?"

"Yes; do you know anything of it?"

"A little."

There was a peculiar look about Dick's face that gave Claude a hope that

he knew a great deal about the Bow-street lock-up, and for fear they should be separated when they got there into different cells, he was very anxious to know what Dick did know of the place.

"Speak low, Dick," he said, "and tell us all."

"I will. There's a tavern in the neighbourhood that supplies the place with anything the prisoners choose to buy, and there is a girl at the tavern who will do what she can for us."

"That is all?"

"Not quite, Claude."

"Go on, then, and tell me all, will you? But don't look as though you were speaking of anything interesting, for that d——d Stevens has his eye upon us now."

"I sea him. Then I can tell you, Claude, that I know a secret passage from the lock-up in Bow Street to——"

At this moment Stevens rode up to the side of the cart, and in a voice of mock friendship, he said—

"Hem! Really now, you seem to be having such a pleasant little discourse together, that it is quite a shame to keep it all to yourselves, that it is. What is it all about?"

"An ass in a fox's skin."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, and his name was Stevens."

"Very good—very good, and very witty, I daresay; but people should keep their wit between their teeth, like their tongues, at times, or it won't do them any good; and it strikes me, Claude Duval, that it ain't the wisest thing in the world of you to make an enemy of me."

CHAPTER CCLXIV.

THE PRISONERS PASS A STRANGE NIGHT AT THE LOCK-UP.

"PSHAW!" said Claude, in answer to this last remark from Stevens. "You have done your worst, and you know it."

"Never mind. Here we are at the lock-up in Bow Street."

Those few words—"Here we are at the lock-up in Bow Street"—had a very chilling kind of sound to the faculties of the three prisoners, and it was not in human nature for them to be otherwise than just a little affected at such an announcement.

They were all unusually silent.

"Ha!" laughed Stevens; "so you are beginning not to like it, and to think about it, eh? I thought your high spirits would soon come down a bit."

They neither of them thought proper to make any reply to this rather ungenerous remark from Mr. Stevens, and he was quite delighted with the idea that he had subdued them at last. But such was far—very far from being the fact in reality. The real truth was, that Claude Duval and his friends felt how very important it was now that their whole attention should be directed to the means of escape, and they could no longer spare a ment to engage in any frivolity with Mr. Stevens. They did not know but that the chances of liberating themselves might entirely depend upon some little matter that they might now notice; so, like prudent men, they sacrificed the present to the future, and let Mr. Stevens enjoy his fancied triumph while they looked warily about them.

The lock-up in old Bow Street at the time of Claude Duval was, as the reader may very well suppose, a very different affair to what it is now. Not the smallest vestige of the ancient building that was devoted to that purpose now remains.

As at present, though, the lock-up was opposite to the police-office, and it was a low-roofed building of only one story in height, and principally built of massive

wood-work. The cells were underground, and fitted up, as regards strength, principally upon that account.

The place was altogether one of the most gloomy that could be well imagined, and was highly calculated very much to affect the imagination of ordinary offenders.

We need hardly say that it had very little effect of that character upon the three prisoners now brought to it.

If there had been any idea upon the part of the idlers of the vicinity that the coach which stopped at the old lock-up contained such men as Claude Duval, Sixteen-string Jack, and Dick Turpin, it is very likely that in the course of a few minutes Bow Street would have been quite impassable; but such was not the case, and they were taken beneath the low-roofed and gloomy portal of the place without exciting any extraordinary sensations.

Immediately within the outer door was another one of iron—that is to say, it was called an iron door, in consequence of being coated with that metal to a considerable thickness on both sides, and it was likewise studded with those large nut-headed nails, which give so great an appearance of strength with so very little of the reality of it.

Immediately through that door was a kind of hall or vestibule, in which a couple of constables sat by a fire, that would throw out as much smoke into the air of the place as went up the chimney. Above the mantel-shelf were several cutlasses, and a blunderbuss, with a brass barrel, that was bell-shaped, and which was presumed to be loaded in some very deadly manner.

A door to the right and another to the left led to rooms appropriated to the officials of the place, and from one of these rooms opened a door to a narrow staircase, that led down to the cells.

Such was the general arrangement of the ground-floor of the old lock-up. Above, there were five rooms, in two of which the clerk to the magistrate at the office resided, and the others were unoccupied, except now and then, when some prisoner of importance, as regarded wealth or position, was placed there for a short time, pending his examination before the magistrate in the public office.

The mode by which these upper rooms were reached was by a staircase opening from the hall, and which was connected by a door that was always shut by a cord and weight. The hall itself was not above twelve feet square, and all the rooms were of the most paltry and confined dimensions.

"Now, gentlemen," said Stevens, "here we are."

"And this you call a lock-up?" said Dick.

"Rather."

"Is that blunderbuss loaded?"

"Just a few."

"Well, Heaven have mercy upon the man who shall attempt to fire it, for it will burst and blow his head off to a certainty if he does. That I can swear to."

"Oh," said Stevens, with a grin, "we are not so mighty particular about our heads as all that comes to; and if we feel inclined to fire it, off it will go, even if our heads follow it."

"That," said Claude, "is a matter of taste."

"You couldn't say a truer thing than that," replied Stevens. "And now, gentlemen, if you will give me leave, I will show you to the parlours below stairs; and if it's any satisfaction to you to know that I am to be found any hour of the night here in the hall, I beg to inform you that such will be the fact—without a doubt."

"Thank you," said Claude, as he looked up at a clock that was upon the wall. "I think we shall be with you about half-past two."

A savage expression crossed the face of Stevens, for he saw that one of the constables in the hall was upon the broad grin at the idea that he was getting the worst of the chaffing that was going on in the place.

"Very good," he said, as he slowly rubbed his hands together, "I quite

understand you, Claude Duval. It is mere chaff. And yet I will shew you that I have a good feeling towards you, and, upon one condition, you shall sit up with me by the fireside here all night, which will be a thousand times more comfortable than being in one of the little parlours below."

"The condition?" said Claude. "What is it?"

"That you will all three give me your words of honour as men, that you willl make no attempt to escape."

"It is tempting," said Claude, "but I beg leave to decline."

"And I," said Dick.

"And I," said Jack.

"Very good. I am not at all surprised nor disappointed. It is only what I fully expected. But still, to shew you that I had a good feeling towards you, I gave you the chance. Where is the lock-up keeper?"

"Here you are, Mr. Stevens," said a short, stout man with a very red face, and peculiar little grey eyes, making his appearance from the upper floor. "Here you are. Who have you got here?"

"Claude Duval—Sixteen-string Jack, and Dick Turpin."

The lock-up keeper screwed his lips up to the position of whistling, but no whistle came from them. Then shaking his head, he said—

"No—no, that's too much of a good thing all at once."

"There is your order."

The lock-up keeper looked at the magistrate's order, and saw that it did indeed name the persons mentioned by the officer. A look of intense interest came across his face in a moment, and he cried—

"Well, this is something! I didn't think to have had three such in the old lock-up while its timbers held together, that I didn't! That is to say, all at once. Gentlemen, you are as welcome as flowers in May."

"We are very much obliged," said Claude.

"Now, Mr. Bolt," said Stevens, speaking in a sharp jerking tone, and addressing the lock-up keeper by his name. "Now, Mr. Bolt, you will quite understand that I don't intend these prisoners to get away, and that I will remain here, in the hall, until they leave this place again; and so help me everything that is good, bad or indifferent, I'll shoot the first man who tries to leave this place who ought not, or who in any way aids the prisoners to go——"

"Mr. Stevens," said Bolt, and his little eyes twinkled again, and his face got redder than usual, "if you mean to accuse me of letting prisoners go, say so at once, like a man, and I can meet you on the charge."

"That will do," said Stevens, drily. "I don't want to say another word about it."

"Oh, you are a humbug," said Bolt.

"I know it," said Stevens, with all the composure in the world. "I am quite aware of the fact."

This little quarrel between Stevens and Bolt was amusing enough to the three captives, and it gave them some hopes, too, that Bolt might, just to get the better of Stevens, and aggravate him a little, be of what service he could to them; so Claude Duval said—

"I am sure that it is a very ungracious thing of Stevens to say one word against Mr. Bolt, who is a gentleman, as all the world knows, although he keeps the lock-up."

Bolt looked gratified.

"My opinion is," said Dick, "that Stevens gets in an ill-humour when he sees Bolt, because he is not a quarter so good-looking, and can never hope to be so. Bolt is a handsome man, and the sight of such is aggravating to some selfish people."

Bolt rubbed his hands together, and smiled.

"Hold your row, all of you, will you?" cried Stevens; "and you, Bolt, how can you be such an ass as to stand smirking and smiling there in such a way, objects ause you are flattered in the most barefaced manner to your face, when all

the world knows you are as ugly as the parish pump, and about as much of a gentleman as my old hat is a nosegay?"

"You envious humbug!" cried Bolt.

"You stupid idiot!" shouted Stevens.

"Go it," said Claude. "Go it. That's the thing—go it! All's right. Stick to him, Bolt; you know you are right, and that gives you strength."

"Stop!" said Stevens, suddenly, with almost preternatural calmness. "Stop, this is folly. Mr. Bolt, I beg your pardon."

"Oh, well, if you say that, Mr. Stevens, I have done."

"Yes, Bolt, I beg your pardon. It is I who am the ass to allow myself to be so played upon by these fellows, who are only desirous that you and I should quarrel, that out of that circumstance they may gather some hope of escaping from the lock-up. Give me your hand, Bolt. I did not mean what I said. The words were spoken in a moment of wrath, merely, and I will stand a bottle of the best wine that can be got to-night for you and I, as we sit up."

Bolt and Stevens now shook hands to the great disappointment of Claude Duval, and the former said—

"Mr. Stevens, you know, I always respected you as a man of extraordinary talents, and I hope we shall always be good friends."

Stevens looked at the prisoners with a twinkle of the eye, as he then said—

"Come, then, we will show them to their cells, and then we will have the bottle of wine, Mr. Bolt."

Claude Duval now turned his whole attention to studying their route to the cells. He glanced at the room that led to the staircase. He took notice of the doors, and upon which side the fastenings were. He counted the stone steps, and found they were fourteen that led to the cells, and he felt that the floor at the bottom was earth merely.

He had not a hope that they would all be confined in one cell—that was not to be expected; therefore, it was no disappointment to him to find that they were placed in different cells.

"Good-night, Dick," he said. "Good-night, Jack."

"Good-night," said Turpin, gaily.

"God bless you, Claude," said Jack.

It was evident that Jack's spirits were very much depressed by the tone in which he spoke; but Claude did not think it prudent to say anything to him of a consolatory character, as there were others to listen to it; so he made no remark.

In another minute he was in a cell alone, and the door double-locked and barred and bolted upon him.

"This is pleasant," he said, as he leant against the damp wall, and tried to pierce the obscurity of the place with his eyes in vain.

The most galling thing to Claude was, now, that he was handcuffed; and, although he possessed the art of compressing his hand sufficiently to escape from ordinary fetters, he very much feared that the handcuffs that were now upon him, were too tight for him to get out of so easily.

"Confound them," he said; "if they had only left my hands at liberty, I might do something; but what a piece of desperate cruelty it is to shut up a man all night with his hands locked together by iron manacles. What, now, if this were only a case of suspicion against me, and I was really innocent!"

It is needless to tell the reader that such positive cruelty is never practised now. Prison discipline is better understood than it was in those days, and the age is much more humane.

As Claude Duval was the most energetic in his movements after he had remained for while in the cell, we will, with the reader's permission, neglect Jack and Dick for a short time, while we attend to what our more immediate hero is about.

The idea of remaining in the lock-up at Bow Street, if he could by any possibility leave, was not one that was likely at all to take possession of such a mind as Claude Duval's; and from the moment of his arrest, although he could not be

said to be concocting some scheme of escape, yet he was on the look out for some opportunity of laying the ground-work of such a proceeding.

It was quite evident, that during the time that had intervened from the arrest, and the moment when the key of the cell in the lock-up was turned upon him, there was no chance of doing anything that could in any way tend to give him or his companions a chance of liberty, so he had wisely forborne to make his situation worse by any weak and unavailing effort, the consequences of which would be sure to rest upon their own heads.

When he was now, however, alone in the lock-up, the affair assumed quite a different aspect, and escape for himself and his friends was the sole idea that filled up his imagination.

CHAPTER CCLXV.

THE FRIENDS DESPERATELY ESCAPE FROM THE LOCK-UP IN BOW STREET.

"Now for the handcuffs," said Claude, after he had felt quite certain that the officer had left him to himself, and that there was no intention of again visiting his cell.

It will be remembered, that Claude had had his fears that he might not be able to rid himself of the encumbrance of the handcuffs quite so easily as he would wish; but as yet he had not made the effort.

Now he set about the attempt.

Claude Duval was a small-boned man, although above the middle height; and although there was not a particle of fat about him, he yet had a roundness of contour, and an appearance of plumpness that looked like fat; but the out-of-doors life he led, and the exercise he took, had made him muscular, so that he had a chance of getting out of the handcuffs, which a more angular and bony man would not have had for a moment.

His first effort was to hold up his manacled hands above his head, so as to get the blood as much out of them as was possible, and then he fixed the handcuffs tightly between his knees, and tried to get his right hand out.

What an awful effort it was, and how impossible it felt! So he could not. But he soon found, from the slippery and damp condition of his hands, that he had broken the skin, and that they were bleeding from cuts inflicted by the edge of the manacles.

"Where there is a will," said Claude, quite calmly, "there is a way, and I will get out of the darbies if they carry half my hand along with them in the process."

Determination such as that was not to be defeated. By one frightful squeeze he slipped his right hand out of the fetter.

"That will do," he said, as he shook it to try and recover sensation in it. "That will do, though it was a bit of a twinge.

It was some time before he could get his right hand sufficiently recovered to enable him to make any effort to liberate his left; but when he made that effort he soon found it was in vain.

Possibly the bones of his left hand, as is the cast with many persons, were a little larger than those of the right, or his having wounded and lacerated the right in the way he had done, had made it impossible for him to make such another effort; but certain it is, that he was obliged, after a trial, to give it up in despair.

"Never mind," he said, "a bracelet will do me no particular harm now, and I dare say I can twist off the loose darby that hangs dangling by the wrist rather troublesomely."

By placing his foot upon the loose handcuff, and giving it a sudden jerk with the left hand, he snapped it off, so that, in reality, he was as free from the handcuffs

for all practical purposes, as though he had got his left hand out as well as his right.

"That will do," he said; "and now, Mr. Stevens, with all his cunning, has left me a knife in a part of my clothing; and if I don't cut my way to freedom with it, why I can't, and there's an end of it; but, I will try, for all that."

Former experience had taught Claude Duval the value of such a weapon—it was a knife upon one side and a saw upon the other, and was exquisitely got up—so that while he had had time and opportunity to do so, he had procured it and hidden it about him in such a way, that it was next to impossible that he should be deprived of it.

The result had shown that he was right in his calculation, for even Mr. Stevens with all his tact and cunning, had managed in some way to overlook it.

It seemed but a small weapon, that knife, the blade of which was not above eight inches long, with which he was to work his way to freedom; but yet smaller tools than that in the hands of skilful cracksmen have worked a passage out of Newgate.

By feeling all along the edge of the knife with his finger, Claude found that it was in good condition, and then he placed himself close to the door to listen if any of the sounds from the upper part of the lock-up reached that place.

All he heard was a rumbling noise, that seemed to come from directly overhead and that confirmed him in the idea that the cells went under the street, for the rumbling sound he did not doubt was a carriage going along over the stones.

The idea did slightly occur to him of trying to work his way out through the roof of the cell, but he gave it up, as he considered that it would be next to impossible to do so without attracting the observation of some one passing, and so leading to an immediate discovery of his intentions.

"No," he said, "I must go the regular way out as I came the regular way in, I suppose; but the first thing will be to get out of the cell, and to liberate, if possible, Jack and Dick."

The cell was paved with a sort of red tiles, very thick, indeed, but in consequence of lying there a long while, the earth, from the dampness of the spot, had oozed up between them, and formed a sort of coating over them, so that, at first, Claude had thought that he trod upon merely hardened earth.

A very slight examination was sufficient to prove to him that such was not the case, and he thought that very possibly the passage on the outside of the cells might be paved in the same way, although he had had the impression that it was nothing but earth.

Such a state of things did not make much difference to his plans.

Throwing himself on the ground, he carefully felt the door at its lower part and found that it was about half an inch from the ground, and that a current of cold, damp air crept in under it.

"Now I shall set to work," he said, "and we will see what the next hour will do."

Claude was very careful in the way in which he used his knife, for fear of breaking it, for well he knew that however well-tempered a piece of steel might be, it was impossible to say that there might not be some flaw in it that would make it give way when least expected to do so; and that knife was to him too great a treasure for him to use it very recklessly.

He got up, without much difficulty, one of the tiles with which the floor was paved. It proved to be about the thickness of an ordinary brick, and, indeed, but that it was shaped squarer than a brick, might with propriety have been called one.

After this, his progress was easy enough, and he placed the knife in its hiding place in his apparel and only used his hands to the work. The tiles gave way without any trouble at all, and he soon got up a sufficient number of them to leave the spot of earth by the door of the cell quite free from any such encumbrance.

The object of Claude was to get under the door

He well knew that a small excavation would be sufficent for him to force himself through, and he did not for a moment doubt but that he should be able to accomplish it.

According, now, to his expectation, he found that the passage without the cell was paved with the same description of tiling that the cell itself was; but the difficulty of getting rid of any of that which was outside was very great.



THE THREE ADVENTURERS FOLLOWING THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT, LEADING TO THE INN.

After incredible efforts, he did at last succeed in loosening one of the tiles, and in dragging it into his cell. After that, his progress was easier, and he pulled them away right and left, and in advance as far as he could reach.

The rapidity with which Claude Duval worked, was now amazing, for he felt that he was in a very dangerous position, as no one could come into the passage

now, without at once seeing what was going on, in which case an instant defea of all his plans was to be at once looked for.

That such a discovery and such a defeat would be made the excuse for loading him with fetters, from which there would be no escape, he well knew; so that now he worked, indeed, for his life. Never did a human being, with inefficient means to do so, dig into the earth with the speed that Claude Duval now used in the process, and this process and the result was that he soon had thrown out sufficient of the soil to enable him to feel that there was a large cavity under the door.

"Will it do?" was the question.

After some little consideration, he thought the best way to creep through, was with his face downwards, and, accordingly, he made the attempt. He got his head under the door easily enough, but his shoulders stuck fast, and after a violent effort to get through, he was compelled to desist and set to work again deepening the excavation. He had it wide enough, for, in truth, it was just about as wide as the door itself.

It took him another ten minutes now to complete the job, and he found the broken handcuff of great assistance in helping him to scoop out the mould from the excavation. When he tried it again, he, to his great delight, slipped through easily, and although it gave him a rather awkward twist to do it, he did manage to scramble right under the door, and to get into the passage.

"Trouble the second over," said Claude. "The first was the handcuffs—the second, the cell; and now I have got plenty to do before me."

The first thing he now did was to run up the stone staircase, and listen intently at the door at the top of it. When there, he heard the murmur of voices, which he felt convinced came from the hall, and no doubt were the individual property of Mr. Stevens and Mr. Bolt, as they sat by the fire in that part of the lock-up.

What they were saying, he could not catch sufficiently distinct to understand, as the sound had to come right through the side room; but he was so far satisfied that they were quiet.

"They are discussing that bottle of wine, no doubt," thought Claude, "that Stevens was so liberal in procuring to treat Bolt with. I would give them fifty bottles of the very choicest, if they would only be quiet for another hour or so."

Claude now trod lightly down the stone steps again, and finding his way to the first of the cell doors on the opposite side to that upon which was his own from which he had recently escaped, he tapped at it with his knuckles pretty sharply twice.

There was no answer to the summons.

"They are neither of them in that one, I suppose," said Claude; so he felt his way to the next door, and tapped at it.

"Who's that?" said Dick's voice.

"Hush!" said Claude, placing his lips to the key-hole. "Hush! It is I—Claude Duval. Don't you know my voice, Dick?"

"God bless me, yes; I do, now. But how, in the name of all that is odd, have you got out of your cell? I have been working away at the hinges of my door all this time, and have only got one of them off now."

"Which one, Dick?"

"The lower one."

"Wait a minute, then, and I can give you a helping hand. There are iron bars across the doors, and if I can only get one of them loose, it will make a first rate jemmy, I rather think."

"But how, in the name of all that's wonderful, are you out and about, Claude? That puzzles me."

"Never mind about that just now. We shall have lots of time to talk at

that when we are all three in some quiet spot in the far-off country, and enjoying a laugh over our night in the lock-up."

"Do you really think so?"

"Think what?"

"That we shall soon be in the country again, and enjoying a laugh?"

"To be sure. But be quiet. I'm trying for the bar."

To his great satisfaction, Claude found that the bars were only screwed in the floor by an iron pin hung by a bit of chain about six inches long to the wall, so that by taking the pin out, the bar could be at once lifted from its place with the greatest possible ease.

With that iron bar, which was about five feet in length, in his hand, Claude felt that he was rather a match for Mr. Stevens, and Mr. Bolt likewise, and all their myrmidons; but the first object was to release Dick. He did not choose Dick as the first to release; but as he had come to his cell, by accident, first, he felt bound to make Jack wait his time.

Claude found that he could just insinuate the end of the iron bar under the door of Dick's cell, and when he did so, he heard something, either about the lock or the hinges, given such a crack, that it was quite evidently broken.

Another moment and the door gave way by the hinge that was left, and Dick was as free as an escape from his cell went, at all events.

CHAPTER CCLXVI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN EFFECTUALLY ESCAPE FROM THE LOCK-UP.

Dick had still his handcuffs on him; but Claude now had his knife with the saw at the back of it, by which he could help him.

Claude shook hands with his friend as well as he could in the dark, and then he said—

"Let us make an effort to get you free from the darbies, Dick, for while they are upon your wrists, you are still a prisoner."

"No, Claude—no.

"No? What do you mean by that?"

"Just that I would prefer you should go and rescue poor Jack before anything else is thought of. He must suffer more than either you or I, for we both know that, poor fellow, after what he has gone through, he is not the man he was."

"True—most true—I will not delay a moment."

"Why did you not leave me alone, Claude, for a little while, and go to his cell at once?"

"Just because I did not know at all which was yours and which was his, and that yours was the first that by mere chance I came to."

Claude now felt his way to another of the doors, and tapped at it as he had done at that of Dick's cell, but no answer was returned; and so he went to another and to another, and it was the fourth before, in a weak voice, Jack replied from within, saying—

"Who knocks?—who knocks?"

"I, Jack," said Claude. "Dick and I have come to rescue you."

"Oh, no—no! Do not mock me. It is cruel to do so. We are all lost! We shall all die! The time has come. Do not mock me, Claude Duval, by any delusive hopes."

Claude did not want to argue the matter with Jack, for he knew that it would be quite useless—indeed, useless as it was dangerous, for time was of the greatest object to them that could possibly be. Turning to Dick, he said—

"We must try what we can do with the door of Jack's cell by the aid of the iron bar. Take this one, Dick. Have you got it?"

"Yes—yes. But you——"

"I know how to get another. But you can't work with your handcuffs on, I am certain."

"Yes, but I can, though. That's quite a mistake of yours, Master Claude. I can place both hands on a crow-bar and give a lift with it quite as well with a pair of handcuffs on as without them."

"Push it under this door, then, as well as you can. You will feel that there is a sort of crevice there, if you take the trouble so to do, and let us try what iron will do against wood and iron by a heave upwards, both at the same moment of time."

"You give the word then, Claude."

"I will. Are you ready?"

"In a moment. Not quite yet. Wait a bit—Now for it—I am all right. The end of the bar is a couple of inches under the door."

"Heave!" said Claude.

In a moment, crash! went the look of the door.

"Heave again!"

Crackle, went some of the wood-work.

"Oh, what is all that?" said Jack. "What is taking place, now?—Speak to me, somebody, do. What is it all about? Am I dreaming?"

"Jack, be calm," said Claude. "All is right, old friend. Don't you know my voice? It is I, Claude Duval. Why, you have been to sleep and don't know where you are."

Claude had thrown down his iron bar, and with all his strength was trying to drive the door inwards. In another moment in it went with a sudden crash, and Claude was very nearly precipitated into the cell along with it.

Dick was much afraid that the noise that had been made would have the effect of warning the officers above of something unusual going on in the cells, and he mentioned his dread to Claude.

"Speak to Jack," said Claude, "and I will go up the steps and listen."

Claude thereupon bounded up the stone steps, and stood for some few moments with his ears placed against the door at the top of them; but all was still, and he felt quite satisfied that their efforts to escape in that underground place had not made noise enough to reach the ears of the officers above. He went back, and heard Dick remonstrating with Jack.

"What's the matter with him, now?" said Claude. "Oh, Jack, I am quite astonished at you. What do you mean by all this?"

"I don't know what he means," said Dick; "but he won't know me at all."

"Light!" said Claude. "Oh! would that we had a light. It is the utter darkness that confounds him in this place."

"That is Claude's voice," said Jack.

"To be sure it is," said Claude, kindly. "I was quite sure you would know that, Jack. Recollect yourself. We are trying to escape from the lock-up in Bow-street. Don't you remember, old friend?"

"Oh, yes—yes. Pardon me, both of you. I know now. But the truth is, I I had fallen into a sort of slumber that had thoroughly confused me, and a noise that I heard completed the matter."

"That noise was made by our breaking open the door of your cell, Jack; so it ought to have been a welcome enough one to you. All we want now is a light."

"Then I can accommodate you," said Jack; "for I have the means of getting a light hidden about me so well, that they did not find them out when they searched me. Wait a moment."

Both Claude and Dick were very glad to hear Jack now speaking so rationally as he did, for they had been really apprehensive, from his strange mode of

talking only a few moments before, that the peril he was in had had the effect of depriving him of his reason. Now, however, they no longer entertained such an idea, for the tone of voice in which he had last spoken had been quite sufficient to dissipate it.

In the course of about half a minute a faint light illumined the cell; and then Jack, as he held up an ignited phosphorus match, said—

"Here it is; but I have no candle or wax taper, so we can only see while the match lasts."

A couple of large rats made a bolt out of the cell at this moment, and passing Claude and Dick, went scampering down the passage, and were out of sight in a moment.

"A lively place this," said Dick.

"Very," said Claude; and then, as he spoke, out went the match, and all was profound darkness again.

"Confound it!" said Dick; "what a treat the commonest penny-dip candle that ever was made would be to us now!"

"It would, indeed, Dick," said Claude; "and I would gladly promise a guinea for it, or a couple, for the matter of that. But light up another match, Jack, if you can."

"Oh, yes. But I have only got six."

"Well, never mind; let us have another, so that I may see where to begin with a file I have here at Dick's handcuffs. I will soon have his off, and then I will begin upon yours, Jack."

"Never mind about getting them off, Claude. Separate them, and that will be quite sufficient, I assure you. The rings on my wrists are no harm so long as I have the use of my hands."

"I understand."

Jack ignited another of the little matches and held it until it burnt right down to his fingers; but by that time Dick had twisted up the lining of his hat closely, and lit it by the match, so that it made a temporary torch, although it did not burn over well.

Claude, by the light of it, however, was able to work away at the handcuffs much better than as if he had been in the dark, and the fine saw, with its exquisitely sharp teeth, soon bit through the iron, and so far as having his wrists separated, and his hands at liberty, Dick was comparatively free.

"Now, Jack, for you," said Claude.

Three minutes more sufficed to release Jack from his fetters, and then they felt as if they were something more than half way to freedom, indeed. All Jack's matches, however, but two, he had exhausted, and those Claude advised him to keep for the present in case of any emergency. They then each armed himself with one of the bars that went at the backs of the cell doors, and, Claude going first, they slowly ascended to the strong door at the head of the flight of little stone steps.

If they could but get that door open, it was but a fight with the officers, even if they encountered them, and then liberty might be theirs; but that door was likely enough to present many obstacles, for not only was it of very great strength, but it was so close at hand to the hall, that they dared not set to work with the expedition they would have liked, for fear of being overheard by the officers.

"Careful we must be, now," whispered Claude, "and I think we must have one of the two of Jack's matches to make a survey of the door with."

"Here it is," said Jack.

Whiz! went the match, and Jack handed it to Claude, who passed it steadily up and down the door, until it went fairly out; but it had kept alight long enough for him to see that the only way for him to work at the door was to cut out either the lock or the hinges, and either would be a work of some time and difficulty with the little saw that he only had to do it with.

"You had better both of you sit down on the steps," he said, "and make up

your minds for a waiting job, now; for there is no resource but to cut away round the lock, and to have patience about it."

"Stop," said Jack.

"What is it, Jack?"

"You can do better than cut away at the lock."

"Can I?"

"Yes; I can just get my hand under the door, and surely your saw will go edgeways under, if that is the case. Can you not cut out a square large enough for us to creep through?"

"That will do, Jack. I can."

Claude saw at once the facilities of escape that this mode of operation suggested by Jack presented. The door was likewise to be attacked at a part of it that was not fortified by any extraordinary means, so that, in all likelihood, it would not offer any very great obstruction to the saw. He at once knelt upon the stairs and began operations.

In the first place, Claude found that the space between the bottom of the door and the top stair would just admit the saw edgeways, so that he could commence to work at once; and although it was rather an awkward thing sawing upwards, it was to be done, by a little perseverance, and that was a quality not wanting in Duval.

With a noiseless, but amazingly rapid motion, the fine-tempered saw cut through the wood-work and the sheets of iron which were used upon the door, and by feeling his way, Claude easily avoided any of the large nails by which it was clamped.

"How are you getting on?" said Dick.

"Capitally! If we go on at this rate, the opening in the door will be made in ten minutes; but speak low, whatever you do."

"I will—I will."

"Better not speak at all," said Jack.

They seemed to think this the wisest advice, for none of them exchanged a syllable now, while Claude worked away with the saw, which only made a dull, grating sort of sound, which could not extend very far, and which, if it did, would most likely be mistaken for something in the street. If the officers went on gossiping, however, which it was very likely they would, it was not at all probable that they would hear it at all.

Claude Duval was well aware through how small an apparent space the body of a man will pass, so he did not give himself more labour than he thought sufficient in the matter, but soon turned the saw to the horizontal, which was much easier in working.

"Do you want a light?" said Jack, in a low whisper.

"No—no. When I get the piece quite out will do. Then it will be as well for us to see our way in the matter; but not yet, Jack."

Another five minutes, and Claude had turned the corner, and was sawing the door downwards rapidly. A flash of light suddenly shot under the door, and he stopped sawing.

Some one was in the room to which the door communicated.

"Lost!" thought Claude, but he did not say a word.

His idea was, that the officers were going to see if all was right in the cells, and if that was the case, there was nothing for it but a hand to hand fight for liberty and life.

"Have you found it?" said a voice from the hall.

"No," said the man who was in the room with a light, and who had evidently come there upon some message for Mr. Bolt, as his was the voice that propounded the question from the hall.

"Look in the corner cupboard, then."

"Oh, here it is. All right, sir."

They heard something rattle like glass, and then Bolt cried out again in angry tones—

"What are you about there—are you drinking it?"

"Oh, no, sir; I'm coming."

"Just try the door leading to the stairs," said Stevens, "before you come away. It's as well to be quite sure everything is all right; and give it a good shake, Smith."

"I will, sir."

Smith, the officer, who had been sent to fetch a bottle containing some rather ardent compound from the room, now approached the door at which Claude Duval had been so industriously at work, and laying hold of the lock of it, he gave it a good shake, which satisfied him that it was all right and secure. He never thought of casting his eyes downwards. If he had, he must have seen the effect that the saw had produced.

"All right, sir," he said.

"Then come on, at once," said Bolt.

The man left the room, and slammed the door of it shut behind him.

"A narrow escape, that," said Claude. "Quite a squeak I call it."

"It was, indeed," said Dick. "I thought it would have been a case of 'war to the iron bars,' at the very least. I was resolved to sell my life dearly, if it was to go at all."

"No—no, Dick," said Jack; "don't talk of selling your life at all. Let us hope that that is a contingency not at all likely to come to pass; and as the danger has gone by now, we will not speculate upon what might have been its results."

"Very good, Jack—I say no more. Are you hard at work, Claude?"

"Indeed I am."

"But I do not hear the saw."

"No, I am working with such long sweeps that it makes no noise. Now do you hear it?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very good, then you will hear it no more, for, if I do not very much mistake, I have got so near to the end of my job, that the slightest force will break out the piece of wood."

"That's capital. Do it, Claude, do it."

"There it goes."

Claude just tapped with the toe of his boot at the piece of the door that he had cut all round, and out it went into the room beyond, leaving a clear opening of about fifteen inches square, through which, without a doubt, they could each of them creep."

"It is done," he said.

"Then we will follow you," said Dick.

"Very good. This is not a time to squabble about precedence, so here goes. What a treat it will be if it should turn out too small, after all, for us."

"It would be such a treat," said Dick, "as I would not have for the best hundred pounds that ever I saw in all my life."

"Nor I for double the amount," said Jack. "Put us out of our suspense, Claude, by trying it at once."

"Here goes," said Claude, and in a moment he popped through the orifice in the door with the agility of a Harlequin.

"Ah," said Jack, "he was but joking with us, for it is quite evident that he knew he could get through with ease. Follow him, Dick."

"As you please, Jack."

Dick was a trifle stouter than Claude, but he did get through the hole in the door, although it cost him a slight squeeze to do so, and he had had his doubts about it before he tried it.

Jack followed immediately, and they were all three in the outer room. The utmost caution was now requisite in their proceedings lest they should be ver heard by the officers in the vestibule or hall, for although the door of the room

that opened into that portion of the lock-up was closed, yet sounds had not far to travel.

They could hear the officers conversing, and by the same rule, the officers might hear them, if they raised their voices above the merest whisper in addressing any remarks to each other.

Their success, so far, was sufficiently wonderful to induce them to entertain the most sanguine hopes of its being followed up by still greater success. They were intensely silent, however, for a few minutes, for they were exceedingly anxious to ascertain, if possible, who was in the hall.

CHAPTER CCLXVII.

THE ADVENTURERS MEET WITH A FRIEND THAT THEY DID NOT EXPECT.

It could not be said that either Claude Duval or his friends had formed any distinct plan of proceeding after they should reach the room they were now in. The fact was, there had been so many doubts about the reaching of it at all, that they had neither of them liked to ask each other what they should do if they did so far succeed.

Now, however, the question became one of the most serious importance, and Dick, in a low voice, said—

"Now that, thanks to Jack's suggestion about cutting a piece out of the bottom of the door, we have got so far, what are we to do? I would fain leave it all to you, now, Claude, to decide upon what course of action you may think the best."

"The obvious one," said Claude, "is to sally out, and fight our way; but that would certainly lead to murder, and that is what I, and what I suppose both of you likewise wish to avoid."

"Oh, yes, yes," said both Jack and Dick.

"Very good; then, it is quite clear that we must not sally out in the way I mention, if such is our feeling upon the subject, but we must try to get into the street in another way."

"By the front windows?" said Dick.

"I hope so."

"Impossible," said Jack; "they are all bound with iron. I noticed as much as I came in the coach to this place."

"And so did I," said Claude, "but the bars must be terribly old by this time, and their hold upon the wood-work must be slight indeed. I should say they cannot resist us."

"Maybe so; but how are we to get into the room above?"

"There is no way but one, and that is through the roof. Confound the man who built this place, who did not put a staircase in the wall of this apartment leading to the one above."

"That would have been almost too handy," said Dick; "but if we are to commence operations on the roof, the sooner we do so the better; and here goes for a beginning of it."

There was a large and very heavy table in the middle of the room, and as he spoke, Dick got upon it, but so lightly and with such agility, that he did not shake it in the least.

"Shall I begin the work?" he said, as he found that he could easily touch the ceiling with both his hands.

"Do so," whispered Claude, "but be cautious, Dick, whatever you do, and recollect the proximity of the officers. The only plan will be to take down the plaster of the ceiling bit by bit with your hands, after once making a beginning, and letting Jack and me take the pieces of you. If any should fall, we are found out, and there is then no chance but in a fight for it."

"I know; but spread your coats upon the table, so that if any should get loose and fall, it may make less noise."

All this was, it will be remembered, in the dark, with the exception of a little glimmering flash of light that came under the door, so that the situation of the three highwaymen was to the greatest degree full of danger, and no men but such



THE ARREST OF THE THREE FRIENDS IN THE GIPSIES' CAMP.

as they could possibly have preserved their calmness and self-possession under such trying circumstances.

Both Jack and Claude spread their coats close to where Dick was standing upon the table, and then he set to work, and the plaster of the roof began to rattle down rather quickly.

"Cautious!—cautious, Dick!" said Claude.

"Yes. Here's a great piece. Take it. Have you got it?"

"I have—I have."

"That will do. Here's another."

By dint of feeling about carefully, Claude continued to take the pieces of the ceiling from Dick, who got them off with great rapidity, and Jack, finding that he was not wanted there, went to the door and kept his ear close to it, to listen if the officers should make any suspicious movement in the hall. From his voice it would appear that Bolt was telling some long story to Stevens, and that he had taken quite enough of the wine to make his utterance rather thick; and by the tone in which Stevens replied to him, it was quite evident that he was dying with sleep, and with the greatest difficulty struggling against the disposition to drop off into a sound slumber.

The fact was, that Stevens had been up two nights before that one, and it was hardly in human nature that he should be able to keep up much longer. Yet Stevens was so particularly anxious that the three prisoners should not escape him, that he made the most strenuous efforts to preserve himself from dropping off to sleep.

"Speak louder, Bolt," he said; "you go on in such a drawling kind of way, that it is enough to set any one off to sleep. Speak louder, and give me a nudge with your elbow if you see me going."

"I will."

"That's a good fellow; now go on with that story of yours. What's that?—oh, what's that?"

"Only me giving you a nudge," said Bolt. "You was closing up your eyes, and going to sleep like a blessed babby."

"Oh, was I? Well, I shan't do so any more. I am quite wide awake now, Mr. Bolt, as you see. Go on."

"Very good. Then, as I was saying to you, Mr. Stevens, before I got this situation of keeper to the lock-up, you see, I was, of course, like yourself, a runner, and many an odd adventure happened to me in the course of my professional experience, I can tell you. Sometimes things went all right, as they ought to do, and I nabbed my man; and sometimes things went all wrong, and I did't nab my man; and sometimes I caught a tartar."

"Murder!" cried Stevens.

"Lor, Mr. Stevens, what *is* the matter?"

"Something gave me such a pinch on the calf of the leg, I'm sure. What could it have been?"

"Why, me with the fire-tongs, to be sure; and I daresay, now, they are a little hot. But if you want to be kept awake, you must really put up with these little things, you know, Mr. Stevens."

"What, was I going off again?"

"Indeed, you were; and my private opinion is, that if I were not here, you would tumble right into the fire, that you would; and then there would be an end of you. Come—come, Mr. Stevens, rouse yourself up a little, and don't give way to—what do you call it?—Murphy, is it?"

"No—no. Morpheus."

"Oh, ah, I knew it was something very like Murphy, but I didn't feel quite sure about it, that's all."

Jack, from his position close to the door of the room, had heard all this quite plainly, and he was highly delighted to find that Stevens was so sleepy, and that Bolt was, in reality, half drunk, which was a fact that could very easily be deduced from the tone in which he spoke. Of course, the confederates had not been at all idle during that time; but Dick had managed to get a great quantity of the plaster of the roof down, and had reached the floor boards above, after cutting away the laths that impeded his progress.

The removal of a floor board or two would be the worst job of all; for however easy such a process would have been if they had happened to be above the floor to do it, yet it was by no means to be done with facility below.

If they had not had the little cutting saw that Claude possessed, it would have been now quite impossible for them to have proceeded any further that way towards escape. By its aid, however, Dick, who was a pretty good workman, contrived to get a part of the floor-boarding cut away, and then he made a grand effort to push one of the planks upwards. With a grating sound the nails gave way, and the plank was loosened, if not removed.

"Hush—hush!" said Claude.

"I can't help a little noise, now," said Dick. "It's the rusty nails in the wood. It will soon be done, now."

By a vigorous wrench, now, Dick got the plank quite out of its place, and brought down upon his head a great quantity of dust at the same time; but that was a minor event, and he immediately commenced operations upon the next board, which, when he should succeed in getting it up, would, no doubt, leave space enough for him and his companions to creep through.

The space between the joists was just about sufficient for them to pass through, but the width of a floor-board would not do exactly.

"We shall be all right in a few minutes, now," whispered Dick. "The other one is coming quickly."

At this moment Jack felt the greatest alarm for the safety of them all, for after repeated efforts to keep Stevens awake, Bolt had begun to give it up in despair; and after giving him a right good shake, he said—

"Mr. Stevens, do you think that a drop of anything else will keep you awake, if I get it for you?"

"Yes. Oh, dear yes—I—I think it would."

"What will you have, then?"

"Vinegar."

"Vinegar? You don't mean that. You don't mean sour vinegar, do you?"

"I never heard of any other. Get it, and I shall recover at once. I don't often give way in this sort of fashion, but there's nothing like a wine-glass of vinegar to keep a man awake."

"Well, I suppose that is upon the principle of giving him such a stomach-ache that he can't go to sleep for the pain of it. Hilloa! there you go again. Keep up, Mr. Stevens, or you will certainly fall into the fire."

"Get me the vinegar, then."

"Well, if you will have it, you shall. Let me see—oh, of course, there is some in the next room, and no mistake. I recollect now. It's in the corner cupboard. I'll go and get it in a moment for you, my dear friend. I—dear me, how the lock-up moves about—Why, I declare, it is quite, in a way of speaking, rotatory. Woa! woa!"

Mr. Bolt could manage to go on talking in his prosey way very well, as long as he kept his seat, but when he rose to his feet, it was quite a different affair, and the effect to him of his potations was just like being in a ship at sea with a cross gale. Of course, nobody ever heard of a drunken man yet who blamed himself for such apparent effects, and so, to be quite consistent, Mr. Bolt would have it that it was the lock-up that was going about in such a ludicrous manner with him.

"Well, this is odd," he said. "I can't make it out. The lock-up is drunk; It must be drunk, for sometimes the wall is here, and sometimes the door is here, and sometimes they are both there, and sometimes they are neither here nor there. It is very odd."

Mr. Bolt was so astonished at these phenomena connected with the hall of the lock-up, that he felt himself compelled to hold by the back of a chair while he considered them.

Mr. Stevens took that opportunity of letting his head droop upon his breast, and of falling fast asleep. It is just possible that if Bolt had been in a situation to get the vinegar with certainty, it might have had the effect of keeping Stevens awake; but as it was, nature yielded, and his sleep became profound.

Those who have had occasion to struggle against sleep will well understand

what an uphill fight it is, and how the oftener you fancy you have defeated it the oftener it will renew the combat with you, until you give up the contest in despair. Such must have been Mr. Stevens' feeling; not but what if he had imagined for a moment that it was within the range of possibility that Duval and his companions should escape from the cells of the lock-up, it is likely enough that that would have had a sufficient effect to keep him wide awake.

But all his ideas went the other way, and it was only as a matter of principle, and not of necessity, that he had determined upon sitting up, for he believed the prisoners to be as safe as it was possible for any prisoners in the world to be. Mr. Stevens, however, like many other very clever men, made a mistake now and then.

"I'll try it again," said Bolt. "Who knows but that a drop of the vinegar would do me some good? I'll try it again. It's in the lower cupboard in the next room. Here goes!"

When Jack heard these words from Mr. Bolt, he thought that the danger was sufficiently imminent to say something to his friends about it, so leaving the door, he touched Claude upon the arm, and whispered—

"Bolt is coming."

"The devil he is!"

"Yes. He is coming to this room to get something out of the lower cupboard. He is drunk, but he is coming. It is for vinegar."

"Is it? Then, Jack, we must give him some pepper with it. How do you get on, Dick, with the floor-boards?"

"Capitally! the second one is just up. Holloa! what's that?"

There was a noise in the room above as of a chair thrown over, and the impression upon the mind of Dick was directly, that some one was there who, possibly enough, was cognisant of all his proceedings. A feeling of the most blank and bitter disappointment came over his mind at such a notion as this, and he paused in his work.

"Did you hear that?" he said.

"Yes," said Claude. "My opinion is, that a chair had one or two of its legs resting upon the floor-board that you were pushing up, and that you consequently upset it, as you could not avoid doing."

"Oh, yes, that is it. I did not think of that. What a relief it is to feel certain, as I do now, that that was it."

"I think you may be certain, Dick."

"I am sure I may. It is too probable. But what is that that Jack is saying about Bolt? I thought I heard his name?"

"Simply that he is coming here, that's all."

"Confound the fellow, is he?"

Dick jumped off the table as he spoke, and pointing to the hole in the ceiling, he said—

"Now, Claude, escape! There is the road to freedom; I don't think you will have any difficulty in getting through the ceiling."

"After you," said Claude.

Dick sprang upon the table again, and was through the hole in the roof in a moment. It was no time, that, to stand upon ceremony, or to delay the precious moments by useless altercation as to who was to take precedence.

CHAPTER CCLXVIII.

THE CONFEDERATES ARE DISTRESSED FOR THEIR HORSES, AND HEAR NEWS OF THEM.

"Now, Jack," said Claude Duval.

It did not take half a minute, now, to place them all three in the room above; but their danger soon became of the most imminent description, as it was quite evident that their foes from the outer room were approaching.

With a sudden burst the door was opened, and the voice of Bolt cried out—

"Hilloa! Hilloa!"

"All right!" said Claude Duval.

"The devil it is," said Bolt. "Help!—help! Murder—escape! Help—murder! Hoi! They are off!"

"To be sure we are," said Claude, as he made a spring towards the window and flung it open. "Come on, Jack and Dick. Speed does it now."

Claude felt quite convinced, now, that anything in the shape of further caution with regatd to the doings of himself and his friends was completely out of the question, and that it made not the slightest matter now with regard to the amount of noise they made in their escape.

The window was by no means so high from the open street as to present any serious difficulty in the way of leaping or dropping from it to men who had been accustomed to the sort of life that Duval and his associates led. They did not, however, at the moment notice that Mr. Bolt had a floricultural taste, and that the balcony of the window had a row of garden pots upon it, which went crashing into the street.

They were, however, but a trivial hinderance, and just as a gun or blunderbuss was fired through the opening in the roof from the room below, Claude had sprung through the open window and alighted safely in the street.

"Run Claude—run!" cried Jack.

"Not yet. Is anybody hurt?"

"No—no."

Dick now followed Claude's example and bounded through the window, but Jack was slow to follow.

"Save yourselves," he said, "and leave me. Oh, save yourselves!"

"Not for a thousand pounds," cried Claude. "If you do not wish to sacrifice us, you will come at once. Good Heavens, Jack, what has come over you?"

A kind of blight or stagnation seemed for the moment to have come over Jack, but from these words from Claude, he shook it off and sprang from the window. Claude partially broke his fall, and so they were all three in the street.

It was at this moment that Bolt and the officer who had taken such pains to secure Claude and his friends, and who had, to a certain extent, been so successful, made a rush into the street. The occurrence of the escape of the prisoners seemed to have had the effect of sobering them both on the instant.

Now, Claude had fully expected that such a result would ensue as these two men rushing out upon him and his friends; and as nothing was so disagreeable to him or so seriously dangerous as being chased through the streets by the officers, he had made up his mind that the contest with them should be there and then upon that spot.

"Dick," he said, "tackle one of them."

"All right," said Dick.

Claude, upon this, sprang upon the officer, as though he meant to devour him, and before he could possibly defend himself from the impetuosity of such an attack, which was more like that of a tiger upon his prey than one human being upon another, Claude had fairly lifted him off the ground and thrown him headlong into the lower room of the lock-up, where his head came into such violent contact with the little stove at which they had been so snugly enjoying themselves, that he lay as one dead.

While Claude was thus disposing of the officer, Mr. Bolt had ran right into the arms of Dick, who immediately grappled him, saying as he did so—

"Do you wrestle, old fellow?"

"A little," said Bolt, as he made one of the most determined efforts to throw Dick that was in his power.

"Good," said Dick, and then exerting all his strength and skill in an art that he almost stood alone in, Mr. Bolt's heels were soon up in the air, and his head came in rather disagreeable contact with the rough road paving of Bow

Street, and there he lay, with a full conviction in his own mind that every bone in his body was broken.

"All right!" cried Dick.

"Come on, then," said Claude, "follow me."

Duval turned the corner of Bow Street, and made towards Covent Garden Market, which at that hour of the morning was as still as the grave. After tumbling over some twenty or thirty of the poor, harmless wretches who nightly congregated there to sleep, he got right through the market and emerged opposite the church.

They were unperceived by any one.

"Our horses," said Dick, "oh, that we could find our horses."

"What's that?" said Jack, as a strange sound came upon his ears.

"Watchmen's rattles," said Claude, "that's all. I wonder how many watchmen it would take, now, at a moderate computation, to arrest us?"

"It's hardly possible to say," smiled Dick; "but, oh, for our horses!"

"Do not despair, Dick; we may yet find a way to get possession of them; and, for the present, I don't think we can do better than go to one of the kens, where we shall be safe enough till we can turn over in our minds what to do."

"We will follow you, Claude."

"Jack, where do you advise that we should go?"

"To Lipstone's," said Jack, "down by the river side. You can get to it by a dive down the dark arches by the Savoy."

"True. Come on, I had forgotten that. It will be the best place we can go to, for there is escape both by land and water, if it should be necessary. We have no time to lose. Come on."

Claude went first, and taking a slight turn to the left, he made his way down Southampton Street into the Strand, and in the course of two or three minutes they reached the mouth of one of those yawning arches opposite the Adelphi, which look as if they led to the infernal regions.

A watchman stood there, holding up his lantern and looking as well as he could down the archway, as he cried—

"Hilloa! hilloa! Come out of that, will you, or I shall be after coming and fetching you, and giving you a night's lodging in the lock-up, my hearty. Come out of that, will you?"

"What's the row?" said Claude, as with one blow he sent the watchman's hat right down over his eyes, and forced him to a sitting posture upon the stones at the entrance of the cavernous-looking place.

"Murder! murder! My rattle!"

"There it is," said Dick, as he seized it and swung it an amazing distance along the street. The confederates did not pause for the watchman to get his hat off his eyes and see them, but they at once, now, dived down the archway, and were lost to all sight in a moment.

How very dark it was in that place. Even Claude paused and instinctively held his hand out before him, for fear of suddenly encountering some obstacle to his progress.

"Jack! Jack!" he said. "Where are you?"

"I am here, Claude."

"Well, I think you know the way to where we want to go better than I do, or than Dick does, so will you take the lead? It is so precious dark here I cannot see in the smallest degree where I am going."

"I don't wonder at it. But it's not likely there is anything to obstruct you. However, we will not go any further till I have made the signal to some of old Lipstone's servants, if there are any about, to let them know that it is all right, and that we are friends."

"Do so, Jack."

"I don't know that signal," said Dick, "for my experience has, after all, lain more in the country than in town."

A very strange whistle, like that of some bird in the dark, who had an idea of singing, and yet was half afraid to trust his voice, now came upon the ears of Claude and Dick. The latter said in a low tone—

"Is that Jack?"

"Yes," said Claude; "listen to him. He does it beautifully. Don't speak a word until he has finished."

Dick and Claude now were profoundly still, while Jack went on with the odd whistling, which at moments sounded in tone as though the bird were thoroughly waking up, and asking himself if it were daylight yet; and at last he finished with a long clear note, and then all was still.

"It's a failure," said Dick. "There is no reply!"

"Hush!" said Jack.

At that moment, there came three clear notes, that any one would have sworn were those of a blackbird, and then a faint star-like light appeared, as if far away in the intense darkness of the place.

"All's right," said Jack. "That is our way. Keep that light in view, and you will go right, and we shall soon see less darkness."

They all three now kept the little star-like light steadily in view, and it seemed to move before them as they advanced in the cavern, for such it really looked like, did that gloomy arch leading right down to the banks of the Thames from the Strand.

Claude had the most absolute faith in the security of the position they would occupy, when once they should reach the place they were going to, and which among the "family" was called "Lipstone's Ken." It was well enough known to the police of London that there was such a place, but none had been able even to reach it, although the most persevering efforts had been made to do so, and every kind of treachery that could be practised was put into requisition for the purpose of getting a full knowledge of the place.

It is, after all, though, very doubtful if the officers at that time had any intention of breaking up this establishment of theirs. The policy of the police at the period when the numerous incidents of our tale occurred, was not to prevent crime, but to find it out.

The whole affair was looked upon as a lucrative branch of business, and the officers reasoned with themselves, that if there were no thieves, why, then there would be no officers, and so they should be out of trade. What they wanted was that there would be plenty of robberies, and plenty of officers to find them out, so that they had no desire in the world to break up these nurseries of crime, the kens, as they were called, of London.

In point of fact, at that period the morality of officers and of thieves was pretty much upon a par the one with the other, and it was by no means an unfrequent thing for a well-know cracksman or highwayman who might not happen to be "wanted" just then, as the slang term was, to meet an officer and take him into the nearest public-house, and treat him handsomely to the best the place afforded.

But to return to our friends, if we may call them such upon the strength of so long an acquaintance with them.

The little star-like light continued to retreat before them, until one would have thought that it must be going right into the Thames, and then suddenly it disappeared.

"What now?" said Dick.

"Oh, it's all right," said Jack.

"Yes, I recollect now," remarked Claude. "I suppose we shall have a visitor soon."

"We shall," replied Jack; "and here he is."

"Well," said a mild voice suddenly. "Who am I to have the pleasure of saying have arrived at this house?"

"It is all right," said Jack. "I am a blackbird, and so is one of my companions, and we two can introduce another according to rule."

"That is all right," said a voice; "but who are you?"

"I am called Sixteen-string Jack."

"Ah, I thought I knew the voice. Why, Jack, we have not seen you for an age. I don't know any that can whistle the blackbird's pass as you do!"

"Are you young Will Lipstone?"

"I am. Did you know my voice?"

"I thought I did; but I am very glad to find it is you, and I now tell you without further ceremony, that I am accompanied by Claude Duval and Dick Turpin."

"Is that possible!"

"It is true, Will, whether it is possible or not. Can they be in safety in the ken till we can think of what to do next, for we have just come out of the lock-up at Bow Street, without asking leave of any one but ourselves?"

"You don't know how glad I am to see you—no, not see you, for it would require better eyes than I have to do that here, but to know that you are coming to the old ken. There is not many there now. We must make Turpin a genuine blackbird before he leaves us."

"I shall be much gratified," said Dick.

"It shall be done. I can tell you, Turpin, that it is not every one who comes with two such sponsors as Jack and Claude Duval, who I am as glad to hear speak as possible."

"We are much beholden to your kindness, Will," said Claude. "Should you know me by my voice?"

"Ah, yes, I should, though it is four years since I heard it."

"Our horses," said Dick, "is what we are distressed for, or we should not have troubled you on this occasion."

"Don't speak of that. We will find out where the cattle are, by some means, and get possession of them, I dare say. Lay hold of me, Jack, if you please, and then if your two friends lay hold of you by the coat, we can all go right, for I can, so to speak, see my way in the dark here as well as in the light."

This arrangement was adopted, and they proceeded for about twenty paces in the most profound darkness, until a dull grating sound, as of a door moving upon very rusty hinges—then there came a flash of light, and the three friends could see each other and their guide, and likewise perceive that they were in a narrow passage with a vaulted roof and an earthen floor.

Dick was the only one of the three who was rather surprised at the appearance of young Will Lipstone. This young giant—for he really might be called such—was no less than six feet four inches, and he looked as he stooped in the narrow passage—which was only six feet in height—taller even than that, and that was nearly enough, Heaven knows.

Both Jack and Claude, who knew how tall Will was, were rather amused to see Dick moving his head up and down very gravely to get a good look at him, and Jack said—

"He is one of the littles ones, you see, Dick."

"He is, indeed."

"It ain't thought that I shall grow much more," said Will, in a rather apologetic tone of voice.

"It's to be sincerely hoped you won't," said Jack, "unless it's downwards a little; for you could very well spare half a dozen inches, Will."

"Well, they do say I'm rather long."

"And they are right," said Dick. "But where are we now?"

"Oh, we shall soon be in the ken, now. It's all right enough. We have got to pass one of our servants."

"In case, I suppose," said Jack, "anything should occur to you in the outer passage, Will?"

"Why, yes, there is no knowing. They do say that the officers have made a dead set upon the old ken, lately; but we have kept them out as yet,

and I don't think, after all, anything but a good rousing fire would oust us now."

"Nor I, either."

Will still went on as he spoke, and at the end of the passage in which they were, they came to a little room, not much bigger than twice the size of a watch-box, but here there was a man with a lamp, who called out—



THE BLACKBIRDS MAKING THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE KEN.

"Who is it?"

"All's right," said Will.

"Oh, it's you, Will, is it?"

"Yes, friends all. Open the door of the crib, Tom, and let us pass through.

It ain't worth while anybody being quite outside now, but you can keep a kind of look-out from No. 1 door."

"I will. It can't be far off morning now, I take it."

CHAPTER CCLXIX.

A TRAGEDY IS PLAYED AT THE OLD KEN.

THE room in which the man named Tom kept guard—and which we have noticed as being so small—had what appeared to be panelled walls; but the fact was, that each of the seeming panelled walls was a door, being just about the ordinary shape and size of one.

Tom touched a spring bolt at the top of one of them, and it swung open at once; but all beyond it seemed to be very dark and drear, indeed; and yet the confused hum of voices came upon the ears of the friends.

"Here we are," said Will.

At the moment that he spoke, he drew aside a very large blanket that hung from the floor to the ceiling, and in an instant Jack and his companions found themselves in the old ken.

The place that they were in now, was nothing more nor less in appearance than a very large cellar. The roof was low, being not above eight feet at the highest from the floor, and the place was capable, probably, of accommodating about a hundred people altogether. Tables and chairs of all sorts and sizes were round the walls, but running down the centre there was one long table, evidently enough formed of three long planks of wood put together, and supported upon trestles. The table, if it might be so called as a matter of courtesy, was covered with a green baize cover, and at intervals there were lights upon it, so that the place was fairly enough illuminated.

The odour of tobacco made the air very offensive for a short time, until the lungs got a little used to it.

"Here we are," said Will. "I think Joe the Cracksman is king of the ken to-night. You can't very well see him from here, though."

Will was right enough when he spoke of the difficulty of seeing to the farther end of the ken, for about twenty or thirty of the persons present were smoking, and there was a thick gray cloud enveloping almost every object.

A bell hung close to the entrance, and now Will struck it in a peculiar manner, and in an instant all the confusion of sounds were hushed as if by magic, and all eyes were turned to Will and those who were with him.

"Who comes?" said a voice from the farther end of the room.

"Two blackbirds," said Will, "and one linnet."

"Oh, very good. The two blackbirds answer for the linnet?"

"Yes, and so do I."

"That's better. One guinea, linnet, if you please."

"Am I to pay a guinea?" said Dick.

"Yes," said Will. "It's all right: I will pay it."

"Thank you. The fact is, my exchequer is rather low just now. I will make it all right with you."

"Oh, stuff—don't mention it."

"Who are the blackbirds?" said the voice from the farther end of the room, and which may be concluded to come from Joe the Cracksman, although it sounded quite mystic from the midst of the vapours of tobacco smoke.

"One is our old friend, Sixteen-string Jack!"

"Hurrah!" shouted everybody in the old ken. "Hurrah!—hurrah!" and the lights danced again with the concussion of the air.

"The other?" shouted Joe the Cracksman, who now, as the majority had left off smoking to take a good look at the new comers, was just beginning to be dimly seen.

"The other is Claude Duval!"

At the sound of this name, which by that time had acquired almost an European celebrity, everybody rose, and there was a grand rush to get to the end of the ken where Claude was, for although they all knew that he had been there before, yet few had had an opportunity of thus seeing him, and all his most renowned exploits had been done during the few years that he had been away.

"Stand back, blockheads," said Joe, "stand back. We are well pleased to see Claude Duval here, and Sixteen-string Jack, and if it is danger that brings them to the old den, we will stand by them like men."

"We will—we will!" shouted everybody.

"I don't know how to thank you all for this kind reception," said Claude. "It is danger that has brought us among you. The fact is, the Philistines thought proper to place us in the lock-up at Bow Street, but we thought we would rather be here by a great deal, so here we are."

"Hurrah! That's it—all right. Did you burn down the blessed crib?"

"No, but I am afraid we have damaged it a little, as well as some of those who were so delighted with our company that they wanted us to stay all night, and then be introduced to their friends in the morning."

A roar of laughter greeted this speech.

"But you haven't told us who the second is," said Joe the Cracksman.

"I will, though," said Will. "They call him Dick Turpin."

The sensation at the announcement of this other name, so well known to fame and the road, was tremendous. Never before had three such luminaries, in the highwayman world, been in the old place all at once, and the enthusiasm of those who hoped that the time would come when they should be able to emulate the exploits of the three friends was unbounded.

About a dozen glasses were held to the lips of each of the visitors, and it was only by Claude crying out that they had had plenty to drink already, and had work to do before the morning, that they escaped being deluged by all sorts of liquors.

Some half dozen voices declared that they had heard of the arrival of the confederates, and then, in a momentary calm, Claude said—

"If there should be any one here who can get us information of where our cattle are stowed, we shall be much obliged. Without our horses we hardly know what to do, but if we can only discover where they are, we have no sort of doubt of recovering them."

A variety of conjectures were immediately hazarded, and, finally, two of those present were despatched to make all the inquiry possible upon that subject. Joe the Cracksman put it to the meeting that Dick be forthwith declared a blackbird by acclamation, which was done, and then he was initiated into those particularities which would at any time procure him admittance to the ken, and all the assistance and support that the fraternity could offer him. The rules were read over to him; and the punishment for any treachery, or the introduction of an officer to the ken, was hanging.

"I shall not incur that," said Dick, with a smile. "The officers and I don't usually hit it very well, and I rather think now that I shall be like my two friends here, that is to say—"Wanted" for the rest of my life."

Tingle went the bell at the door at the moment, and the voice of the man who had been named Tom, by long Will, called out—

"A blackbird and a linnet!"

There was a deathlike stillness now, as two persons made their appearance in the ken.

One of the persons was a small, wiry-looking man, who was a member of the ken; but the person with him was a much stouter personage, and a stranger to all appearance to all present.

"Who is the blackbird?" said Joe the Cracksman.

"I am, as is tolerably well known to all the highly honourable fraternity," said the smaller of the two men, "John Stokes, and a cracksman."

"Who is the linnet?"

"The linnet is a friend of mine, who has taken to the road, gentlemen, and who wishes to be errolled in the brotherhood. He took two watches upon Hounslow Heath, only last week, and yesterday he stopped a coach upon Ealing Common, and with a good booty."

"I did," said the linnet.

"Very well; does he know our rules?"

"Yes, Joe, he does. Here's his guinea, and he puts another five to it for good fellowship, and is willing, at all times and in all seasons, to abide by the old ken."

"That is right. Has any member of the ken anything to say in the matter, for now is the time, before it is all settled, and the name of the new member put down in the roll?"

"Yes," said one rising, "I have something to say—Is the door closed, and are we all right?"

"All," said long Will.

"Very good; then I propose that the new member be searched. It ain't a th ng that we often do, but there's one of our rules that lets us do it if we like—I propose that he be searched, and if nothing suspicious is found upon him, I will be the first to drink his health."

No one made the slightest remark upon this but Joe the Cracksman, who occupied the position of authority in the chair, and he said—

"Very well. One of our rules says, that any blackbird can ask that a linnet should be searched upon his applying to be a member, so I can't say nay to it."

Those who were the nearest to the linnet saw, or fancied they saw, that he shook a little, and that he changed colour; but whether such was the fact or not was a very difficult thing to say in the uncertain light that was in the place: He spoke calmly enough.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I had no sort of idea that I should be looked upon with any degree of suspicion. If I had known that, I would have foregone even the great advantage of belonging to this honourable fraternity; but I really thought my friend here was in great esteem among you."

"No, he isn't!" said several voices.

"A sneak!" cried one.

"Order! order!" said Joe the Cracksman, "this must not be. It is true, enough that we have heard some things of John Stokes that we don't like; but so long as he kept good faith with us we were not bound to notice them."

"What things?" said the man named John Stokes.

"Oh, we will tell you. We heard that you were seen visiting the house of an officer named Hunt, and that, without doing a bit of work, you had plenty of money. We heard, too, that you had gone in a coach to the Secretary of State's offices in Downing-street. Is that true?"

"It is not. I have been very much maligned, or else I have been mistaken for some one else."

"I hope so."

"So do I," said the man who had come to be made a blackbird; "but if there be, really, any diffidence in admitting me, I will retire at once, hoping that at some future opportunity I may have the pleasure of being proposed by some more popular member of the assembly; and of being admitted as a blackbird into it is my great ambition to be, gentlemen, and I feel quite sure that you will admit that it is a laudable ambition, and that I have treated you all with the greatest possible respect, and so I humbly take my leave."

"Not quite so fast," said Will, who mistrusted the candidate. "We will admit you, no doubt."

"Then I am quite happy."

"After the search has proved satisfactory."

"Oh!"

"We don't behave shabbily. We will either admit you, or let you know some good reason why we won't, if you are proposed by the devil himself."

"Very good, very good. I will be back in a little while—I, that is.—What is this for?"

A couple of the blackbirds suddenly rushed upon the candidate and held his arms. They pulled his hand out from the breast of his apparel, into which he had plunged it, and found that it grasped something. Upon forcing open his fingers, they saw that is was a copper ball that he had in his hand, and a very slight examination showed that it was so constructed that it would explode if thrown hardly to the ground or against the wall, and they did not entertain a doubt but that the noise it would make would be terrific, if it did no further danger.

"The door! Guard the door," cried Joe the Cracksman.

"It is," said Will.

"Silence—silence! Peace in the blackbirds' nest!"

Every sound was hushed, but half a dozen strong men surrounded both the candidate and his friend.

"Now search him," said the king of the blackbirds, as the president of the night was called.

"Hold!" said the Linnet. "What is it that you want to know?"

"Who and what you are, that's what we want to know."

"Then I will tell you."

"Oh, no—no!" cried John Stokes—"oh, no.—That will do no good. Are you quite mad?"

"Hold, John Stokes," cried Joe the Cracksman.

There is no knowing exactly what, in his rage, John Stokes might have done, if violent hands had not been laid upon him in such a fashion that he was made as secure from perpetrating any mischief as if he had been in a vice.

"Now go on, linnet," said the president, to the man who stood resolutely, but still very pale, before the fearful array of angry faces around him.

"I will," he said. "When there is no longer any use in disguising the truth, it is much better to admit it at once. I do not pay you the bad compliment of supposing you are such fools as to make it possible that I can deceive you any longer."

"Mad! mad! Quite mad!" cried John Stokes.

"Not at all," said the other. "Listen attentively to me, all of you. It is the duty of an officer of the police to do all he can in his vocation against you. It is but natural that he should do so; and so long as he does that without any other feeling than a public one, he is not to be condemned."

"Go on," said the president.

Claude and his friends felt an interest in this man who, in so critical a situation, had the boldness to defend himself in such a way. They all three hoped that he would be spared, although if they might judge by the scowling, angry countenances about them, they doubted it.

"Go on. Go on!" cried several.

"I will go on," said the man. "I have told you that it is the duty of an officer of the police to do what he can in a legitimate way against you, and at the same time that I tell you all this, I pay you the compliment of supposing that you are all real, downright Englishmen, and not assassins. I am an officer of police!"

The yell that arose at this speech was deafening, and several made a rush forward towards the officer. Claude stepped before him.

"Hold!" he said. "Is it a fact that when this man called you Englishmen, it was only a piece of gross flattery?"

They shrank back, but a voice called out—

"Death to the spy?"

"Death—death!" shouted twenty others.

"Not now," said Claude, as he held his arm over the head of the officer. "You shall not in a moment of passion play the parts of cowards, and then

regret it afterwards when it is past recalling. We will hear what this man has further to say."

"Who are you?" cried a ferocious looking fellow with a large red face. "Who, are you that comes here to interfere with us?"

"I am a blackbird, I believe," said Claude, "and if you have any desire to know anything further of me, I advise you to come within reach of my arm, that is all."

"Oh, you can bully, can you?"

"I can threaten when I see occasion, and it is well for those whom I do threaten to take warning by those threats."

"We will soon see about that."

The fellow made a rush upon Claude, but the latter was quite prepared for him, and grappled him by the throat. The struggle that ensued was short but decisive, for Claude threw his opponent on to the middle of the long table, with a crash that broke down a portion of it and scattered the lights in all directions, as well as leaving the bully in a state of complete insensibility upon the floor, in the midst of the wreck which his fall had occasioned upon that spot.

CHAPTER CCLXX.

THE CONFEDERATES ESCAPE BY THE RIVER.

"Is there any other gentleman," said Claude calmly, "who is inclined to try his skill upon me, or are we all friends as we ought to be, joined together in one common cause? Is there any one who suspects me of being other than a true member of the family, or that I, with my reputation and my name, and with five hundred pounds reward hanging over my head for my body, dead or alive, can have any other intentions than those in common with all here?"

This speech, with its rough logic, was so much to the purpose, that it was quite impossible but that it should have its due effect upon those who heard it. It came, too, from one whom they were quite prepared to listen to with respect, and the exhibition of physical power that Claude Duval had so recently made was not without its effect in his favour.

One voice cried out—

"Long live Claude Duval! Hurrah!"

It only wanted such an impulse as that, and then all followed it, and Duval saw at once that he possessed a large share of influence with the strange assemblage around him. He wished to use that influence, if he possibly could, in saving the life of the officer.

This was a task which any one but Claude Duval might well have shrunk from with dismay; but the fact was, that he was so much in the habit of doing things that other people would not attempt, that he did not feel inclined to shrink from this one.

"My good friends," he said, "I understand that you give me credit for being, indeed, your friend, and I can say that I would risk my life at any moment rather than a hair of the head of any one of you should be injured. When, four years, ago I came to this place and joined your fraternity, I did not do so in idleness or in sport, but I did so in truth and reality, and I look upon you all as my associates and friends."

"Hear! hear! That's it, Duval. That's right!"

"Then let us hear what this man has to say."

"Stop a bit," said the cracksman who was in the chair. "It is quite clear, Claude Duval, that the blackbirds to-night will pay a deal more attention to what you say, than to what I say, and I don't at all object to it, for I admire your courage and your talents as much as anybody can do, so I propose that you

take the chair, and that I leave it, when you will not find a more devoted friend and adherent than Joe the Cracksman."

"That's right, Joe," cried some dozen or so of voices. "That's a fine speech, Joe! That's all right, old fellow! You won't better that—We don't think the worse of you, old boy! Hurrah for Joe!"

Claude Duval tried to say something of a deprecatory character, but he was voted into the chair, and declared, for that night, king of the blackbirds, with all the honours usually given upon such an occasion.

Upon the whole, Claude was glad that he was placed in such a situation. He felt that it gave him the influence of authority as well as that of an individual, and he hoped that it would arm him with power to prevent any act of violence that might be in the contemplation of the more energetic portion of the fraternity about him.

Jack and Dick kept close to him when he was installed in the chair, and after the cheers had subsided that had heralded him to it, he rose, and showed by his gestures that he had something to say to the rather motley assemblage before him.

All was immediately silent, and it was quite clear from the looks of the officer, that from the moment Claude Duval was placed in the chair he had some hopes of escape from the perplexing situation in which he had placed himself.

"Good friends," said Claude, "I wish that we should all of us hear out what that man has to say. It is impossible we can come to any decision concerning him, without we give him a patient hearing."

"Hear him! Hear him!"

"Now, Mr. Officer," said Claude, "what is your name?"

"James Brand!"

A groan and a shout burst from the lips of the blackbirds as they heard in that name the designation of one of the most formidable and bold of the Bow Street runners.

"Very well; you are a bold man."

"I hope so," said the officer.

"You need not hope it, for you are so—that is past a doubt; and it is a quality that we all rather admire than otherwise; but we have our safety to look to before we give way to admiration of your bravery; so, now, what have you to say to us in your self-preservation?"

"Not much," said Brand. "I knew very well before I came here that I was running a great risk, and yet I do not think you ought to feel so very much infuriated at me as some of you seem to do. As I said before, it is my duty to do what I can to vindicate the law against the law-breakers; but I would fain say something for the man who brought me here, John Stokes."

"Hang him!" shouted several voices.

"Do you mean me, gentlemen," said the officer, with the most innocent look in the world, "or do you mean my friend, Stokes?"

It was impossible to avoid laughing at the tone and manner in which this question was put; and Claude, with his friends, could not but admire the consummate coolness and courage of a man who was in such really imminent danger as that which surrounded the officer.

"Both of you," cried several.

"Oh, that is very expressive indeed," said Brand, "and allow me, in the first instance, to tell you what I can tell you in excuse of this John Stokes; as for myself, I consider that I require no further justification than that I am doing my duty; and there is not one of you who, if he had been an officer and had the courage, which I daresay you all have, who would have scrupled to do just as I have done. And now, regarding Stokes."

John Stoker was very far from putting the bold front upon the affair that the officer did. It was quite evident that he was oppressed by the most abject fear, and that it was as much as he could do to keep himself from some very pitiful display of it. He looked about him as though he were seeking for some face in

which he might see a ray of compassion; but he found none, and Claude was too far off to be looked at.

"Go on," said Duval to the officer, for he was not a little curious to hear what he could possibly find to say for John Stokes.

"I will go on. This man, Stokes, then, committed a robbery, and was caught. He was caught in the very fact, and the proofs of the case were so clear and so undeniable, that it would only have saved trouble if he had hung himself at once, for death by the hangman's hands stared him in the face next sessions."

"Yes—oh, yes," stammered John Stokes.

"Well, it was a great point with the magistracy to apprehend the whole of you here present calling yourselves the blackbirds."

A yell of execration interrupted the speech.

"Oh, be patient, gentlemen; you are not apprehended yet."

"Confound the fellow's impudence," whispered Dick to Claude.

"Hear him out," said Claude.

"No, gentlemen, you are not apprehended yet," added Brand; "but an offer was made to this man, John Stokes, by the Secretary of State, an offer between life and death—the cord or liberty. He was offered his freedom, and a sum of money to go to a foreign country with, if he would betray you all."

"Hang him!—hang him!"

"Now, gentlemen, consider, what was poor John Stokes to do? If he refused, we would assuredly have hung him; if he consented, he had the chance of saving himself; so, upon the principle of self-preservation, John Stokes was right to bring me here to-night."

"Curse the impudence of that fellow," said Dick.

"It is cool," said Claude, "and yet I like the fellow for it. I never could have supposed that there was such a man in the police."

"Nor I," said Jack, "and I should be very sorrow if he were to be murdered in this place to-night."

"He shall not be," said Claude, in a low voice, "if I can possibly help it."

The officer ceased speaking, and then Claude, turning to John Stokes, said—

"Is all that true that Brand has stated?"

"It is," gasped Stokes. "Oh, spare my life!—Have mercy upon me!—It will do you no good to kill me."

"Silence! You will do yourself no good by entreaties of this kind."

"There is one thing," added Brand, "that I may tell you, and that is, that I am as ignorant of the way into this place as I was before. My eyes were blindfolded as I was brought in here, and I know no more than I did before, namely that there is such a place."

"How was that?" said Claude; "were his eyes blindfolded."

"Yes," said Long Will. "Tom was suspicious of any friend of John Stokes's, so he did so as a matter of precaution."

"Well," said Claude, "perhaps, as you are so candid, Mr. Brand, you will tell me what was the use of the copper ball you had in your possession?"

Brand was silent.

"Will you answer?"

"I hardly know what answer to say to you," he said, at length. "Life is as sw et to me as it is to most folks, and I think that you ought to make a bargain with me, that if I do you all a good turn, you will allow me to go in peace from you this time."

"No—no!" cried almost every one. "Hang him!—hang him!"

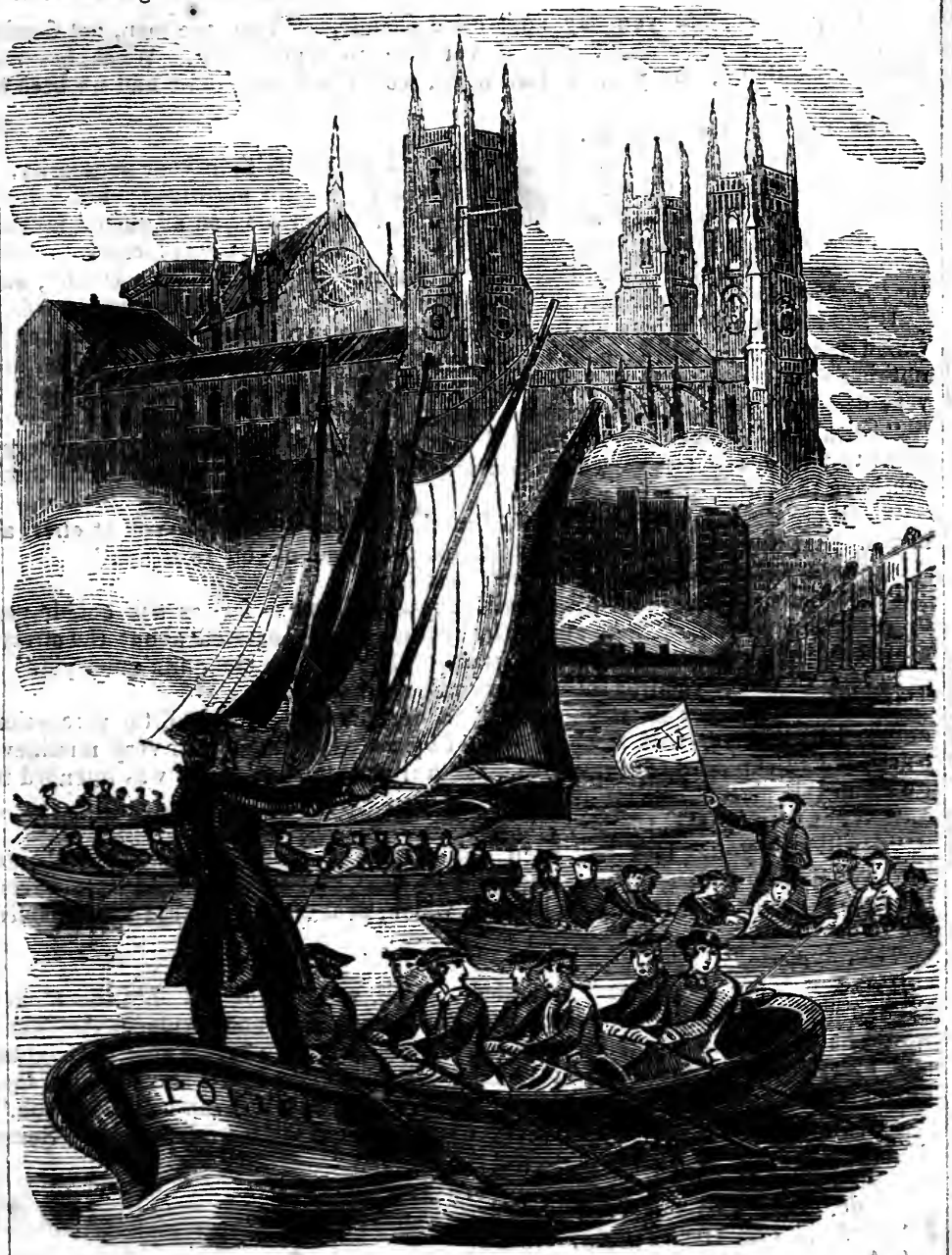
"Hush!" said Claude. "I think you are all too precipitate. It is possible enough that to save his own life, Brand may give us valuable information."

"That is just what I am willing to do," said the officer.

"And my life, too," howled John Stokes.

"Oh, hold your tongue," said Brand; "nobody will think your life worth the taking; don't make that hideous noise."

Claude bit his lips to keep himself from laughing, and then, as he saw doubt and hesitation upon the faces of the blackbirds, he seized the opportunity of endeavouring to turn them in the direction he wished them to go.



THE PURSUIT AFTER THE BLACKBIRDS BY THE POLICE-GALLEY.

"Let me beg of you all to consider," he said, "that your own preservation is of much more importance than the gratification of a blind revenge against Brand, who, setting aside the fact that he certainly is our enemy, is a man whom we may all respect for his bold and straightforward conduct."

Some murmurs of disapprobation came from the blackbirds, but Claude would not notice them, and continued speaking.

"We ought to look to ourselves, and I think that we might safely make a conditional promise to Mr. Brand, that if his information be of great importance to us, we will let him go free."

"No—no!"

"Oh, pause before you say no," cried Claude. "You are men, not fiends. You have good sense about you, if you like to appeal to it. What has this officer done that I, and you, and all of us, would not have done had we been in his situation?"

The blackbirds were silent.

"Listen to me, all of you," said Brand. "I will put faith in your generosity. I don't think that there is one among you who thirsts for my blood; but I don't expect you will let me off for nothing. I will, however, do you all such a favour, then, if there is a grateful feeling in any of your hearts, you will reply to it by giving me my liberty. I will trust you with the secret that will save you all, and that if you like to murder me, the infamy of the deed be upon your own heads."

It would be quite impossible by any language to convey the tone and manner in which these words were spoken. They were boldness itself, and yet there was nothing at all arragont in them, or in any way defiant or offensive. They made a very decidedly favourable impression upon all who heard them.

"Speak on," said Claude, "we will hear you; and if it will be any encouragement to you, I will tell you, that you are adopting the only course that I think can have the effect of saving you."

"You are a good authority," said Brand, "and so I will tell you at once, all of you, that there is a plan on foot to arrest every one of you to-night."

An uneasy movement pervaded the assemblage.

"The particulars of that plan I will explain to you so far as will enable you to escape its action. There are now, by this time, concealed about the streets a hundred well-armed men. Do not start. They will remain quite quiet yet."

Several of the blackbirds looked very uneasy indeed.

"What I tell you is strictly true," added Brand. "The little percussion copper ball that you took from me, would by no means have been very mischievous if it had exploded, but it would make a tremendous noise. It was intended to go off in this place."

"What then?" said Claude.

"I will tell you. If I had been duly elected a brother blackbird, I should have counted how many of you were here present, and then I should have taken the first plausible opportunity of leaving, which, probably, youwould have enabled me to do freely."

"Surely, yes."

"And with my eyes not blindfolded. Well, when I got out into the arches beyond here, I should have cast down the copper ball and exploded it. That would have been the signal for the men in ambush to rush to this spot with lights, and every possible means of overcoming all opposition, and I should then, too, have been in a position to guide them to this apartment, if it can be called such."

The blackbirds looked at each other with consternation and surprise. Some were incredulous of the fact.

"You surely believe it?" said Brand.

"I do," said Claude Duval.

"And I," said Dick Turpin.

"And I," said Sixteen-string Jack.

"Gentlemen, I thank you for giving credence to me, and it will be well if others do the same, for it will be the only means by which they can be saved."

"How do you make that out?" cried one.

"This way," said Mr. Brand, as he very coolly took out his watch and consulted it. "I make it twenty minutes to three exactly. What do you say, gentlemen?"

"Right! right!" cried several.

"What of that?" said Claude. "Go on, Mr. Brand."

"Very well, then. Of course it was not likely to escape the calculation of those who requested me to come upon this expedition that something might happen to me to prevent me from giving the signal at all, and in that case it was agreed that a vigorous attack was to be made upon this place as three o'clock struck by the church in the street yonder, so that, you see, that you have all of you just twenty minutes to get comfortably away in, and to save yourselves."

Everybody rose now in disorder, and as everybody began to say something at once, it was no easy matter to know what they would be about. Claude raised his voice above the din and said—

"Silence! Those who wish to perish will continu this tumult—those who would save themselves will be still.

"That's right," said Bland."

Every voice was hushed upon the instant.

"Hark you all," said Claude. "I think that Brand has nobly redeemed his promise. He has given us information that is of the utmost importance to us; and considering such, I propose that he be let go free."

"No!—no!"

"Oh, consider all of you. It would be not only a criminal act, but, to my thinking, it would be a base act to take his life."

"Hang him!—hang him!" cried all the voices, with the exception of a very few, indeed.

"No," shouted Claude, "it must not, and shall not be! If you reach that man to take his life, it shall first be over my dead body. I will not sit here and see a brutal murder done."

CHAPTER CCLXXI.

CLAUDE FINDS THAT BRAND CAN BE GRATEFUL.—

The feelings of Claude were wound up to such a pitch by the brutal designs of the blackbirds to kill the officer, after he had really given such information to them, that, heedless of what might possibly be the personal consequences to himself, he made a rush as he spoke right along the whole length of the table in the centre of the ken, and jumped down to the floor at the other end of it close to Brand.

Dick and Jack followed his example.

"Now," shouted Claude, in his clear manly voice, while the colour heightened upon his cheek, "now, who will side with me and with justice? Who will be barve enough to do what is right as well as what is wise, along with Claude Duval?"

"And with Dick Turpin too," cried Dick.

"And wtih Sixteen-string Jack," said Jack.

"I—I—I," shouted some eight or ten of the blackbirds, and then there arose a loud shout from the whole of them, for those who still had the wish to put Brand to death, found that they were in a small minority, and that they would have no chance of carrying their point now against Claude Duval and his adherents.

"That's all settled, then," said Claude, "and I admire you all for so settling it. Mr. Brand, you are free; but you will not make so bad a use of that freedom as to play us false, I am sure."

"I will go with you," said Brand, "until you are out of danger, and then you will be quite at ease upon that point."

Nothing could be very well more judicious than this proposal, as it at once put an end to all fears upon the parts even of the most suspicious regarding the good faith of Brand.

"That is all right," said Claude Duval; "and now you all of you know better what to do than we, so let us follow you at once."

At this moment, one of the scouts who had been sent forth to make inquiries concerning the horses of our adventurers entered, and coming up to Claude, he said in a low tone—

"News of your cattle, Claude Duval."

"Ah, have you?"

"Yes; you will find the exact address where they are written upon this little slip of paper."

"A thousand thanks," said Claude, as he took the slip of paper, folded up as it was, and placed it in his pocket.

The blackbirds had now begun to stir themselves in earnest to leave the old ken, and by the general agreement of various watches that were produced, it was tolerably evident that only ten minutes remained for them to evacuate the place in.

"What course will you adopt?" said Claude. "Recollect that we cannot leave as we came in. There is an armed force there."

"The river!—The river!" cried half a dozen voices. "We must all leave by the river."

"Good," said Claude. "I think. with you, that it is the only chance."

The proceedings of the blackbirds were now tolerably quick. In the first place they got, without much ceremony, from the pockets of Mr. Brand, the officer, a pair of handcuffs, which they placed upon the wrists of John Stokes, and it was tolerably evident that, notwithstanding the imminent character of the dangers that beset them, they did not intend to let him go.

"You will spare him now?" said Brand.

"You mind your own business," replied one who was active in the affair. "Claude Duval has got you off, and that's enough for you."

Brand was silent.

There could be no sort of doubt upon the mind of the officer but that he would have been sacrificed to the fury of the thieves if it had not been for Claude Duval's presence there, and the extraordinary influence which he managed to exercise over the party.

We shall see whether such a favour from Duval to the officer awakened any corresponding sensations in his breast.

It was curious now for Claude and Dick and Jack, to notice the dexterity with which the blackbirds acted. Both Jack and Claude knew that there was another way of getting out of the ken than by the route they had taken to get into it, but Dick did not, he was too lately initiated into the society to have received that information.

Immediately behind the elevated seat—indeed, the seat was placed upon the table—upon which Joe the Cracksman had sat, and into which Claude had been inducted upon his merits, the wall of the ken seemed to be constructed of rather roughly put together wainscoting; and now two of the blackbirds who were good workmen approached it, and had down one of the long panels in a moment.

Another and another of the panels were removed, and then when the whole space was nearly open, there appeared a room, which had evidently been built by workmen who knew their trade.

"What place is that?" said Dick to Jack.

"That is a house," said Jack, "that stands upon the banks of the river. It is empty, but it is rented by one of the blackbirds, who now and then makes a show of living in it. It commands a direct course to the water side, and there is a little quay specially belonging to it."

"That is capital."

"Well, it is not altogether the worst place in the world. But see, they are going fast!"

"How will they get off when they get to the river side?"

"Oh, there are short of forty of them altogether, and they will easily enough get away. A few boats that they can hail will take them off, and they have a desire to avoid observation."

"They would need to have one."

"You shall see."

"Come on," said Claude, at this moment; "we shall be late."

The three friends were nearly the last to leave the ken. The officer, Mr. Brand, had gone away the first, for he had been carefully looked to by four of the blackbirds, who contrived pretty well to keep around him in such a way, that any attempt to escape from them would be utterly fruitless. The officer did not appear to be at all put out of humour by this species of surveillance. He felt that, situated as he was, it was of no use to object to anything, and that there was likewise abundance of room to have a little suspicion of him.

Brand, in the whole affair, acted evidently upon the most philosophical principles. He was determined to save his own life if he could; and as he, no doubt, considered that he would be much more useful as an officer for the future alive than dead, he considered that the present escape of the blackbirds was quite a minor evil in comparison to his being knocked on the head, which, by the by, would still not have prevented their escape at all.

He was a clever man, that Brand.

The same number of blackbirds likewise attended upon John Stokes, although in the state of abject terror that that individual was in, one would have been quite sufficient; but they thought that it was probably quite as well to make assurance doubly sure, so they did him the honour of giving him a good guard.

The hour at which the attack was to be made upon the place was now fearfully near at hand, and Claude Duval thought that yet there might be some catastrophe.

After passing through the room that was immediately behind the ken, the wall was put up again with great dexterity, and if it looked as well upon what may be called the ken-side of it as it had done before it was taken down, the officers who should come into the place might well be deceived into the idea that there was no other outlet from the place than that by which they had managed to enter it.

It was Joe the Cracksman who appeared to know exactly the route to pursue, for he took the lead, and every now and then he kept crying out—

"This way, blackbirds. This way. Follow me. This way, blackbirds, and all will be right!"

One, and one only, carried a light, which shed a lurid and strange flickering glare upon the mouldy walls of the old deserted house that they were passing through.

Claude counted no less than five rooms that they made their way through, before a gush of cold damp air told him that they must be close to the bank of the river. Then Joe the Cracksman called out—

"Silence, noble blackbirds! Here we are. Half a dozen steps more takes us to the quay. We must get off cautiously."

"The flag," said one.

"Yes, I will not forget the flag."

"What the deuce do they mean by that?" said Dick.

"I don't know," said Claude. "It is some new device that I know nothing of, but you may depend it is all right."

"I can tell you," said Jack.

Just as Jack was upon the point of giving to Claude and Dick the required information, a loud shout from the direction of the ken that they had just left came upon their ears, and then there was a discharge of fire-arms.

"Ah," said Jack, "the officers have made the attack."

"They have, indeed."

"I told you so," said a voice close to Claude, and he recognised it as the voice

of Brand the officer, although it was too dark where they stood for him to be seen.

"Yes," said Claude, "you spoke the truth."

"There was no good to be done in any other way."

"I quite agree with you there."

"The fact is, that they were more likely to be, from their impatience, a few minutes before their time than after it, and I would advise our friends, the blackbirds here, to get away as fast as they can, for disappointment will, perhaps, induce those who, by this time, are in the ken, to pursue their inquiries a little further, and a fight in the dark here would just be a scene of the most horrible slaughter."

"You are right," said Claude. "What are they doing now upon the river-side, I wonder?"

"It's all right," said a strange voice. "Joe is getting the boats—ah, here he comes."

A shrill whistle at this moment sounded upon the night air, and then there came the strange imitation of the notes of the blackbird, which were the private call or pass note of the association. Directly the sound came upon the ears of those around Claude and his friends, they began to move silently towards the banks of the river. Claude followed, and in a few seconds they were all by the side of the stream.

Fortunately for the blackbirds, it was high water.

How they had procured the boats it is hard to say. It is only just possible that they had managed—at that dull hour, when no one was upon the look out—to steal them from a rather popular landing-place that was in the immediate neighbourhood; but be this as it may, boats they had.

The Thames wherries have only of late years been such little miserable things as they are. As time rolls on they will be quite extinct, for now it is a thing of foolish temerity to venture upon the bosom of the stream in a boat not much more secure than a cockle shell, where steamers are crossing and re-crossing in all possible directions.

The boats that were by the bank now, and into which the blackbirds silently made their way, were of a good size, and would very well hold from twelve to fourteen persons each, so that three of them did very well for the whole party with a little crowding.

CHAPTER CCLXXII.

THE PROGRESS DOWN THE RIVER, AND THE POLICE-GALLEY.

The blackbirds went apparently upon the principle of placing the most precious freight all in one boat; for in the first boat of the little squadron there was Claude Duval, and there was Jack and Dick, and Brand the officer, and John Stokes the treacherous blackbird, who may be considered to have brought all this danger upon them.

In the two other boats, which kept, as Claude thought, very inconsiderately close to the first one, were the other blackbirds.

As they pushed off from the little landing-place, that belonged very especially to the house at the river bank, the early light of the dawn was just visible, and if it had not been that there was a light kind of fog upon the river, no doubt objects would have been visible tolerably plainly. The fog or mist, however, got whiter and whiter every moment, so that it was quite evident that it would soon clear off, and then the daylight would be upon and about them rather suddenly.

"The flag," said Joe the Cracksman, "now for the flag."

"Yes, Joe, all right; here it is."

"What can be the meaning of this, Jack?" said Claude; "you were going to tell us when we were interrupted."

"Why, the fact of it is," said Jack, "the flag is very religious."

"Religious?"

"Yes. It is a common custom at this time of the year for various religious sects to go upon water parties on the river, and they generally carry a flag with them, with the name of their sect or society upon it; and sing hymns as they go along. The River Police don't at all interfere with them, and our friends the blackbirds being provided against such an emergency as this, put on her such a flag, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if they burst into a hymn."

"Well," said Claude, "it is rather a clever trick."

"It will answer, too."

Brand laughed.

"What do you think of all this, Mr. Brand?" added Claude.

"Well, to tell the truth, I don't like it."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, I cannot shut my eyes to it, and I feel that I have no right to know it, since it is by accident that it all comes to my knowledge, you see; and if I were to make use of this information, it would not, to my thinking, seem like fair play."

"You are an honourable fellow, Brand."

"I try to be so, Claude Duval, and I can safely say this much, that I will not, if I can possibly help it, take any sort of advantage of the little secrets that have come to my knowledge this night."

"You are quite right. Good God, what is that?"

"The hymn," said Jack.

Two dozen of the blackbirds had at this moment tried their sweet voices at a hymn; and although there were some among them who could really sing very well, the effect upon the whole was very ludicrous, for not even the conviction that they were all in the most imminent danger could induced them to execute the hymn with that steadiness and gravity that it required.

"Really," said Claude, "that hymn, or pretended hymn, is the most execrable thing I have heard for a long time."

"It is foolish," said Jack; "they had better, by all means, leave it alone, than bring it out in the manner they do."

Jack gave this opinion aloud, so that it soon spread over the boat; but it had no effect, except to cause some laughing, and the hymn was sung right through, notwithstanding all the disapprobation with which it was regarded by those who were keenly alive to the danger of the position in which the boats, with their closely packed living freights, were.

Suddenly, as if by magic, the white mist that had been upon the surface of the river rolled off, leaving the water bright and clear, for the Thames was in not quite so bad a state then as it is now. There were not so many abominations upon the banks of it, and you might go from Blackfriars Bridge up to Chelsea every day without being poisoned by the horrid stenches on the Surry-side, where certainly all kinds of abominations exist.

The day-light had made some progress now, and although the boats were in the centre of the river, as nearly as possible, they could see the bank upon either side quite plainly.

But in addition to the bank, they could see a large galley, with eight oarsmen in her, and about half a dozen well-armed men likewise, lazily creeping along with the tide.

"What is that?" said Claude.

"A police-galley," said Brand.

The words "Police-galley" were not spoken very loudly, but still they reached the ears of every one in the boat, and created a little consternation.

"Strike up another hymn," said Joe the Cracksman.

"No—no," said Claude. "Allow me, with all deference, to suggest that you do no such thing!"

"Why not, Duval?"

"The chant is so dire a performance, that I am confident it could not possibly deceive any one who had ever heard a hymn in their lives before; so it is better left alone."

"Oh, you don't know how we can do it. We have practised it. That was only a joke; but now that it is necessary, I assure you we can do the real thing, as you shall hear, if you will be so good as to listen to us at all as we sing it."

"Of course I will, and if I am mistaken in the matter, pray pardon me."

"No offence, Claude Duval. It's all right. I don't wonder at your saying what you did. Now brothers"—here Joe the Cracksman imitated, in a most exquisite manner, the twang of the conventicle. "Now, brothers, raise the flag and sing the hundred and fourth hymn, if you please. Now begin, and confound the scoffers and the mockers."

The flag, which was held by two persons in the stern of the boat, and upon which was painted the words "Lambs of the Fold," was quietly waved to and fro, and the hymn begun.

Claude Duval was astonished! Nothing could be sung better, or with more devotional grace than that hymn. There was not a smile upon any one's face, nor a wrong note uttered. All was excellent and harmonious.

The police galley was brought to, and it was evident that the officers on board of it were regarding the three boats with their full contents with great curiosity.

"Do you think they will be deceived?" whispered Claude to Brand the officer.

"Likely enough. The hymn is beautiful."

"It is, indeed."

"And the flag is just the thing. There is only one danger."

"What is that?"

"It is that the police-galley should come so close as to see that neither the countenances nor the costume of your friends, the blackbirds, are favourable to the assumption of their pious character."

"That is true; but see, they just rest upon their oars to see us pass as a matter of curiosity, and they don't seem disposed to take any further notice of us."

"I own it looks like it. They shan't see me, if I can help it. I said I would do the best I could for you all, and I will keep my word."

With this, Brand took a white pocket-handkerchief from his pocket and tied it round the lower part of his face. He then took off his hat, and in some indescribable manner squeezed it and worked it about for a few moments until he had made it quite a different shape, and when he put it on, no one could have known him for the same man.

"You are good at disguises," said Claude.

"It is part of my business. But here comes the police galley—I thought that all was not quite right, by the whispering of her crew."

CHAPTER CCLXXIII.

DETAILS FURTHER ADVENTURES AND PERILS ON THE THAMES.

It was quite clear now, that the galley with the police on board it was making way towards the three boats.

"Steady," said Joe the Cracksman in a low tone. "Steady, blackbirds—give them another hymn."

The hymn that they had been singing was duly finished, and a pause had taken

place; but now, in obedience to the command of Joe, who was evidently held in high esteem by his comrades, another one was commenced, the soft melody of which floated gently over the waters, and really ought to have had all its effect upon the officers in the galley; but officers' hearts are of a very flinty description indeed.



THE DESTRUCTION OF THE POLICE-GALLEY.

Of course, nothing could have been more indiscreet than for the three boats with the blackbirds in them to have made any effort to escape from the officers, for that would not only have been most futile, loaded as they were, but would at once have engendered suspicion if there were none; and if there were only a slight

suspicion, would have converted it into the certainty that something was amiss.

They steadily pursued their track, and as the police-galley was well manned, a very few moments indeed sufficed to bring it close up to the three large boats with the blackbirds in them.

"Hilloa!" cried an officer from the galley. "Boats-ahoi!"

"Go on with the hymn," whispered Joe.

"Silence, there, with your bawling," cried the officer again. "You can sing your hymns another time, if it's all the same to you."

The hymn at this moment came naturally to a close, and the last notes of it died away very sweetly on the water.

"Hilloa!" cried the officer again. "Do you hear, stupids?"

"What do you want, sinners?" said Joe the Cracksman, in his capital voice in imitation of the accredited twang of a fanatical preacher. "What do you want, sinners?"

"Sinners be hanged!" said the officer. "I daresay you are as great sinners as other people! But come, now, what do you call yourselves?"

"Lambs of the Fold!"

"Lambs of the Fold? Well, I can't understand a bit of what that means, but if you understand it, it's all right, I daresay. Have you seen any suspicious characters on the river?"

"Do you mean in a spiritual sense, or in a worldly sense?" said Joe, with such admirable gravity, that it was as much as Claude Duval could possibly do to keep himself serious.

"Bother your spiritual senses! I mean suspicious characters. That's what I mean, and surely all the world knows what that is."

"Repent! Repent! Repent!" said Joe. "I hope that you have time all of you, and I hope that you have grace enough left to feel the importance of so using that time, as to listen to me while I hold forth to you in a little discourse that will not occupy more than one hour and three quarters in delivering, and at the end of which, I do think, that you all will become lambs of the fold."

"No, thank you," said the officer. "We would rather not. It ain't at all in our line."

"Yes, but I beg of you to listen."

"Hold your row."

Joe the Cracksman put himself into a capital attitude, and then, in a nasal tone, he began—

"Miserable and benighted sinners, you will all go to the devil—you will all be grilled——"

"Oh, come on," cried the officer. "Pull away, my lads. Don't let us listen to this ranting any more."

The eight oarsmen bent their oars, and the police-galley shot past the three boats full of blackbirds.

"What an escape," said Claude.

"It was an escape," whispered Brand. "I know that officer very well, and I could see by the glance of his eye that at first he had his suspicions; but it was the exquisitely sung hymn, and the admirable acting of your friend Joe the Cracksman there, that completely deceived him."

"Not a doubt of it."

"That fellow throws his talents away by not being upon the stage. Nothing could be better than his tones and his attitudes; and a man who can act one thing well can act another."

"Certainly. I suppose, now, we consider ourselves to be free of your friends in the galley?"

"Oh, yes; it's all right. Nothing but some new circumstance altogether could bring them back, after they have once sheered off in such a way."

"That is not likely to occur?"

"Not at all."

Now, both Claude Duval and the officer were clever men, but it will be seen how they jumped to a conclusion rather too hastily, for a new circumstance did occur to bring back the police-galley.

It so happened that a very indiscreet blackbird, indeed, sat in the hindmost boat, and he, fully believing that the little affair with the police-galley was quite over, and that those on board of her had not cared to look even at the three boats, executed the well-known manœuvre of placing his thumb against the end of his nose and spreading out his fingers fan-like, so as in fact to produce what is called a "sight," in the direction of the police-galley.

Now as nothing could be very well more at variance with the true character of a Lamb of the Fold than to do such a thing as that, even at a boat full of sinners, it had all its effect upon the officer who was in command of the police-galley, and who happened at the moment to be looking from under the rim of his hat precisely in that direction, and so to see the "sight" executed.

The first surprise he had before had that all was not quite right deepened in a moment, and he said a few words to his companions. The result of these words was, that the police-galley tacked about again, and came on in rapid pursuit of the three boats containing the blackbirds.

The "sight" that the indiscreet blackbird made was not seen by any one of his companions, or they would have been at no lost to discover the reason why the police-galley came after them again; bat as it was, it merely looked like a piece of caprice.

The man who had brought this danger upon himself and his friends knew well the cause of it, and he felt keenly the consequences of his own indiscretion, although he said nothing, for fear of the vengeance of his comrades.

"What does this mean?" said Claude, as he indicated the police-galley to Brand, just as it turned.

"Ah!" said Brand.

"They are coming back again."

"They are. There will be a brush for it now, I am sorry to say; but something has happened to strengthen the suspicion that they evidently had from the first."

"It is a pity. Joe, do you see the galley?"

"I do, Claude Duval, and I think it's all up now. Blackbirds, look to your arms. If it comes to the worst, it is better to die in a fight, than to go out of the world with the compliments of the Sheriff of London, and a rope round your neck."

"Silence," said Brand, "all of you. It may mean nothing after all; do not be premature in anything you say or do."

The police galley now came on very rapidly, and, although by the time the unfortunate "sight" had been made that induced the pursuit, the three boats had got a considerable distance from it, it was evident that three or four minutes now at the outside would render that distance as nothing, and bring the galley on a level with them.

Truly the situation of Claude and his friends was now most perilous, and nothing but one of those extraordinary incidents which beset the career of such men could by any possibility save them from the consequences of capture by the police in the galley.

CHAPTER CCLXXIV.

DETAILS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE POLICE-GALLEY.

"I RATHER think," said Dick Turpin, "that we are in for it now."

Jack looked rather pale, but he said nothing, while Duval began to ransack his mind for some device, by the aid of which he could escape from the rather fearful dilemma in which he and his friends were in. There can be but little

doubt that if the fraternity thronging the boats had been at all aware of the indiscretion of one of their number in the "sight" business, they would have taken some extraordinary vengeance upon him; but as no one had noticed him, and as he was not now likely to call attention to his own folly, he escaped the consequences of it.

Brand had thought it just possible enough that the police galley was upon some other task than that which would bring it close upon the boat in which he and his new friends sat; but a very few moments, indeed, sufficed to put an end to any such idea. There could not be any reasonable doubt but that the police were overhauling the large wherry.

"Lie too, will you?" cried a loud voice.

"Pull away," said he who took the chief conduct of the boat; "pull away, now, for your lives."

"It is useless," said Brand. "They have not only more power, but are not half the weight that we are."

"Then we are lost," said Jack.

"I regret to say," added Brand, "that I think you will be all taken, and I only hope that you will avoid bloodshed in this affair."

There was an ominous silence as these words were uttered, and the click of the lock of more than one pistol came upon the ear of the officer.

"Lie too! will you?" cried a voice again.

"For Heaven's sake stop," said Brand. "They will fire into you if you do not, for they are not the most patient of men. I know the officer in command well."

"No—no! All's right."

"Right? What do you mean by right."

It was the chief of the club who had said all's right, and now he turned and looked Brand in the face as he added, in a low, hissing whisper—

"My friend Brand, you have been so truthful and candid in other things, that I hope you have been so in one that to us is more important than all the others put together."

"What is that?"

"It is regarding that little explosive projectile that we took from you in the old ken."

"Ah!"

"Yes, you understand me now, I feel assured. I ask you as a man to tell me if it really possesses the explosive power you attributed to it?"

"Alas, it does."

"Then we are saved."

"Saved? Why, surely you would not—you could not——"

"Duval?"

"I am here," said Duval; "what would you have of me?"

"Would you be so kind as to look to Mr. Brand. He is a brave and a bold man, and he has now some scruples as to what I may think proper to do, as we are likely to come to close quarters with the gentlemen in yonder boat. I don't ask you to do him any mischief, but only to prevent him from doing us one."

"I understand," said Claude.

"And so do I," said Brand. "I don't see the use of throwing away my life for nothing, so I must just be a spectator of these proceedings, looking upon myself as a prisoner the while."

"It is a wise determination," said Duval. "No one here, I am sure, has any wish to injure you if it can possibly be avoided."

Brand was silent now, but he looked both sorrowful and anxious, for he saw but too well that a fearful collision was about to ensue between the thieves and the officers in the police-galley.

"Tip them another stave," said the Cracksman. "Let us sing the ninety-

second hymn, if you please, my brethren, and who knows but it may have some effect even upon the flinty hearts of the Philistines?"

It was not with the best grace in the world that the members of the old ken struck up the hymn now, but it showed what great faith they had in the skill and in the judgment of their leader that they struck it up at all. Probably it prevented the officers in the police-galley from firing at them, by getting up again a doubt in their minds as to the real character of those in the boat.

It will be understood that the thieves, although they had not at all slackened their pace, had not increased it visibly, so that the police galley had to make a stern chase of it, which it is quite understood by all persons, is a long chase; and although they appeared to be quite close to the boat, they took much more time than any one would have supposed to overhaul the fugitives. However, there was time enough to make a few little arrangements consequent upon the altered state of affairs.

The Cracksman, who was evidently so highly thought of by the thieves that they all looked to him in the present emergency for advice and direction what to do, stood in the bow of the boat, and his voice was higher than any one's elses in chaunting the hymn that rose from so many throats, and still puzzled the officers regarding the character of the assemblage in the boat. In his right hand, however, partially enveloped in a handkerchief, he held something concealed.

Brand knew too well what that something was. It was nothing else than the detonating ball or shell with which he had intended to give the alarm while in the ken, and which seemed highly likely to answer a very different purpose, indeed.

"Hilloa!" cried a rough-looking man with a very red face, as he stood up in the police-galley. "Hilloa, you, in the boats there. Stop that canting and singing, and answer me, or I shall be compelled to send a few bullets among you."

The police-galley was now so near, that it would have been the height os indiscretion to refuse to stop, and especially as the hymn had come naturally to an end; so the Cracksman cried out in the same conventicle twang which he had before adopted—

"My brethren, stop, and let us hear what the heathen has got to say to u now."

In a moment the rowers stopped pulling, and all eyes were turned upon the police-galley as it came right alongside, and a man in the bow of it put out a boat-hook, and grappled the other craft by the larboard quarter of it.

"Well, friend," said Joe the Cracksman, "what is it now?"

"Why, hilloa!" shouted the man with the red face, "if there isn't Brand!"

"Yes," cried Brand, in a tone of desperation. "My life, I know, is lost by what I say: but I am a prisoner, and these are your men that you want."

These words were hardly out of Brand's mouth, when Duval presented the pistol that he had in his right hand at his head, and placed his finger upon the trigger.

"Fire away," said Brand. "I expect it."

"No, by Heaven," said Claude, "I cannot. You are a brave fellow, and have only done what I should have done myself in your situation."

"I have done my duty," said Brand.

Duval lowered the pistol.

"You shall not die by my hand, Brand," he said. "It would be murder."

"By Heaven, I am sorry I spoke," said Brand, and then he let his head droop upon his breast, and would not look up.

"Surrender, all of you!" shouted the red-faced man from the police-galley. "Surrender at once, or, by all that's good, I'll sink you, and send every man of you to the devil."

"Friend," said Joe the Cracksman, "you don't call that good, do you?"

"Fire at that fellow!"

Bang, went a pistol, and the bullet whizzed past the head of Joe, who instantly cried—

"Blaze away—blaze away! They will have it."

Some half dozen shots were fired upon either side, now and then, and the cries of several who were wounded arose above the oaths and execrations of the others. It was quite a mimic naval engagement, and the folks upon the banks of the Thames must have been not a little amazed to see what was going on.

But this unequal fight was not to last beyond the moment. Suddenly there was a tremendous report, as if a cannon had gone off. A cloud of black smoke rose up in the morning air. There was one fearful shriek, and then all was still. A puff of cold wind blew the smoke aside, and the police-galley was gone.

"Pull away," said Joe the Cracksman, "pull away, and we will sing the two hundred and twenty third hymn, my brethren, commencing with the line;

'Let us love all human kind.'"

Those who had been rowing bent to their oars again, and about half-a-dozen voices struck up the hymn. Some who had been wounded by the fire-arms of the officers, lay at the bottom of the boat groaning, and two had ceased to groan any more in this world, for they had bidden it adieu, their wounds having proved immediately fatal.

Brand the officer heard the stunning report, but he did not move from the attitude he had assumed. He only slightly swayed to and fro, like a man in a state of great mental agony.

Duval was rather astonished at the extraordinary change that had taken place in the aspect of affairs, and although he was at a loss to account for what had happened, he could not help looking at Dick and Jack with an air of much more interest and excitement, than any ordinary circumstances could induce in him.

CHAPTER CCLXXIV.

THE CHALK LANE AT GRAVESEND.

That it was the fearful detonating shell which had done so much mischief in the police-galley, all the thieves were well aware, for they had seen it in the hands of Joe the Cracksman, and they had fully guessed to what use he intended to put it. Probably they had hardly thought that the effect of it would have been so stupendous as it was.

The fact is, that Joe the Cracksman had cast the shell with all his force into the galley, and in its explosion it had knocked the bottom out of the boat, and so confounded the police by the concussion, and the volume of thick, choking, blinding smoke that came from it, that they had not been able to take any steps for their own safety, and they had perished to a man. This wholesale mode of disposing of the police was rather shocking to Duval and his friends, and the looks they exchanged were quite translatable into the fact that they wished themselves out of the present company as soon as possible.

Joe the Cracksman saw their looks, and when the second hymn was over, he spoke to Claude—

"You don't like this sort of thing, Duval; neither do I; but let me ask you what else there was to do?"

"Nothing," said Duval. "Do not let me for one moment be thought to cast any censure upon you for what you have done. When men play at the sort of game we do with the officers, the penalty for the loss of which is death, we may as well do our best to win."

"Just so," said Joe the Cracksman; "it comes to this, that they would have killed us if we had not killed them; and for my own part, I prefer the latter course by a great deal."

"And so do I."

"So do we all!" cried some half-dozen of the thieves.

"What's to be done now?" asked Dick. "Of course this affair has been seen from the shore. Would it not be safer now to run in somewhere, and leave the boats?"

"Not yet," said Joe; "not yet."

"I defer to you entirely in the matter," said Dick, "and feel quite sure that you will decide correctly."

"And so do I," said Duval.

Jack, too, intimated his acquiscence in this feeling likewise, and then Joe the Cracksman, finding that he was duly elected the commander-in-chief of the expedition, spoke firmly.

"I recommend," he said, "that we push right on for Gravesend."

The nods of his companions showed that they thought this a good and wise determination.

"The fact is," added Joe, "that we have safe quarters at Gravesend. We know where to go. There are landing places there that are only known to our fraternity, and this affair, I feel confident, will make such a noise that it will be weeks before we dare show our faces again."

"I hope it will not be so long," said Dick, "before we are on the road once more."

"Well," said Joe, "of course, you can do as you like, all of you, but we have hiding-places among the old abandoned——"

"Hush!" said one, and he pointed significantly to Brand.

Joe bit his lips and uttered a not very complimentary exclamation upon his own forgetfulness of the fact of the officer's presence in the boat, and the stillness that succeeded was only broken by the roll of the oars in the rowlocks, and the wash of the water past the sides of the boat, as it sped along at a good rate.

Brand could not possibly be off knowing and feeling that some reference was being made to him, by the abrupt manner in which the council of war, as it might be called, had terminated. He looked up and saw some dozen pairs of eyes scowling at him.

After looking from one to the other for a few moments, and finding little else than threatening aspects bent upon him, Brand spoke, saying in a much calmer and bolder tone than most men could have assumed, in his position—

"I know that you dread what I may do and what I may say, but you should all of you recollect that I have kept my word with you, and given you all the information that I had. You have overcome your foes in a complete and frightful manner, and I think that now you might put me on shore somewhere, and so get rid of me."

"There are other ways of getting rid of people than putting them on shore," growled one of the thieves.

"Would you murder me?"

"No," cried Duval. "That cannot be done. It would be a murder in cold blood, and nothing but a murder. I hope that there is no man here who would stoop to such an act."

The silence that followed this bold avowal of an opinion was sufficiently expressive of the fact, that it was not exactly tasteful to the majority, and from that moment Duval feared for the life of Brand.

The officer himself was evidently of the same opinion, but yet he managed to carry the idea off in a way that showed the indomitable courage of the man, and that he would do all that was possible for his life.

"I wait your answer," he said. "Whatever crimes may be laid to your charge, I don't think you will be inclined to add to them want of faith with one who trusted you."

"Oh, we will talk of all that when we get to Gravesend," said Joe.

"Very good, gentlemen. I am, of course, as regards the time and mode of my liberation, quite at your disposal."

"But it is understood, let me hope," said Duval, "that no harm is to be done Mr. Brand?—for, as he truly says, he has kept faith with us."

"How do you make that out?" growled one of the thieves. "Didn't he call out to the boat's crew that we were the men they wanted?"

"He did; but you, if you had been in the same situation, would have done the same thing, but for one little circumstance."

"And what's that?"

"Just that, judging from your thirst for blood, it is doubtful to me if you would have had the courage."

"What, do you doubt my courage? Blood and fury, the man who doubts my courage is—is——"

"What?"

"Nothing. Never mind. It don't become me to call names. I treat such aspersions with the contempt they deserve. Doubt my courage, indeed! That is a good one!'

The other blackbirds only laughed at this.

CHAPTER CCLXXV.

CLAUDE AND HIS COMPANIONS SAVE BRAND'S LIFE.

The tone in which Joe had said that it would be at Gravesend that they would talk further about the liberation of Brand, was one that was so decisive, that there could be no doubt of his fully meaning it. Claude did not think it wise to say anything more just then upon the subject, or to press his advocacy for Brand too far.

From the looks, however, that Duval exchanged with Dick and Jack, he saw that they were fully of his mind, and that they would aid him by force, if necessary, in saving Brand from death. It would appear, too, that the officer was not himself backward himself in noticing these friendly indications, for he watched his opportunity, and when he thought no one observed him, he took Duval's hand in his, and gave it a friendly pressure, which Duval returned, for there was something touching in the situation of that man now, surrounded as he was by foes, appealing to him, Claude, as his only friend.

It must not be supposed that during this time the rowers has been idle. On the contrary, the boats had been impelled through the water at considerable speed, and had got a long way from the spot of encounter with the police-galley.

One of the blackbirds spoke to Joe in a surly tone.

"Bill is gone," he said, "and so is Job."

"What do you mean?"

"Dead as mutton, that's all."

"Ah, is it so? Poor fellows! Well, it can't be helped. Is any one else baldly hurt?"

"No—no!" said several voices.

These words called Duval's attention to the fact that there were two dead bodies lying in the bottom of the boat. The pistol shots from the officers had done more execution than he had thought.

"Well," said Joe, "it won't do to go to shore with such witnesses of having had a brush with the police, as these two bodies would be; so, over they must go. The Thames is as good a family vault as any of us are likely to have."

"Are you sure they are dead?" said Jack.

"Lor, yes," said one of the thieves. "They is stiff 'uns, and no sort o' mistake, I can tell you."

"Over with them, then," said another.

"Stop a bit," said Joe the Cracksman. "Let me take a good look about us first."

He glanced carefully all round, and finding that no other craft was sufficiently near to take notice of what they were about, he said—

"Yes, over with them. All's right."

It will be recollected that at that time the Thames was not, by any means, such a crowded highway as it is now. There were no steamboats, and a wherry



THE BLACKBIRDS THROWING OVER THE DEAD BODIES INTO THE THAMES.

might go gliding along for a long distance upon the quiet bosom of the stream without meeting another; nor were the banks of the river near so populous as they are at present, when not a square inch is unoccupied. Under these circumstances, then, it was not a difficult thing to throw the corpses of the two men overboard without exciting any attention.

Those who were rowing rested for a moment or two upon their oars, and the others dragged up one of the dead bodies from among their feet, and sent it over with a sullen plunge.

"Good day," said a voice.

"Silence!" said Joe. "This is no time for joking. Over with the other. That will do. Now pull away, comrades, and forget the past, except so far as it may do us good for the future."

The two dead bodies slowly sunk, and the muddy water rolled over all that remained of those two men, who, but half an hour before, were engaged in jesting and laughing, as though their tenure of life were eternal.

As if, too, by a sort of retributive justice, one of the men was he who had made the "sight," and brought the police-galley upon them; and so, by that trifling, ridiculous, and heedless action, he had not only lost his own life, but he had hurried into eternity more than a dozen fellow creatures.

Such are the great events that occur in this world from trivialities, that bear no sort of comparison with their results.

"Now," said Joe, "the sooner we see Gravesend the better, for there will be a hot pursuit, I can tell you, within the next hour or so. Give me an oar, and I will have a pull at it. Keep in to the shore, and we shall be out of the current, which is adverse to us at this bend of the river."

The thieves now worked away with right good will, and although the boat was rather heavily loaded, it shot through the water at good speed, and in another hour they were within sight of the rough, straggling coast of Gravesend.

Joe gave his directions to his friends in an undertone, and from the route of the boat now, it was evidently not his intention to go to any of the regular landing-places by the town, but to run on shore at some unfrequented spot. There could be no part of the banks of the Thames that at that time presented greater facilities for such a manœuvre than the bit of coast close to Gravesend.

There is still to this day the corner of the lane, abutting upon the river, at which the blackbirds landed, along with Claude Duval and his companions. A few of the most miserable cottages that can very well be imagined stood at the entrance of it, and extended for about a couple of hundred feet up the lane, These cottages are in the same state now that they were sixty years ago, and are apparently in the occupation of the very poorest of the laundress class.

What other hidden and mysterious modes the inhabitants of those pestiferous little dens have of obtaining a livelihood, Heaven only knows; but their appearance is of the most squalid character that can be possibly conceived.

When the boats touched the shore, Joe the Cracksman sprang out on to the straggling, chalky beach, if it may be called such, and then he called out—

"Hand me Mr. Brand."

From this little circumstance alone it was tolerably evident that it was considered to be a great point to keep Brand a prisoner in perfect safety, and Claude Duval had his suspicions that all would not go so well as he would wish with the officer.

Brand was of the same opinion, and from the glance he cast at Duval, seemed to say—"I look to you and to your friends for safety!" Duval nodded in answer to that glance, and Brand looked satisfied. Whether he felt so or no was quite another affair.

"Now, Mr. Brand," said Joe, "a bullet always hits a man at speed, so I should advise you to remain with us quietly."

'I have no intention to try to escape by running," said Brand.

'That's right."

'I don't see that I have anything to gain by such a course."

'Why, no, of course you haven't. You have, on the contrary, everything to lose"

"So I suppose, for it is hardly likely that you or you friends would be so cowardly as to take my life."

Joe looked at him, and then co mmenced whistling, as he pretended to be watching the disembarkation of the blackbirds.

A couple of dirty, squa id-looking children came from the lane and looked on in amazement, for it was not often that any boat put in at that not very tempting spot.

"Be off with you," cried Joe, to them, "or I will smash you."

This was quite an intelligible threat to the children, who, no doubt, were used to all sorts of violence, and they at once, at top-speed, made their way into the first of the little cottages that they came to.

"What's to be done with the boats?" said one.

"Send them adrift," said Joe the Cracksman.

CHAPTER CCLXXVI.

SHOWS HOW THE ROBBERS TRIED TO DECEIVE CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS.

"This way," said Joe, and he led the way up the lane: he had previously given some whispered orders to two of his co mpanions, who, from that moment, attached themselves to Brand the officer, one walking on one side of him and one on the other, so that it was quite out of the question his giving the blackbirds the slip, even if he had had any intention so to do.

Joe walked up to Duval, and began a whispered conversation with him.

"Well, Master Claude," he said, "I think we may take upon ourselves to say that we are all safe, now."

"I am glad to hear that."

"I knew you would be, for the sake of others more than yourself. That was a capital move that sinking of the boat, with the officers in it, by the very means they had thought they should ensure our capture with."

"It was a sad necessity."

"Oh, yes—yes, sad enough. It's one of my principles to never do mischief till you can't help it; but when you do do it, take care that it is quite effectual."

"Not a bad principle, Joe."

"No, I should think not. By the bye, did one of our fellows let you know where your cattle were?"

"He did. I have in my pocket a note of the place. The horses are in the city, and, in fact, they are put up at a stable in the Old Bailey, as nearly opposite the gate of Newgate as possible."

"Humph! Rather an awkward place."

"A little; but I am not going to abandon my horse because he happens to be in an awkward place."

"Certainly not. Any one who knows anything of you can safely enough swear to that; and, between you and me, you can't do better than get them as soon as possible, for one good reason."

"There is not much reason wanted, beyond my own wish to be mounted and upon the road again."

"Yes, but there is another reason for expedition, and that is, that as your escape, by the next few hours, will be spread all over London, it is just possible that the officers, knowing what sort of person you are, will remove your horse to some other place, where it will be in greater safety."

This was a possibility that had not struck Claude Duval; but now that it was proposed to his consideration, it had all its effect upon his mind, and he looked rather anxious.

"You understand me?" said Joe.

"Too well. Dick, where are you?"

Both Dick and Jack were close at hand; and now when Claude turned towards

them, they stepped up to him and Joe, upon which he told them the state of affairs, and added—

"I think that we can't do better than get to London as quickly as we can, and make some attempt to secure our cattle."

"In daylight?" said Jack.

"It is daylight, indeed, now," said Claude, looking about him. "It is very awkward, to be sure."

"I fear," said Dick, "that we must wait till night before we set about it. Where are the horses, Claude?"

"In the Old Bailey, at the old Angel Yard, just opposite the regular entrance."

Dick perpetrated a long whistle as he got this, to tell the truth, rather startling intelligence, and Jack looked rather aghast.

"I hope," said Claude, "you neither of you see anything in that circumstance to lead to the conclusion that we are to lose our horses?"

"Why, no, confound it, that would be a pity."

"Such a pity," added Claude, "that I feel inclined to run some risk to prevent it; so, if the cattle were in the prison itself, I would make an attempt to get them out."

"I believe you would," said Dick.

"And I am sure he would," said Jack. "He is fool-hardy enough for anything. My advice may not be palatable, I daresay, but I give it against making any attempt for the horses while they are in their present situation. They won't be killed, and it is ridiculous to suppese that they will be always kept in the Old Bailey; so there are sure to be plenty of better opportunities for getting hold of them than the present one."

"I don't deny the truth of what you say, Jack," said Claude, "but what are we to do, my good friends, in the meantime?"

"Oh, we shall live somehow."

"Well, I don't desire the assistance of any one upon this enterprise, if they don't like it; of course, if a man thinks any particular expedition a fool-hardy thing, I can't expect him to patronise it with his presence; so I shall go alone."

"No," said Dick, "I am with you."

"And do you think," said Jack, "that I would let you go alone? No, Claude, I may have my own ideas of the affair, and I may be right or I may be wrong; but I do not know that I have, as yet, shrunk from going where you chose to lead."

"Never, Jack; and, what is more, I will take upon myself to say that you never will."

"Then," said Joe the Cracksman, "the very best thing you can all do is to go at once to London and make your arrangements. You can get into the high-road by passing right through this lane and turning to your right, and you will be sure to find some sort of conveyance to the metropolis."

"But I thought," said Jack, "you had some hiding-places here?"

"We have."

"Then I am decidedly of opinion that the best thing we can do is to stay in it till night. We are twenty miles off London, it is true, but that is not such a very serious distance, even if we had to walk it, which is not very likely, as we should get a lift on the road in some sort of conveyance, without a doubt. But till night, if I were you, Claude, I would remain; for if we go to London now, we must hide somewhere, and if that is to be the case, why not hide here?"

"You speak reasonably, Jack," said Claude; "be it so, provided our friends the blackbirds have no objection."

"Objection! How can we?" said Joe. "Are you not one of us?"

It was quite impossible, under the circumstances, for Joe to make any other kind of reply; but yet it is difficult for a man to conceal wholly those nice shades in his tone and manner which enables another to see that he is consenting to something with a bad grace; and Claude and his friends could not but suspect that Joe wished them away. The question then arose in Claude's mind of "Why did

he so wish them away?" and to that he could not at the present find a ready answer.

"Then that is quite settled," said Dick, "that we remain here till nightfall again, is it?"

"Quite," said Claude.

Joe the Cracksman, upon this, rather abruptly quitted the side of Claude Duval, and made his way to his own more immediate friends and comrades. As he went on he said something to each of the blackbirds whom he met, and they in general replied to him by a nod; but what that something was, neither Duval nor his friends had any means of knowing.

"I only wish I felt quite sure," said Jack, in a whisper, "of the good faith of that fellow."

"Do you doubt him?" said Claude.

"Indeed I do. His conduct is, to say the least of it, rather extraordinary and suspicious, don't you think so?"

"Perhaps I do, Jack, but not in the way that you mean. I believe thoroughly and entirely in his good faith to us."

"Then that alters the case."

"I think you understand me, Dick, and that you, Jack, will understand me likewise when I say that the apparent odd conduct of Joe the Cracksman does not arise from any want of faith towards us, but from want of faith to another who is in danger."

"Ah!" said Jack, "you mean Brand?"

"I do."

"You are right there, Claude, by Jove; and I would wager a thousand pounds to a sixpence that they want to hill him."

"Heaven forbid," said Claude. "It would be a dastardly act, and, what is more, it shall not be done. If they take his life, they shall first dispose of mine."

"And mine! And mine!" said Dick and Jack.

CHAPTER CCLXXVII.

A NIGHT OF PERIL AND ADVENTURE.

WITHOUT a doubt, the officer, Brand, thought that Claude Duval and his two friends would protect him to some degree; but it is hardly to be supposed that he imagined they would go so far as to fight for him. Such, however, was the intention of Duval and his friends.

The officer was evidently uneasy, for he saw how strictly guarded he was, and the looks of some of the blackbirds about him were certainly not very pleasant or assuring. Ever and anon he sought the eye of Duval to give him assurance that he had yet a friend, and as often as he did so, Claude nodded to him, so as to re-assure him and convince him that such was the case.

What a miserable state of mind Brand must have been in during all the time that he was in such very unusal company, for him, with the dread continually pressing upon him that he would never be able to leave that company a living man.

But now Joe the Cracksman had apoken a word or two to almost every one of the blackbirds, and he made his way up to Claude again, assuming as he did so as easy and unconstrained an air as he could, as though there was no hidden motive upon his mind.

"Duval," he said, "our hiding-place is close at hand."

"So I imagined."

"It will be very useful to you to know it, for if you should be ever hard pressed,

and within a few miles of this spot, you will be able to avail yourself of it, and once within it, you may almost defy the efforts of the police to seize you."

"Indeed?"

"Ah, I see you are incredulous, but I shall soon have the pleasure of convincing you that all is right."

Duval had looked about him, and for the life of him he could not devise where the hiding-place could be.

It will be proper now briefly to describe the place that he and his friends and the blackbirds were in. We have already said that the place which they had chosen to land at was the commencement of a lane that was at right angles to the river.

The fact was, that all that part of the coast had been extensively worked as chalk pits. It had at one time been a precipitous cliff of chalk, rising some two hundred feet from the edge of the water, something like the cliffs that so profusely and so majestically terminate the coast of Kent, some fifty miles further on than Gravesend. These chalk pits, thus lying so near to London, had been very profitably worked, and immense pits, where the chalk had been taken from, were in all directions; and in some places the solid face of the cliff had been taken down, and the pit had changed its character, and looked more like an immense cavern opening to the river.

For the convenience of getting the chalk to the immediate bank of the Thames, various cuttings had been made in the shape of lanes, right through the cliff, beginning at its base close to the river and terminating upon the bleak and barren loam, which supported a scanty crop of grass and nettles, at its summit. Of course, these cuttings were slanting, having just as much incline as would enable horses to ascend them without too much fatigue; and, as a consequence, they had to be of considerable length.

Time had done much in the way of picturesquely adorning these cuttings with vegetation. The naked chalk cliff for years had on each side raised itself like a solid white wall merely, but in the course of time weeds had sprung out of crevices; and as a little loam had, by rains and storms, been washed down the face of the chalk, a goodly crop of weeds had found root.

Here and there, too, from the roots of old tree that had been cut through, there sprung up young saplings; so that a space of twenty years made the bare, bleak, barren-looking chalk cutting, an umbrageous lane, the thick vegetation of which almost hid its sides, and frequently closed over head, to the almost total exclusion of the daylight.

Such, then, was the place in which the blackbirds were upon this most memorable occasion.

It did not seem as if, beyond the place being rather dark at all times, and every now and then sides of great height, that there was any extraordinary facilities for hiding; but there were such.

Joe observed that Duval looked curiously around him, and he said with a smile—

"Well, Claude Duval, have you found out our hiding-place?"

"No."

"Nor will you, I think; but come, it is time we took possession of it, for we don't know how soon the Philistines may be after us."

"There is danger, certainly," said Claude Duval.

"Yes, much. Hilloa! Blackbirds, are the scouts all right at the top of the lane?"

"All right, Joe," cried a voice.

"Do you place sentinels?" said Claude.

"We do. A couple of our number are at the top of this cutting in the old chalk cliff, and a couple at the commencement of it by the cottages. They will whistle us an alarm should any one attempt to come either way."

"But it is a regular path."

"It is, and yet days will pass before any one comes up it or down it, and upon the present occasion it won't be very pleasant for any one to attempt to do either."

"Well, where is your hiding-place?"

"I will tell you first, and then I will show you. To the left of this lane there is one of the oldest of the abandoned chalk-pits, and about twenty feet upon the face of the wall of chalk in the midst of the old weeds, and the blackberry bushes, and the tall thistles that all but choke up its entrance, there is a narrow slanting opening that leads right through the wall into the pit."

"Ah, I understand it now."

"Of course you do; but it requires a little nerve and a little dexterity to descend into the old excavation. Some folks would go head first, perhaps."

Claude smiled.

"But that is not our way. All you have to do is to place your feet in, and place your arms over your head, and you will slide down all the way as comfortably as possible. On the floor of the pit where you will alight, there is a truss or two of hay and straw, and the incline of the narrow passage is such that you reach within six feet of the ground, and alight upon it in perfect safety."

"So I should think; but how do you get out of the old gravel pit again? You do not ascend the hole in the wall?"

"No. There is another orifice that leads from there into the lane again in the same way, so that as we stand here as in the pit, there are two hollows crossing each other."

"I understand."

"That will do. The sooner we avail ourselves of the accommodation on the other side the better."

"Yes, but——"

"What would you say, Duval?"

"Do you mean to show Brand the secret?"

"Yes."

"Would it not be a wiser plan to let him go now at once, before he knows too much?"

"He knows too much already. Do not bother yourself about him, Duval. That part of the affair will all come straight enough, I warrant you. Come along. Let us ascend the cliff. There are some old footholds in the precipitous sides, which you will soon see when once you begin the ascent. Come— come."

Duval followed Joe the Cracksman; but as he did so, he said to himself—

"I will not have Brand murdered, though, for all that."

CHAPTER CCLXXVIII.

CONDUCTS THE FRIENDS TO THE THIEVES' HAUNT.

Joe the Cracksman ascended first the face of the cliff, and Claude Duval followed him. It was no part of Joe's intention, though, to be the first to descend through the little hole in the chalk. He went to a small ledge about five feet above it, and pointed it out to Duval.

"Do you see it?"

"I do see what I suppose is it."

"All's right."

"It may be all right, and I dare say it is; but it looks for all the world like getting down somebody's chimney."

"Yes, it has that look, I grant you; but it is amazingly comfortable when once you are in it."

"Umph!"

"Now, blackbirds, time and tide wait for no man. Let us be off while we may. Who'll go first down the flue?"

"Oh, I will," said a rather surly-looking fellow.

"That's the ticket. You are a good weight, and if there should be any obstacle, you are just the sort of fellow to clear it away for us. Mind how you go, now; good folks are scarce, old fellow."

"Oh, none o' your gammon," said the man, as he thrust his feet into the hole in the side of the cliff. "None o' your blessed gammon, Mr. Joe, if yer pleases Good mornin'."

The man clasped his hands over his head, and as he said, in his own classical vernacular, "good mornin'," away he went out of sight in a moment through the hole in the wall.

It looked a perilous and most uncomfortable thing to slide out of sight in such a fashion through that narrow opening in the cliff, which certainly was not so wide as to leave a tolerably bulky person a couple of inches of room to spare.

Joe the Cracksman laughed at the expresssion of Duval's face.

"He is all right enough, I dare say," he said.

"So do I," replied Duval; "but it is not pleasant"

"Hilloa!" said Joe, with his mouth to the opening.

"All's right," replied the man who had descended, and the voice came up through the shaft in strange, hollow tones and echoes.

"There, you see," said Joe, "he is in the pit now."

"I wish I was," said Claude with a smile.

"Will you go now?"

"Not just yet. Wait a bit; I will see some more of the blackbirds make the descent, for it is rather curious to observe them disappear in such a fashion from the daylight."

By this time, Jack and Dick were upon the same ledge with Claude Duval and Joe the Cracksman; but they had not seen any one make the descent yet. The blackbirds, however, now began very rapidly to do so, and the "All's right" that came sounding up as each one reached the pit in safety, sounded like a voice from the infernal regions.

After more than half of them had disappeared, Joe called out in a rather odd tone of voice—

"Mr. Brand."

"Iam here," said the officer.

"You have seen what has been going on here, Mr. Brand, so I will now trouble you to do so likewise. You may descend with perfect safety. Hilloa in the pit there!"

"Ay, ay!" said a voice.

"Brand is coming."

"All's right."

"Now, Mr. Brand, if you please. They will take care of you in the pit, as you are not used to this mode of descending. All you have to be careful of is, not to stick out your toes or your elbows; you will slide, then, along the chalk like a lump of butter on a hot plate."

Some of the blackbirds set up a laugh at this little joke, but Brand did not seem to think the affair, take it for all in all, was any laughing matter at all, and he spoke seriously, and yet he spoke in a manly way, without exhibiting any signs of fear.

"I address myself to you all," he said, "and I appeal to you all if I have not kept my word with you. It was an understood thing that I was to be released as soon as it could be done consistently with your safety. Surely that time has now come—I do not want to know any of your secrets. You might have dispensed with my presence before this had it so pleased you, and I can only say that it would have pleased me very well if you had done so. What on earth now can be the use of me accompanying you to your haunts?"

"That's not the question, Mr. Brand," said Joe. "Here is the hole in the wall, and it is my particular request that down you go."

Joe looked angry, and the blackbirds looked excited.

"I will speak," added Duval, "and I care nothing for the black looks of any man. I say that the officer ought to have been released before now. Surely, I and my two friends here have as great a stake in this affair as any of you; our safety and our lives are as precious to us as your own, and we are all three of the same mind, namely, that Brand ought to have been let go before, but not having been so let go, it is full time to do it now."



JOE, THE CRACKSMAN, COMMANDS BRAND TO DESCEND INTO THE CHALK-PIT.

"No—no!"

"Who says no?"

"I do," said Joe the Cracksman. "I suppose I may presume to have an opinion, although Claude Duval is here?"

"I don't know what you mean about having an opinion," said Claude.

"Right and wrong are scarcely matters of opinion, and in this case, in particular, it is a matter of fact that the officer was promised his freedom, and upon the strength of that promise he made to us all certain disclosures."

"No!" said a voice.

"I say yes, and that those certain disclosures saved us all."

"No!" said the voice again.

"Whoever says no to that, lies," said Claude Duval.

"Don't call me a liar," said a burly-looking ruffian, "or I'll mark it down against you in my memorandum book."

"If you will have the goodness to come up here," said Claude, "and show me any such book in which you keep the record of revenges you are too cowardly to pay off at once, I will cram it down your throat and make you swallow it, as sure as you are a living man."

The blackbirds rather laughed at this, but the man who had provoked such a speech from Duval thought that it was just as well not to put him to the proof of his words, so he remained where he was.

"If Claude Duval has said all he has to say," remarked Joe, carelessly, "I will speak."

"I have finished," said Claude.

"Very well. Then all I have to say is, that I differ very much in opinion with him, and that I think that Mr. Brand, the officer, ought to be detained some time longer. I will not take upon myself to say how long; that will depend entirely upon circumstances."

"What is to be done, then?" said Dick.

"What we always do," added Joe, "when there is a difference of opinion among us, and what I humbly suppose you will think reasonable enough, which is to put it to a show of hands. We are all blackbirds, and no doubt we all mean what's right by each other—it would be a hard thing if we did not; so I propose that it be put at once to the vote whether Mr. Brand be liberated now, or kept a little longer with us. Do you object to that, Claude Duval?"

"I cannot object to it."

"Very well. Blackbirds, you understand the question. As many of you as wish Brand to go at once, hold up one hand."

There were only three hands held up, namely Claude's, Dick's, and Jack's.

"On the contrary."

All the blackbirds held up their hands.

"Mr Brand," said Joe, with all the coolness in life, "I will trouble you to descend through the flue, if you please. Turn in your toes and keep your elbows straight as you go down."

CHAPTER CCLXXIX.

THE EXECUTION IN THE OLD CHALK PIT.

Brand looked amazed at this mode of settling the question, and Claude Duval felt that it placed him in such an awkward position, that there was really no help for it but to acquiesce in the arrangement. The taking the vote was so specious a mode of getting out of the difficulty, that for the time being he was puzzled to know what to say.

Brand looked at him imploringly:

"I think you must descend," said Claude.

"If you say I must, I must."

"Stop a bit. I will go first, I think; and you Dick, and you, Jack, will follow Mr. Brand."

"We will."

There was just the ghost of a smile upon the face of Joe the Cracksman for a

moment, as Claude spoke and adopted such an arrangement. He knew perfectly well that Duval had his doubts as to the sort of reception which Brand would get in the pit when he should descend.

Just as he was then preparing to go down himself, Jack laid his hand upon his, Claude's, shoulder, saying—

"Stop a moment, Duval. It will be just as well to let our dear friends in the pit know that it is not Brand that is coming, but you."

"So it will."

Claude had not thought of that. If Brand was to encounter any immediate danger upon effecting his descent, it might, in the hurry of the moment, fall upon him, Claude; so he turned to Joe as he said—

"Will you be so good as to say who is coming?"

"With pleasure; but you are not correct in your surmises. There is no foul play meditated. I will not pretend to be so blind as not to understand perfectly what you mean."

"Nor will I," said Duval, "be so unwise as to deny it; but I will ake your word that all is right."

"You may."

"Heregoes, then."

Despite of everything in the shape of warning that Jack began to say, Claude Duval allowed himself to go through the opening in the side of the cliff. It was a very odd sensation so to shoot out of the daylight into such a narrow and gloomy place, and if the transit had not been very rapid, it would have been almost intolerable. As it was, it did not last anything like half a minute, and then Duval let his feet sink into some hay and straw, and opening his eyes, he found himself flying on his back in the daylight again.

"Hilloa! is it you?" said a voice.

"Yes," said Claude. "Here I am."

He scrambled to his feet and looked about him with surprise and pleasure, for he found himself in one of the most picturesque-looking spots that he had ever beheld, and one which he little expected ever to be found so close to London as it was.

The chalk pit was of considerable extent, and the rugged sides of it rose up to a height of upwards of one hundred and fifty feet around it. The bottom of it was one mass of vegetation, and trailing weeds depended from the sides in the most picturesque confusion. There was a sombre calm, too, over the whole place, which lent it quite a mysterious air.

"This is the blackbirds' nest," said one. "How do you like it?"

"I think it charming,"

"That's a good job, for it shows that you think with us; for to tell the truth, we all think it charming."

"It merits the title. Why it is an abode fit for a prince. I must say that I never saw a spot that I liked better. If I was to go about picking and choosing for a retreat, this is the very one I should hit upon, I assure you. It has many advantages."

"A few."

"Not a few, to my judgment. And now show me the way you get out of it, if you please."

"It's quite impossible for any one to get out of it," said the man, "unless he happens to know the secret. To climb the face of the excavation looks an easy thing, but far from being that, it is quite impossible. There are some little rivulets from the high ground above, that keep the chalk wet; and it is so confoundedly slippery, that no one can possibly keep a foothold upon it for a moment."

"I should think not."

"It has been tried, and all have failed at that kind of fun; but you see that clump of thistles about twenty feet up above you?"

"I do."

"Well, there are steps to that spot from here, just the same as there are to the hole in the wall on the other side in the lane; and when you are up there, you will find just such another opening, into which you go in the same way, and it brings you out among the old weeds in an obscure corner in the lane, as safe as possible."

"Thank you for the information," said Duval. "I shall not forget it."

"You can't very well, when once you know it. And when once the officers find it out, why, the sooner the old chalk pit is blown in the better, for it will be of no further use to the family, I take it, after that."

"Hilloa!" said a voice that sounded as if it were miles off, in the centre of the earth. It made Claude start round with surprise.

"That's Joe calling through the flue," said one of the blackbirds, as he stooped close down to the little opening through which Claude Duval had so recently only emerged, and cried in answer—

"Hilloa, above there!"

"Brand's coming."

"All right."

The blackbird stepped aside, and in another moment the officer appeared from the opening, and fell upon the hay and straw there collected: he immediately, however, sprang to his feet, looking rather scared at this mode of transit from the lane to the chalk pit.

"All's safe," said Duval.

"Oh, yes," said Brand, "so long as I can hear your voice, I do think all is safe, indeed.—It was much against my will that I came here."

"Oh, never mind that," said one of the blackbirds, "you will not regret it, I can tell you."

Brand was silent. Probably he detected the double meaning that lurked under that speech, and felt that, without imprudence, he could not make a reply to it.

Duval looked at him.

"Well," added the blackbird, "it's all right."

"Oh, yes," said Brand, "there can be no doubt in the world about it's being all right, can there, Mr. Duval?"

"There shall be no doubt," said Claude, and the words as well as the manner in which they were spoken seemed to have the effect of very much reassuring the officer, who managed to creep still closer to Claude Duval, feeling, as no doubt he did, that he was his staunch friend.

In the course of the next few minutes, both Jack and Dick had descended the curious little tunnel into the chalk pit. The remainder of the blackbirds followed in rapid succession, and last of all came Joe the Cracksman himself.

"Here we are," said Joe, with a forced kind of jocularity, "here we are, all of us, as snug and as comfortable as we can possibly be. Why, Duval, don't you think you might stand a siege in this place?"

Claude shook his head.

"Why, what's the matter with it?"

"Nothing at all; but as for a siege in it, that would be rather awkward if the enemy got upon the heights and took a fancy to pepper us with a few bullets."

"Oh, that can't happen. There is a space of fifty feet, if there's a bit, between the brink of the pit above there, and the high road, so that there is no sort of likelihood of our being seen by any one. But we won't deal in possibilities, nor bespeak danger. We have found this a good shelter before, and we shall find it a good one again, no doubt."

"It is my fervent hope that you will," said Claude; "and I don't know how you may feel, but for my part, something in the shape of a breakfast would not be the worst thing in the world."

"I have been thinking of that. Who will volunteer to go to Gravesend and get some victuals and drink for the lot?"

"I—I—I!" cried several voices.

"Very well; settle it among yourselves; only two of you are quite enough.

Here's money. You must keep a sharp eye about you that no one follows you, my men."

The blackbirds promised to do that, and departed on their errand. Jack and Dick were as much pleased with the aspect of the old chalk pit, as Claude had been, and was still. They could hardly have conceived it possible that so thoroughly romantic a region could be found in such a place; but there it was, with all its rich and extraordinary vegetation before their eyes; and if they had not been disturbed in their minds by various considerations, they would greatly have enjoyed the beauties of the place.

That mental distraction that they felt. the reader will, no doubt, attribute to its right cause, namely, an increasing anxiety regarding the probable fate of Brand the officer. The blackbirds were in numbers quite sufficient to have insisted, in defiance of Claude Duval and his two friends, upon the sacrifice of that unfortunate man; but it would seem as if they had a lurking dread of so cold-blooded a deed; for although, as the sequel sufficiently proved, it was all along determined upon, they would much rather have got rid of Claude and his associates before putting the sentence into execution.

The strange, enforced kind of jollity with which Joe the Cracksman spoke, would, without anything else, have been sufficient to convince Claude that something was meditated; and he kept as close to Brand as he could without such a proceeding looking too marked, for fear some random blow should be dealt to the unhappy man which might do the deed he, Claude, wished so much to prevent.

"Now, my lads," said Joe, "who is the cleverest at making a fire? for I don't see that there is any necessity for our taking our victuals cold."

CHAPTER CCLXXX.

A DREADFUL SCENE TAKES PLACE IN THE OLD CHALK PIT.

THERE was nothing now that Duval longed so much for as an opportunity for a little private conversation with Dick and Jack. He could pretty well tell by their looks that they were of the same opinion as himself regarding the dangerous predicament in which the officer was; but then, if it had any effect at all upon him, it had that of making him still more anxious to consult with them as regarded the best means of ensuring the safety of Brand.

The fact was, that Claude Duval, under the circumstances, considered himself quite committed to the preservation of the officer; and he would have left the blackbirds with the conviction that he had connived at a deliberate and cold-blooded murder, if he had shut his eyes for a moment to the fact that Brand stood in imminent danger of death.

What the grand mass of the thieves thought of the affair, it was hard to say; but they looked upon Claude Duval and his friends now as decided encumbrances, and, no doubt, wished them far enough off, although it was not likely that they would commit any overt act against them.

While some of the blackbirds were busy in lighting a fire in a hollow close to one of the chalk walls of the pit, Claude caught the eye of Dick, and very slightly intimated to him to follow him. Dick, who was standing close by Jack, gave him a nudge with his elbow as a hint to come after him; and then, as Claude strolled about, affecting to be admiring and examining the pit, his two friends soon joined him.

They were at a sufficient distance from the blackbirds for what they said to each other, provided they said it in a low tone of voice, not to be heard, and it was Claude who spoke first.

"My friends," he said, "these fellows want to murder Brand."

"I know it," said Dick.

"And so do I," said Jack.

"We must not permit it."

Jack looked rather alarmed.

"Nay, Claude," he said, "what do you suppose we three can do against so many as are here assembled?"

"Much. We can do much. Three determined men can do an immense deal, especially when they are upon the right side."

"I agree with you there," said Dick, "and while I am here he shall not fall a victim to the fears or the passions of these men. It is that fellow, Joe the Cracksman, who is at the bottom of the whole affair. I don't think for a moment but what the others would really have let him go."

"I am of your opinion there," said Jack; "but still, the question is, what is to be done in the matter?"

"That, Jack," said Claude, "I was in hopes you would have been able to suggest."

"You are jesting with me, Claude."

"Ah, Jack, you are lukewarm in this affair."

"No, I am not, and to prove to you that I am not, I here tell you that I will, without question, debate, or objection, accede at once to whatever plan Dick and you decide upon for the purpose of attempting the rescue of Brand."

"That is something like yourself, Jack."

"There is one mode of doing the business," said Dick, "which I think ought to succeed. You know that these fellows think a great deal of putting things to the vote, 'Ay or No,' as, indeed, they did the question concerning the liberation or otherwise of Brand, you recollect, only a little while ago. Now, I think that the very best thing we can do is to bring the question forward of his life or death, and have it decided one way or the other by them. We shall, at least, know then what they mean to do."

"A good thought, Dick."

"If they decide upon sparing him, I think they will keep their words; but if, on the contrary, we find that they carry their intention to take his life, it will be time then for us to adopt more particular and efficacious measures to preserve him. Nothing will be easier than to put arms into his hands, and then we are four."

"Capital!" said Claude. "What do you think of it, Jack?"

"I agree that it is the only way of proceeding."

"Very well; then, I will propose the question to the blackbirds. Let the breakfast, or whatever meal they choose to call it, pass off in peace first, and then I will move in the business."

All this time that they had been thus talking, Joe the Cracksman had, with an uneasy, sidelong step, been moving towards them, but Claude Duval had had his eye upon him, and suddenly turning round, he said—

"Well, Joe, we have settled it."

"Settled what?"

"Why, that nothing in the world could take us alive out of this place. The only mischief that could be done, would be by fire-arms from the brow of the cliff yonder."

"Oh! ah! Yes—yes!"

Joe was evidently disappointed: he had, no doubt, expected some sort of communication regarding the intentions of Claude and his friends in the matter of the officer, for he could have taken his oath, from his own conviction, that it was concerning Brand they had been consulting.

"Yes," said Jack, "we are quite unanimous upon that head."

Joe put as good a face on the matter as he could, as he said, after looking about him a few moments—

"I don't think that even then they could do us much harm, there are so many hiding places, and the vegetation is so thick that it would be all random firing."

"So it would—so it would," said Duval. "And now I am quite ready for the breakfast, if the breakfast will only return the compliment and be ready for me."

"This way," said Joe. "All is ready now. We are old soldiers in this kind of war against property that we are always engaged in, and we don't take long in getting a meal served up."

The blackbirds fully merited the eulogies as regards quickness in their cookery that Joe passed upon them, for they had managed the affair capitally; and although the repast was rather of the roughest sort, still it was extremely welcome to hungry men.

They did not scruple to give Brand something to eat, but it was evident that the poor fellow took it with a very bad relish. The thought that he would never get out of that chalk pit alive was clinging to him, and his sensations must have rather closely resembled those of a man condemned to death, and who, by the cold courtesy of his jailers, is accommodated with a breakfast before the hour of execution.

In about a quarter of an hour the meal was completely dispatched. The men who had gone to Gravesend had brought back word that all was quite favourable, and that not the slightest idea seemed to be abroad that any such parties as the blackbirds were in the neighbourhood, so that, in perfect safety, the congregation of questionable characters rejoiced at the announcement of this report, and prepared to pass the day in that place of rest.

It was then that Claude Duval suddenly rose, and in a clear voice said—

"Blackbirds!"

There was a general commotion at this sudden address upon the part of Claude Duval, and Joe the Cracksman bit his under lip, to conceal the deep vexation that beset him.

Jack and Dick stood close to Duval, for they did not know what the affair might end in, and Brand, too, was within a very few paces, looking very pale and ill indeed. The deep anxieties of the last few hours had told very much even upon his strong and well-knit frame.

"Blackbirds," added Claude Duval, "I have something rather particular to say to you."

"Say it," cried Joe.

"I mean to say it, but I hope that the mere fact that I have it to say is not very disagreeable to any here present."

"Oh, no—no," cried several; and then Joe forced a laugh that sat but oddly upon his countenance, as he said—

"Oh, no—no; disagreeable, indeed—disagreeable to any of us! I am quite sure that is it impossible for Claude Duval to say anything that is disagreeable; quite—quite."

"Thank you," said Claude. "With such encouragement as that, I will proceed at once; and feeling myself to be one of the fraternity, I speak freely when I say, what is to be done with Brand, the officer?"

There was a blank silence upon this.

"I say again, what is to be done with Brand, the officer?"

No one spoke.

"It is quite out of the question but that you all have formed some sort of opinion upon the affair. I have, and so have my two friends here; and all that I want settled is the question that I ask. In fairness to the man himself, it ought to be settled. It is unworthy of us all to keep him here in a state of suspense."

A confused murmur arose from the blackbirds, and Joe the Cracksman looked around him, and nodded to two or three of them; then he spoke:

"Perhaps we might answer you, Claude Duval, in what you would think terms not at all agreeable. But there is one thing that I will do, and that is to put you in mind that it is necessary for the safety of us all to observe—

"Hold!" said Dick.

"Why should I stop in what I am going to say? It is no harm. I was only going to add the one word, caution. Is there any harm in that?"

"None," said Dick, "none whatever; and I, too, will add a word, and that is sincerity; and I hope that that will be thought quite as much, if not a little more of than caution."

"Very good," said Joe, "I have no objection. Sincerity and caution! Blackbirds, these are the two words that are to guide you. And now let us hear what further our distinguished friend, Claude Duval, has to say."

Duval was afraid that the experiment he was about to try would prove a failure, in more ways than one; but still, as he had made a beginning, he felt strongly the impolicy of leaving off, and he was determined to go through with the affair.

The blackbirds were evidently very deeply interested in what was going on, and they crowded round Duval, his friends, Brand, and Joe in a rather dense throng. There was a heightened colour upon the face of Claude, and Dick had his hands in his pockets, where each of them grasped the stock of a pistol upon which he knew he could depend. Jack looked much excited and full of serious anticipations of a disturbance.

CHAPTER CCLXXXI.

THE BLACKBIRDS PLAY A TREACHEROUS PART.

"For the sake of common justice between man and man," said Duval, "for the sake of our peace in the time that is to come, and for the sake of this man, Brand, who was brought with us contrary to his wish to this place, I ask you to decide by your votes his fate."

"Hear! hear!"

"All right," said Joe.

"I think that it is beneath us one and all, to keep any man in such a state of doubt and uncertainty, as to what is to become of him, as Brand must be in; and now, as I have, I hope, said enough to convince you that we ought to come to a decision, let me say a little as to what I think the decision ought to be."

"Excellent!" said Joe; "excellent! Hear him, blackbirds!"

"In the first place, then," added Claude Duval, "we made a sort of bargain with this man Brand in the old ken, that if he gave us valuable information his life should be spared. That we are all here now is a proof that he did give us valuable information; and I put it to you all to say whether we have not found that the information he gave us was strictly correct."

"Quite so," said one.

"Very well, then, such being the case, as he has kept his word with us, it surely behoves us to keep ours with him. It would be, I have no scruples in saying, one of the most dastardly, cowardly, and ill-advised acts in the world, to break faith with this man. And yet there have been some dark hints, some strange words, and some actions, that would lead one to believe that some mischief was intended to him. I cannot really think it; but if it should be so, I hope that you will all of you now take a better thought, and if I have been wrong entirely, it will be a good thing that it should be at once definitely settled that no such piece of folly and villany, for it would be both, is intended."

"Hear! hear!"

Claude ceased speaking, and all eyes were turned upon Joe the Cracksman, who, finding that something was expected of him, said—

"Well, I am ready to vote."

There was a slight laugh at this, for everybody had expected that he was going to make a speech. Duval did not dislike anything that would put the blackbirds in good humour, for he knew that when people laugh they are not very bloodthirsty, so he laughed likewise, and cried out—

"Let it go to the vote, then, at once. Life or death to Brand, the officer. Let all who are of opinion that his life should be spared, hold up one hand."

The whole of the blackbirds held up their hands, including Joe, who then said—

"Why, it is carried unanimously, Claude."

"So I perceive. On the contrary—None. That is settled."

Brand drew a long breath.

"Now, then," said Dick, in a voice that all might hear, "all we have to do is to slow Brand out of this place, and have done with him."

"We will take his pssitive promise



CLAUDE CONGRATULATES BRAND ON HIS SAFE DESCENT INTO THE CHALK-PIT.

and engagement," said Duval, "that he will say nothing of the existence of this place."

"Mind how you go," said Joe to Claude. "Here is the opening in the cliff, and you will find it land you comfortably in the lane."

"Thank you, that will do. It is all clear, no doubt."

"I should say so. It is not very likely

that our friend, Brand, has stuck in the way, as he would have let us known as much by this time."

"So he would. Farewell."

Without another moment's hesitation, Duval let himself through the opening in the cliff, and found himself in the lane with great alacrity. The moon was slowly rising, and the scene around him was one of great beauty. Jack came next, and then Dick. After that the voice of Joe the Cracksman sounded through the opening.

"All right?" he asked.

"Quite," called out Claude Duval, "quite right. Good evening, and good luck to you all! Farewell!"

CHAPTER CCLXXXII.

THE TRAGEDY IN THE OLD LANE.

THE object of the three friends was, now, to get to London as quickly as they could, and then to adopt some bold and decisive step for the recovering of their horses; so they, at a quick pace, made their way up the lane, and reached the high road, which was at some distance from the old chalk pit.

"Now for a conveyance to London, if one can be got," said Dick. "I should think that some cart or waggon would be sure to pass us soon."

"Not a doubt of it, Dick," said Claude, "and as such is to be our mode of getting on, we need not hurry, I take it, but walk at our ease."

"Exactly; but still, every mite is a mite nearer our destination; so come on."

They walked at a strutting kind of pace; but they had not got many hundred feet from the head of the cave, when such a shriek came upon their ears, that they all three involuntarily stopped, and faced about to the direction from whence it came.

"What on earth is that?" said Jack. "What a dreadful cry!"

"Hush," said Claude, "hush! It may come again! No—all is still.—It echoes through my head. It was a fearful cry. Oh, Dick, and you, Jack, it sounds perhaps odd to you both, and you will think me too much the slave of my imagination, after what we thought we saw; but, something seems to whisper to me, that that shriek came from the lips of Brand, the officer."

"Good Heaven!" said Jack.

"I will see to it," said Dick, with sudden energy. "I had my suspicions all along, and now they are confirmed. You are not mad, Claude, nor are you the slave of your imagination. We have all been duped by some clever trick in supposing that Brand was free, and my opinion is now, that the blackbirds are murdering the man."

"Come," said Claude.

Without another word, he set off back again towards the lane and the chalk pit.

While Duval and his two friends are now making the best of their way to the spot from whence they had so recently come, we will carry the reader back again to that chalk pit where the blackbirds were assembled, and which was yet to be the scene of a tragedy that they had one and all determined should take place as soon as Claude Duval and his friends were got rid of.

That tragedy was the death of Brand, the officer, for Claude had been juggled, and Brand was still a prisoner in the hands of the thieves.

The blackbirds made sure that Claude Duval and his two friends would start for London as quickly as they could.—The great importance to them that the recovery of their horses was seemed to point to such a proceeding as beyond a doubt; and if Claude Duval had gone off at speed, ten minutes at the most would have sufficed to take him and his friends far beyond earshot of anything that might take place in the chalk-pit.

But we will not anticipate. The reader is not yet well aware of how it was Duval was deceived regarding the supposed liberation of Brand.

We have stated, that when darkness did come over the face of the land, that in that chalk-pit, with its precipitous sides, it was a tenfold darkness; and so rapidly, too, did it come on, that in the course of a very short time it was impossible to distinguish objects with any degree of distinctness. It was at this juncture that, acting under the orders of Joe the Cracksman, two of the most active and determined of the blackbirds flung themselves upon Brand the officer, and bore him to the ground

at once, and gagged him with a cork, which they had prepared for that purpose, and which effectually prevented him from giving any alarm.

After that, they took off his coat and hat, and it was one of the very men who had thrown him down only a short time before, that personated him to Duval, and made believe to leave the pit. As for Brand himself, he was securely hidden behind some luxuriant bushes that afforded a perfect place of security for him, and would, indeed, have sufficed to hide him even in broad daylight.

After this, there can be no doubt but that the death of the officer was determined upon.

The ten minutes, then, that Joe thought amply sufficient to ensure the sufficient distance of Claude and his friends having elapsed, a deathlike stillness reigning in the chalk-pit, he spoke—

"Blackbirds," he said, "we none of us like the job we feel forced to do.—We are forced only to it by self-preservation; but, as I say to you all, we none of us like it. Brand must die!"

"Yes," said the throng, and the whispered assent died away upon the night breeze.

Brand heard that "yes," and he knew that it was his death warrant; but the gag was not removed from his mouth, and he could not speak. It was very dreadful to think that he should die in such a fashion. No wonder that he made the strenuous efforts to free himself.

"Bring him here," said Joe.

The unfortunate wretch was brought forward, and the thieves gathered in a dense and small circle about him.

"Brand," said Joe, "I am sorry for you—we are all sorry for you; but men are at times compelled to do deeds that they may much regret, and yet must do them. The secret of this place must be kept; besides, you know us all now too well by sight, and it is too much to ask of you to neglect making use of the information which the last twelve hours have given you. If you were to promise to do so, and we were to let you go upon such a promise, we could not in our hearts blame you for breaking your word. It is your business to hunt us, and it is our business to take care of ourselves as well as we can; so I tell you that, without bearing any particular malice against you of any kind, or description whatever, we have no resource but to put you out of the way of doing us a mischief."

Brand made painful efforts to articulate; but he could only utter a strange noise in his throat.

"We will not hurry a man to another world," said Joe, "in such a way as this. I think he must see the justice of what we say. Take the gag out of his mouth, and let him speak."

The cork was at once removed from the mouth of the unhappy man, and the moment it was so, he uttered that loud and startling cry which had come upon the ears of Claude Duval and his companions.

"Help—help—help!" cried Brand, with the hope that his cries might reach some friendly ears. "Help!—murder!"

"Down with him!" shouted Joe.

He was knocked down in a moment, and a handkerchief twisted round his neck so tightly that he was nearly suffocated, and could not speak.

"I didn't expect this," added Joe, "or I should not have had the gag taken off him; but it's no matter. The sooner now we finish the job, my friends, the better."

"All's ready," said a voice.

"Very well. It's an ugly affair, so let us get it over."

In a hollow of the chalk-pit, where the debris of many seasons' vegetation had collected until there was a tolerable thickness of loam, a young tree had sprung up and thriven. It was about twenty feet in height, now, and there was a branch near to the top of it which was strong and supple. To this branch the blackbirds had fastened another piece of wood, so that they could run a stout cord over it.

They had made up their minds to hang Brand.

Hanging was in all probability the sort of exit from this world that most of them were doomed to make, and, therefore, it was no wonder that, as a mode of bidding good-bye to Brand, it was uppermost in their minds. The poor wretch himself had no idea of the

mode by which they meant to take his life, although that he should be murdered by them was now a proposition that came before him in all its ghastly and horrible reality. He tried to scream again, but as often as he did so, they tightened the handkerchief firm round his throat, so that he could utter no sound but a faint gurgling noise, strongly indicative of the fact that he was half choked, and in this fashion they dragged him on towards the temporary gallows.

"Quick, blackbirds — quick!" said Joe. "The sooner this affair is settled the better for all parties now."

"Oh, no—no!" said Brand, suddenly slipping free of the handkerchief in consequence of it turning by the force with which it was held. "Oh, no—no! spare me! I will swear to anything you like, only spare my life!"

"Away with him!" said Joe.

"You will have nothing to fear from me. I will promise to come once a month, if you like, and place myself unarmed in your power, that you may deal with me according to my acts. Oh, spare me!"

"Quick! quick!"

"I will no longer be an officer! I will leave the police! Surely that will satisfy you. And, if you like, I will join your fraternity. Life is sweet, and it is better to be a living thief than a murdered officer."

"Pshaw! Hold your noise, Brand. Meet your fate like a man. If any of us in the course of fate get to the gallows-tree, you don't find us howling and begging to live, and offering to be police-officers if they will let us off."

This sounded so ridiculous, that, notwithstanding the awful job they had in hand, the blackbirds could not forbear a smile, and Brand was still dragged on towards the fatal tree.

"Now say your prayers, if you like," said Joe, "for in another minute off you go."

They fixed the noose they had constructed at one end of the rope round his neck, and four of the blackbirds took hold of the other end, at some few yards off.

"Will nothing save me?" said Brand.

"Nothing, so you had better put up with it, and die with a good grace like a bold fellow, as we always thought you were."

"No—no! you don't know what it is to die—to feel that the world and you are about to part for ever. I have a wife, too."

"So have I," said Joe; "and I would rather be hanged any day than know that she and I were in the same country; so that goes for nothing at all."

"I have children."

"Well, somebody else will have all the trouble of them; so that don't much matter; so once more good-night, Brand. I tell you, as I told you before, that we are sorry for it, but we can't do other than what we are doing, and it's just what you would do yourself, old fellow, if you were in our place."

"Oh, no—no! I have money—hidden money. Pause a little, while I recollect myself to tell you where it is."

"We don't want it."

"We may as well hear what he says about it, Joe," said one.

"Oh, nonsense! How can you be such a fool? A man with the rope round his neck will say anything to give hmself the chance of drawing half-a-dozen more breaths. It's all stuff!"

"Indeed, it is not, Joe," said Brand. "I have been always a careful man, as you all know, and I am not without means, I can tell you. Let me only free, and I will put a booty in your hands such as you little dream of."

"Oh, stuff, Brand—stuff!"

"Nay, Joe, let's hear him. These officers hide swag, you know, for years sometimes, that they lag hold of from some poor devil or another, who has risked his neck to get it. Come, Master Brand, what have you to say?"

"But if I give you such information, will you promise to spare my life?"

"Oh, we will consider of that."

"How can you expect me to speak without some sort of promise?"

"Why, if we do hang you, still, you know, you won't be any the worse off; and by telling us what you know about the swag, we shall be all the better off."

therefore, you will go out of the world with the satisfaction of having done a good action, you know; and only think of that!"

Brand was silent.

"Well," said Joe, "I have let you go on having your own way, all of you, in this, and you see now what a stupid affair you are making of it. You had better run him up to the tree at once."

"Oh, no—no!" cried Brand. "I will tell—in a moment I will tell. As you say, the swag is no good to me now."

"Not a bit."

"Well then, gentlemen, you must know that I always took care of myself in any little affair that I could do myself a good turn, and so, as I said before, I have collected some money as well as some goods. I should be able to tell you all better about it if this rope was not so tight round my neck, but it half stops my breath."

"Listen to me," said Joe.

"Well, Joe, we do."

"Am I captain of the blackbirds, or am I not?"

"Yes, you are, Joe—you are. You know that well enough."

"Very well, then. Unless my orders are obeyed, I here renounce all authority among you, and will never again set foot in a ken where any of you may be. Run that man up to the tree."

Brand uttered a last shriek, and in another moment he was swinging in the air, and the blackbirds were twisting the end of the rope round and round the stump of the tree.

"Halt!" cried a voice at the top of the cliff near the main road. "Make ready! present! fire!"

A rattling volley of musketry came into the chalk pit.

CHAPTER CCLXXXIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS GET THEIR HORSES AGAIN.

It will be remembered that we left Duval, and Dick, and Jack, making their way at full speed back from the London-road to the chalk-pit again, after having been alarmed by the first loud shriek of Brand, the officer.

That some fearful tragedy was being enacted in the chalk-pit they could not doubt, but what it was, considering that they were under a firm impression that Brand must have escaped, was beyond their conception to fathom.

They did not speak a word as they hurried on, but the sudden volley of musketry, the echoes of which spread far and wide, brought them to a standstill in a moment, and they were as still as statues, till Claude Duval broke the charm that held them, by saying—

"Good Heaven, can either of you say what is the meaning of all this?"

"Not I," said Jack.

"Nor I," said Dick Turpin; "but I suspect——"

"What, Dick?"

"That it is by far our best plan to look to ourselves. That volley of fire-arms is something more than suspicious. There was about it a military preciseness which gets up a suspicion in my mind."

"What is the suspicion, Dick? Do you think the blackbirds are really beleaguered in the old chalk-pit by the soldiery?"

"I do, indeed. But we are near at hand. Our appearance on the road cannot awaken any suspicion, as it is a public thoroughfare. Let us proceed as though we were going to Gravesend, and we shall then soon find out the state of affairs in the pit, and among the blackbirds."

There could be no possible objection to such a course as this, and they all three proceeded at a slow, but not creeping pace, towards the bit of high road above the chalk-pit.

They had not proceeded far when they saw, glancing in the dim light, the muskets of the soldiery, and then a voice called out—

"Who goes there?" and there was the ring of a musket as it was brought to the charge.

It was necessary at once to reply to the challenge, and Claude Duval said—

"We are peaceable people. What is the meaning of all this?"

A sergeant stepped up to them, and said—

"Where are you going, and where do you come from?"

"We are tradesmen," said Duval,

"and can give you our cards. We are on our route to Northfleet, but hearing a firing like guns, we came back to see what it was all about. I'm Mr. Brown, of the High-street, Gravesend, grocer and cheesemonger—and this is Mr. Smith, egg merchant—and this is Mr. Green, the well-known upholsterer, you understand."

"Well—well," said the sergeant, "you had better go back again. There are thieves in one of the old pits, here, and we are assisting the civil power to apprehend them, that's all; you had better be out of danger."

"Danger!" cried Claude Duval. "Did you say there was danger, sir?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Oh, dear, then I'm sure that don't suit us. Come along, neighbours! This gentleman in the red coat says that there is danger, and that is quite out of our lines of business. We bid you good evening, sir, and only hope you will be as successful and as cunning in all your undertakings as in this one."

The sergeant laughed as the three friends walked away. He was quite satisfied in his own mind that he had very much frightened them, and it did not at all surprise him to hear them set off at good speed the moment they got a little way from the spot. How little did that sergeant suspect that the united rewards for the apprehension of those three men, whom he had actually had at arm's length, and whom he could have surrounded with a force sufficient to render all resistance madness, exceeded the sum of two thousand pounds!

"It's all up with the blackbirds," said Dick Turpin, after they had gone about half a mile, and felt that they could speak freely.

"Not a doubt of it," said Claude Duval, "provided one thing has been done, and that is, a guard placed at the end of the lane. There is no sort of doubt now in my mind but that the fellow who went to Gravesend for provisions was watched back again, and that has brought the military upon them."

"But that scream," said Jack. "I can't forget that shriek!"

"We shall possibly get at the meaning of that some day, Jack, but not now. Our only course is to go to London at once, and get possession of our horses, if it be possible so to do."

"You know where they are, Claude, and, therefore, it is possible."

"I hope it is. They are at a stable adjoining to, or belonging to a carrier's yard immediately opposite to the door of Newgate in the Old Bailey; not a very pleasant locality for us to go to."

"Far from it; and yet possibly as safe a one as we could find. But I have no idea of walking all the way to London."

"Nor I; but, hark! I hear an odd rumbling noise upon the road, which betokens the presence of some vehicle, and the tinkling of bells makes me suspect that it is a waggon."

"Yes," said Dick, "and it seems to me to be proceeding at the magnificent rate of about two miles an hour."

Dick laughed; but they all three stood in the roadway watching for the waggon, the dangling lantern in the front of which was soon visible.

"Here it comes," said Claude. "I will speak to the driver. If he is going to London, we may as well go with him until we meet with a quicker conveyance; and, after all, the two miles you talk about, Dick, are four."

"But, good gracious! it would take us five hours to get to London Bridge."

"Never mind," said Jack. "Anything is better just now than being a post on the road; and, besides, as Claude says, we can leave the waggon as soon as any quicker mode of travelling suggests itself; and if it really gets on at the rate of four miles an hour, you must recollect, Dick, that on the average, we should not walk quicker than that, so we save our legs by the use of the waggon, at all events."

"Be it so," said Dick. "I am willing. Hail the waggoner, Claude, will you?"

"Yes. Hilloa! Waggoner there! Hillo!"

"Woa!" said the man, who was lazily trudging on by the side of the eight great fat horses who pulled the waggon. "Woa!"

The horses seemed to consider of it for a moment or two, and then they stopped.

"To London?" said Claude.

"Yes, master."

"And room for three?"

"Lor bless you, yes, to be sure. We comes from Charlton, but we ain't got nothing like a full waggon. Get in, gentlemen, if you pleases."

They all three got into the waggon with expedition, and as it was very dark, they, of course, fell over the legs of everybody that were there before them; but at last, when the cursing and swearing incidental to such a process were over, they succeeded in getting into a comfortable corner among some straw; and the waggoner having requested his lazy cattle to proceed, the huge lumbering vehicle was in motion again in a few minutes.

"Well, sir," said a voice, "pray go on."

By this, Duval and his friends found that by their entrance something in the shape of an anecdote or a very amusing gossip had been put a temporary stop to.

"Oh, I have not much more to say," replied a rough voice. "The fact is that we officers see strange things."

"Officers!" thought Claude and his companions.

"Of course you do," said another voice, "and you ought to be well paid, for yours is not only a dangerous profession, but it is one that gets you no credit, even after all your danger."

"But did they really escape them?" said a third voice.

"Oh, yes. I will tell you how it was. You see, the keeper of the lock-up at Bow Street and the officer who had apprehended them, sat by the fire in the lower room, and, of course, they rationally enough considered that all was right; but Duval and his associates actually made a hole in the ceiling of a room they got into, and then escaped out at the window of the apartment above."

"Oh—ah!" said everybody. "That was it, was it?"

Dick Turpin gave a slight kick to Claude Duval, for there, sure enough, was an officer interesting the people in the waggon with a tolerable accurate account of their last escape from the lock-up at Bow Street, and with which the reader is well acquainted.

"Do you know him?" whispered Claude to Dick Turpin.

"Not by his voice; and it is so plaguey dark that I can't see so much as the tip of any one's nose."

"Nor I. We can but wait a little."

"Hush!"

"There's one thing, however," added the officer, "that it is as well should be known to as many people as possible, as it may make the fortune of somebody, and that is, that the rewards offered for their apprehension are now increased."

"What's the amount?" said one.

"I can't say exactly; but it's nearer two thousand pounds than nothing."

At this there was a general expression of surprise, and the officer added—

"Ah! I should consider myself a made man if I could only lay hands upon Duval and those with him."

"What suppose they were to get into this waggon?" said one.

"Ah! that would be too good a thing."

"A great deal," said a woman's voice; "and as for me—I only hope they won't, for I should be frightened out of my life if they did."

"So should I," said another female.

"Well, so should not I," said the officer. "I should be ready to jump out of my skin with joy."

"Dick!" whispered Claude.

"Yes. Here you are."

"Answer me what I ask of you. We had better keep up some sort of conversation together, or they may take it into their heads that we are suspicious characters, for all we know."

"Very good."

Claude now spoke in a conversant tone, but so as he might be very well heard by all in the waggon.

"Well, neighbour," he said, "will you take four-and-eight for the sheep, or will you not? It's a fair offer."

"Four and ten," said Dick Turpin, "I do think would be nearer the mark. You won't see such in the market every day, I can tell you."

"Well, I will think of it. But do you anything in pigs?"

"Only at the fall of the year," said Dick. "I can let you have the pigs, though, at your own figure."

By this time, Jack became aware of

what they meant, and he thought he might as well say something likewise, to keep up the delusion.

"I have laid down six acres of mangold this season," he said "and I do hope you'll take some of me, neighbour Smith."

"Well, I'll see when you cart 'em," said Claude.

By this time the people in the waggon were quite assured that the three strangers who had recently got in were in the farming line, and that they were intent upon bargaining with each other for beasts and for field produce. The conversation became rather general, until the officer said—

"Perhaps some of you farmers or graziers can say how the corn crop will be this year?"

"Why, hardly good, sir," said Claude; "but still, we hopes as it will be finish, not that we grows much ourselves, as we does more in beastes than in corn crops, you see."

"Yes, oh, yes; and you find that pay?"

"Tolerable, sir; but not like thief catching."

At this, there was a general laugh, in which the officer joined.

"Thief catching," he said, "is all very well, but sometimes we catch a tartar, and then, you know, it is not quite so pleasant."

There was another laugh at this, and then some one cried out—

"Hilloa! Mr. Waggoner, mind you stop the coach for me when it comes up, now, will you? Don't let it pass."

"It's a coming now," said the waggoner. "I can hear the guard's horn, now, and I can see the lights."

"Dang it, we will go by the coach," said Claude, "for I shall lose a good customer if I don't get to London quick."

The sound of the guard's horn belonging to some stage coach now came clearly upon the night air, and the waggoner called out—

"It's the royal mail from Maidstone. Here it comes. Hoi! hoi! coach a-hoi! hilloa!"

The flash of the lights of the mail-coach partially illumined the waggon, and the three friends got out of the slow and lumbering vehicle, and inquired if there were places.

"Yes, get up," said the guard.

The other person who went by the mail likewise, was a respectable-looking tradesman-like man, and they were all soon on the roof of the four-horsed coach, which looked quite bright and shining with its lamps, and its scarlet-coated guard, and heaps of luggage.

"All's right," said the guard.

The coachman then chirped to the horses, and in another moment the mail was off, and the lumbering, slow waggon with its team was far behind.

"This is an escape," said Duval.

"What did you say, sir?" said the guard.

"That it is quite an escape to get out of a waggon at the pace of four miles an hour, into such a coach as this with its spanking team."

"Oh, ah, sir, it is indeed. We do rather go along, I take it. Why, it's a matter of seventeen miles to London now."

"And when shall we get there?"

"In two hours, including all stoppages, and one bait to change horses at Greenwich. What do you think of that?"

"Why, that it is capital going, that can't be denied, my friend."

The guard was so satisfied with the approbation that Claude Duval bestowed upon the coach and its performance, that he entered quite into a history of it—how long it had been built—how it was at first not intended for a royal mail, until that honour was thrust upon it by reason of its being so light in draught, and such a capital coach altogether.

To all of this Claude listened as though he were deeply interested, and presently the coach stopped at Greenwich to change horses. This operation was performed with all that celerity which used to mark the proceedings of the then quickest mode of travelling in Great Britain. How all that is changed now, and how the railroad, with its panting engine, makes the mail-coaches of the last century seem in comparison what the slow waggons were to them in their day.

In due time the mail-coach rattled over old London Bridge, and the mo-

ment that it drew up, Claude and his companions dismounted, and paying liberally for the ride they had had, they stood in the midst of London just as St. Paul's clock pealed out the hour of twelve at night.

The streets of the city at that hour were not nigh so populous as they are now. The citizens of London went to bed at soberer hours than they now think of retiring, and the quietude of London was then as great as some country



THE BLACKBIRDS ABOUT TO HANG THE OFFICER.

town can boast of now—for it is a boast surely to be able to hear oneself talk to a companion in the street, and not to be continually running the risk of being run over by some horrible omnibus, or infernal machine in the shape of a cab.

Alas! alas! it is the omnibus and the cab that have made London the

Babel that it is, and filled the thoroughfares with racket and danger. We are not of the number who look upon the good old times, as they are called, for everything that is excellent: on the contrary, we admire many great changes that have taken place; but to the omnibus and to the cab we are enemies to the back bone; and, for the sake of peace, and comfort, and safety, and humanity to the horse, we proclaim war to the knife against such vehicles.

CHAPTER CCLXXXIV.

THE HORSES ARE RECOVERED BUT TO BE LOST AGAIN.

Claude Duval and Dick Turpin and Jack assembled by the light of a flickering old oil lamp, not far from the Royal Exchange, to debate upon the best course to pursue in furtherance of the great object that had brought them to the metropolis.

That object was the recovery of their horses.

"I have every possible reason," said Claude, "to rely upon the information that I have received from one of the blackbirds, that our cattle are in a stall, opposite to the wicket gate of Newgate."

"Of that there is little doubt," said Jack. "They are in the custody of the Sheriff of London; and I happen to know that there is the stable in which cattle belonging to persons who are amenable to the law are really placed, so that the information you have, Claude, tallies with experience and known facts."

"Ah!" said Dick, "mind you, I intend to make a try to get my gallant steed out of the power of the Philistines; but still, I cannot conceal from myself, nor am I at all desirous of concealing from you, too, that I look upon the enterprise as one of the most troublesome and doubtful that can possibly be undertaken."

"Well," said Claude, "there are but two ways of setting about it. The one is to try something to get at the cattle and gallop off with them, and the other is, to attempt by some bold manœuvre to persuade those who have the custody of them that we are entitled to them."

Dick shook his head, and Jack shook his, and then the former said—

"I don't think that any open mode of proceeding would answer. If we do anything at all, it strikes me it must be in the secret way. The hour is late. It is quite possible that there may be only some watchmen upon the premises, and if that is the case, a bold push might do the business."

"I would advise," said Jack, "that we go at once to the place and make what observations we can. Who knows but something may turn up when we get there that may alter all our plans?"

"Good," said Claude. "Come on."

A watchman, who had been looking at them from the other side of the way, now crossed over, and turned the full light of his lantern upon them.

"Ah! Charles!" said Claude to him in a boasting tone, "how are you to-night? Wife and family all well?"

"Move on, will you?" said the watchman.

"Oh, certainly, sir, with great pleasure!"

"I've half a mind to take you all up. I don't believe you are after any good, a-whispering and a-talking here at this time of night."

"Perhaps you would like to know what we are about?" said Dick.

"Yes, I should, stupid," said the watchman.

"Well, then, we intend to carry off the Bank of England to-night, and to divide it between us in the Hampstead fields."

"Now, if I don't take you upon my own account! Oh, murder!"

"You'll find some difficulty in taking yourself up, I think," said Dick, as with one blow he sent the watchman prostrate in the kennel.

It was quite expedient for them to get off now from that spot as quickly as they could, and they went arm-in-arm at a quick pace just as the watchman found his rattle and began to spring it. To the next guardian of the night they met, Duval said, in a very serious voice—

"There is a fire in Lombard Street, my good fellow, and you had better hasten there as soon as possible. It's at a banking-house, and they are throwing the gold out at the window with a shovel."

The watchman did not wait to thank them for such a piece of intelligence, but he set off as fast as his legs and his huge white great coat would let him, to the scene of commotion.

Fleet of foot as Claude Duval and his friends were, they soon scampered along Cheapside, and made their way down Newgate Street to the corner of the Old Bailey. There they had to draw aside, for the purpose of letting pass them a riotous set from some club in the neighbourhood, which had just broken up, and conveyed its noise and racket into the public streets. The shouts and the profane songs of the half drunken party died away in the distance, and then Duval and his two friends walked on to the other side of the way, and getting into a doorway, they confronted the gloomy old pile of Newgate.

"There it is," said Claude.

"Ay," said Jack with a shudder. "It would need, indeed, to be something particular that would tempt me to this spot."

"We won't look at it," said Dick. "Let us go to the inn yard, where our special business lies."

They walked on till they got to the inn yard, which was exactly opposite to the market of Newgate. All was dark and drear about the place. A solitary lamp, that was nearly out, cast a flickering light upon the spot, that was positively worse than darkness.

"I have thought," said Claude in a low tone, "that the best thing we can do will be to ring at the bell of the stables of the inn, and see if any one is up."

"Do so," said Dick; "we will keep back in the shadow here."

"They got right into a deep doorway with a huge overhanging portico, and Claude Duval finding a large wooden handle to a bell, slightly pulled it, and produced a tolling sound within the yard. No notice was taken of this, and after a few minutes he rang again. He then heard the sound of a bolt being worked up and down to withdraw it, as it evidently fitted very tightly into its socked, and then a little wicket was opened in the large wooden gate, and a man, with a dimly-burning lamp, appeared, and asked, in a sleepy voice, what was wanted.

"Is Mr. Groveland within?" said Claude.

"Groveland? You mean Wilkes, I suppose?"

"To be sure I do. Wilkes it is. I come from Mr. Groveland. How I do confuse names, to be sure."

"Well, then, he isn't, and he is."

"That's a strange answer, my friend."

"Well, he's abed, in course, at this hour o'night. But what do you want, now? Do say what it is at once."

"Are you the ostler?"

"Gracious, no! I'm the watchman. The ostler is gone to bed too. Now, do say what it is?"

"Why, I wanted to know if there was any chance to-morrow of my having a coach and four horses for about half the day. The coach belongs to Mr. Alderman Pump, you see, and so I——"

"Oh, dear me! can't you come, now, at a christian hour, my good fellow?"

"Well, I don't want to trouble you. Is there anybody else upon the premises?"

"Not a soul, I tell you."

"Then," said Claude, as he stepped at once within the wicket gate, and pointed a pistol right at the face of the watchman, "if you give the least alarm, or so much as speak above your breath, I'll scatter your brains over the yard."

The watchman retreated backwards till he fell over an iron chain that belonged to a crane close at hand, and there he lay upon his back as if he had been suddenly deprived of all sense and motion.

Claude went to the wicket and only said "Come in," and then Dick and Jack entered the inn yard, and Duval closed the little wicket door in a moment.

"Watchman!" said Duval.

The watchman only groaned.

"Get up at once; you shall have better pay for this one night's work than you can get for a year. Listen to me. You may as well make a hundred pounds as any one else. I am Claude Duval."

"Oh—oh, the dev——"

"Silence!"

"Yes, I—that is—oh, dear, of course; but I feel that I am the watchman of

another world. I am as good, I mean as bad, as a dead watchman, and this is the last hour of my watch——"

"Silence, and listen to me. This is a matter of life and death to you, watchman. You may die upon the point of principle in not giving up the trust reposed in you, or you may live and pocket a hundred-pound-note."

"Principle, did you say, sir? Die upon principle? Principle be hanged! I'd rather live than have all the principle in the world."

"But your character?" said Dick.

"Character be blowed, sir! What's the use of character to a dead watchman, I should like to know? And touching that hundred pounds, why—why—"

"You would be very glad to touch it?"

"I should indeed, gentlemen."

"Very well, get up."

"Yes, gentlemen. Here I is. Don't be holding of that pistol in the line of my head, if you please, Mr. Duval. Oh, don't!"

"Listen to me. There are three horses here, in charge of the sheriff of London."

"Ah, I smell a rat."

"Well, never mind that just now. There are three horses here, I say, and they belong to us. We intend to have them. Can you take us to them?"

"To the stall where they is I can, but not to the 'osses. The stall is locked up, you see; but I can show you where they is, and no mistake. But I'll take the liberty of putting out my lantern, and they then won't have any chance of looking out at a window and seeing of us."

"Do so."

The watchman blew out the candle that was in his lantern, and he said, in a voice that was evidently struggling between fear and cupidity—

"Gentlemen, you offer me a hundred pounds to let you take the 'osses, if you can get 'em?"

"We do. And if you refuse, we shall be under the necessity of shooting you."

"Then I consent."

"But, look you, you will have to come for your money at twelve o'clock to-morrow night to Blackheath."

"Oh, lor!"

"You need not be alarmed. If you have ever heard anything of Claude Duval, you have heard that he don't break his word with any one, so you may make sure he is not going to begin to do so with you. We have not the money with us, but we will get it for you by midnight to-morrow, if you will be at the gate at Greenwich Park that opens to Blackheath at the hour mentioned. I tell you this beforehand, lest you should prefer being shot at once to aiding us in this little matter."

"Don't mention that again. Oh don't."

"You consent, then?"

"Rather. Of course I do. As for the 'osses, what can it matter to me whether you has 'em or the sheriff? It isn't the likes of me that the likes of you stops on the highway, and I have got a wife and family to look to, and only get nine shillings a week as a watchman; so I feel as if this was a kind of a bit of a God-send to a poor man, and I will trust to your word, Mr. Claude Duval."

"You have decided wisely. Now, take us to the stable, and we will manage to get at the cattle."

"Hilloa!" said a voice. "Brown! Brown!"

"Oh, lor, that's Mr. Wilkes," said the watchman, "a-calling to me out of his bed-room window. What shall I do now?"

"Answer him," said Claude, in a whisper; "tell him it's all right, and we will keep close here in the shadow of the court by the gate. You have nothing to fear. Answer him boldly."

CHAPTER CCLXXXV.

CLAUDE MEETS WITH A SEVERE SHOCK IN THE OLD BAILEY.

THE watchman was evidently frightened, as well indeed he might be, for such an adventure as that in which he was now engaged was rather new to him. He shook so that his teeth chattered in his head.

"Hilloa!" said the voice from the window. "Watchman, where are you now?"

"Answer him at once," said Duval, "or it will be the worse for you."

"I'm afraid it will," groaned the watchman, "but I'm going to answer. Yes, sir—yes, Mr. Wilkes, I'm here."

"Where are you? I don't see you."

"Tell him your lantern has gone out." said Claude.

"Please, sir, my lantern has gone out, that's the reason, sir."

"Then why don't you light it again?"

"Confound you," whispered Claude, "why don't you tell him you are going to do so directly?"

"Confound you," said the watchman in his fright, "I'm going to do so directly.'

"This fellow will ruin all," said Dick Turpin.

"What's that you say?" cried Mr. Wilkes. "You are drunk, fellow, and I'll take good care to discharge you in the morning. I tell you, you are drunk, fellow."

"Say you were speaking about the lantern, you idiot!" said Claude.

"I was speaking about my lantern, you idiot, if you please, sir," said the watchman.

"Upon my life, this is pretty language to use to your employer," said Mr. Wilkes, "and if I was not afraid of taking cold, I would come down stairs and turn you out of the place at once, you rascal, that I would; but, as it is, you may depend upon being discharged to-morrow, and without a character, too."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" murmured the watchman, "now I am in for it, rather, I take it! What will become of me?"

"The hundred pounds!" whispered Claude.

"Oh, ah—that is something."

"It is more than you could save if you were to stay in your place for twenty years, so you are better off with that and your discharge than you would be without it and still keeping your situation. But how came you to be so absurd as to speak to your employer in such a way?"

"Oh, dear! didn't you tell me?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, now, I'll be hanged if I didn't think you did. But it's done now, and can't be helped, so I must just do the best I can for you, gentlemen, and trust to you, for, you see, I have lost my place all through you."

"I beg your pardon," said Claude; "it is not through us at all."

"Oh, dear—yes."

"Oh, dear, no. It is through your own folly, my man—nothing else. If you had only answered your master as you ought to have done, all would have been well enough with your place. But we can't stop to dispute that question with you. Take us to the stable in which are our horses at once."

"Come on, gentlemen—this way."

The night-porter spoke in rather a gloomy tone. Perhaps, after all, he had his suspicions that the one hundred pounds was too much in perspective, and that there was no very good security of its forthcoming, even provided he did go to Blackheath to get it, according to the directions that had been given him; and the loss of his place was a positive event, that he could have very little doubt of indeed, after what had occurred between him and his master upon that interesting occasion.

The man led the way along the old walls of the yard, so that they should not be likely to be seen by getting into the open space, and then stopping before a pair of old doors, he said—

"Here is the stable that the three horses are in. They have been well fed; for the sheriff, who is a saddler by trade, has been several times to look at them, and says they are prime ones, and that he will ride the dark bay mare himself."

"Will he?" said Dick Turpin. "I should like to catch him, that's all."

"Then, that's yours, sir?"

"It is."

"Then, by Jove, you are Dick Turpin?"

"Well, what of that?"

"Oh, lor! that I should be with such a highwayman as Dick Turpin, and sich another highwayman as Claude Duval, at this time of night. It's enough to makes one's hair stand on end, it is. Please, what's the other gentleman's name?"

"Sixteen-string Jack!" cried Jack.

"Oh—oh! Is it possible? Well, I often thought I should have liked to

be a highwayman myself; and if I had only thought nobody would have arrested me, and I should never have been took up for it, I don't know but that I should have gone upon the road some odd day. But there is the door, gentlemen, and, you see, it is fastened by a padlock."

"Was fastened, you mean," said Jack.

"Was, do you say, sir? Why, they have never forgot to lock it, have they?"

"No; but I have picked the lock, and the stable is open. Now, comrades, let us decide upon the best course."

"I think," said Claude, "that the thing to do will be, to saddle the three horses in the stable, and, likewise, mount them there. Then let the watchman go and throw open the outer gate sufficiently wide for us to go through, and then we can make a bold dash for it, and be off at once, and never mind how much clatter our horses' heels make. I'll warrant that before any one can be in the saddle to be after us, we shall be a couple of miles off."

"That is the way to do it," said Dick.

They all three went into the stable at once, and then Jack lit a match, and held it up, upon which Dick exclaimed—

"Ah! here is my Bonny Bess, looking as bright and as beautiful as ever."

At the sound of Dick's voice, the creature made a whining sound, and began to rub its head against him, to testify the pleasure it had in seeing him again. Jack and Claude found the saddles, and began hastily to fasten them on to their respective steeds, and Dick soon followed their example. The watchman remained hovering about the door of the stable, and in a great fright, as his muttered ejaculations sufficiently testified.

"Oh, lor!—oh, lor!" he said. "I do hope all this will end well. I never was in such a fright in all my life. Oh, dear! What, suppose there was to go for to come to be a scrimmige now, what a pretty situation I should be in, in the midst of it."

"Hold your row!" said Claude.

"Yes, sir; oh, yes."

"Don't keep up that muttering and grumbling at the stable door; somebody will hear you at last, and then we shall have a fight for it; and when that once begins, it is hard to say who may or who may not get a stray bullet in his head."

"Don't mention it, sir, I beg. I feel already as if one was going right through my nob, I do indeed."

"Are you all ready?" said Dick.

"In a moment, Dick," said Claude. "Now I am. How do you get on, Jack?"

"I have only to fasten the throat rein. Now it is done. Shall we mount?"

"To be sure."

They were all three in the saddle in a moment, and then it was that they felt a degree of exultation that on foot they could never feel. The mere fact that they were mounted again upon their good steeds, and thay were, both man and horse, quite fresh and full of life, was sufficient to give them great spirits; and they felt as though they could afford to scorn any danger that could possibly now approach them.

And yet one glance at their situation will show how very precarious it was. There they were in the midst of London—opposite to Newgate itself, and at the mercy of any little circumstance which might have the effect of betraying their position to their worst foes.

"Watchman," said Claude.

"Yes, gentlemen; oh, dear—oh, dear! Here I am."

"You are a poor coward. But remember that your money will be ready to-morrow night at the place I have mentioned to you, and it will be your own fault if you do not come for it. And now go and open the outer gate gently, so that we may ride out."

"Yes, yes; and the sooner you do ride out the better, gentlemen. Let me beg of you not to make a clatter in the inn yard. When you are outside, it don't matter, of course, to me a bit."

"We will be careful."

It was an anxious moment now that which preceded the opening of the great gate of the inn yard to allow Claude and his friends to pass out into the Old Bailey. They were in complete darkness; but, as well as they could, they kept their eyes fixed in the direction of the gate. Then they heard the fall of an iron bar, and Duval

cursed the stupidity of the watchman, who thus doubled their danger by a want of ordinary caution in his proceedings.

"That fellow will ruin all yet, if he don't mind," said Jack.

"He is a desperate fumbler," said Claude; "but a moment or two will suffice now to save us."

"It will—it will."

The gate creaked back upon its old hinges, and by stooping in his saddle, Claude could see that it was fairly back.

"Now!" he said.

With one accord they walked their horses across the inn yard, but it was impossible upon the stones with which it was paved to prevent the shoes of the cattle from making a noise. Of course, the horses stepped freely and firmly, and twelve legs, each armed with an iron shoe, do not come down upon stones quite as softly as velvet upon velvet.

"Holloa! What's that?" cried the voice of Mr. Wilkes again, from his window. "I'm sure I hear something. What is it?"

"The devil, sir!" said Claude. "He has mistaken the house, that is all, but he will call upon you to-morrow. Don't you hear his hoofs?"

"Watch! watch! Thieves!"

"Off with you both," said Claude. "Let us turn to the left."

"Yes, yes!" cried Dick and Jack.

The watchman shrank on one side, and as they went out at the gate, he said—

"Don't forget me to-morrow, gentlemen, I beg of you."

"We won't," said Claude. "Hush!"

They were in the Old Bailey, and with a bound, Duval was half way towards the end of Newgate Street, when a hackney-coach came into the Old Bailey round the corner. It was accompanied by a couple of mounted men, and as it lumbered along, one of the windows was broken, and a voice cried in screaming accents—

"Claude—Claude! Oh, where are you now to save me?"

If the whole of Newgate had suddenly, without the least warning of the approach of such a catastrophe, tumbled down, and presented nothing but a mass of ruins before his eyes, Claude Duval could not have been more completely astounded than he was by this cry from the person in the hackney-coach. It thoroughly bewildered him. For the moment it stopped his breath, and he staggered in his saddle, as though some mental blow had been struck at his head by an invisible hand.

Then in a voice that rang through the street, he shouted—

"By Heaven, 'tis Cicely!"

Yes; too well had he recognised that voice as the voice of his wife—his Cicely, whom he thought he had left still in such perfect security and comfort at the farm-house by Ealing Common; and now suddenly, at such an awfully critical moment, to discover her in a coach in the Old Bailey, and to hear her calling for help, was enough to make him doubt for a moment the fact of his waking existence.

The sound of his voice reached the ears of Cicely, for, indeed, and in truth, she was in the hackney-coach, and the shriek of joy that came from her lips, was an answer to his in a moment.

"Drive on!" shouted one of the horsemen. "Drive on, coachman! Curses on you, don't you see you are close to Newgate?"

The coachman had been alarmed at the cries, and had instantly pulled up, as he would have done had he, in some crowded thoroughfare, been made aware that he either had driven over some one, or was upon the point of doing so. But before he could put the old miserable horses into motion again, Claude Duval was at the side of the coach.

"Cicely!" he cried, "speak again! Is it, indeed, you?"

"Oh, Claude!—Claude! Save me!"

"Ay, will I."

The two horsemen who accompanied the coach, when they heard the name of Claude mentioned, uttered a shout of gratification, and one cried—

"Why, here he is! This is our man. Down with him!"

One of them aimed a blow at Duval, and struck him on the shoulder with a staff. Claude had drawn a pistol, and at once he shot that man dead, as he cried out—

"Dick and Jack, ride off. Don't wait for me—ride off, both of you."

"Not yet," said Dick.

"Yes, you be off with you."

"I will die first," said Jack.

"Help!—help! Police! Watch! —watch!" cried the other horseman who was with the coach, as he slipped off his horse, and ran with all his speed towards Newgate.

The sound of rattles began to be heard from several quarters, and Claude dismounted as he shouted to the coachman—

"Keep your horses quiet, or I'll blow your brains out. Keep quiet, coachman, or it will be the worse for you."

"Oh, lor, yes," said the coachman; "all I want's among you all is my blessed fare. That's all I wants among you all, if you pleases, gents."

CHAPTER CCLXXXVI.

THE FRACAS IN THE OLD BAILEY HAS DISASTROUS RESULTS.

Claude Duval kept the bridle of his horse over his left arm, while with his right hand he tried to open the coach door, but it was made fast by some means, and resisted him.

"Cicely," he said, "how is this? The door is fast."

"It is tied with a cord."

"Ah, that will do—I see it. A knife—a knife!"

"Here," said Jack, close to his head. "Here is one."

"A thousand thanks."

With the knife that Jack handed to him, Claude cut the thick cord that kept the coach door shut, and in another moment Cicely was in his arms.

"Claude—Claude, you have come to save me! Oh, God! I thought they would have taken me to prison; but you have saved me."

"Mount—mount! Let me help you on the horse, Cicely."

"Yes, Claude—oh, yes. With you, to the world's end if need be. They took me a prisoner, Claude, because I would give them no information where they might find you, and they threatened me with death. Is this Newgate?"

"It is—it is. But you shall tell me all another time, Cicely. Moments are now most precious. Our lives all hang upon a thread."

"They do, indeed," said Jack.

Claude had just succeeded in getting Cicely upon the horse, and was upon the point of mounting himself, when, with a rush and a shout, some couple of dozen men from Newgate tore up the street, and began firing pistols at random, as they approached the party by the coach.

"Lost!" said Jack.

"No, no!" cried Claude. "Hold my horse's head, Dick, or you, Jack, do it. If I can only gain the saddle, all will be well again. Stoop low, Cicely—oh, stoop low, and avoid the bullets."

"Yes, Claude, yes; but the horse is hurt."

The horse began to plunge furiously. It was quite out of the question for either Dick or Jack to hold the half-maddened animal, and it was equally impossible for Claude Duval to mount it. Still he would not relinquish his hold of the bridle, and still his foes advanced.

"Surrender yourselves," cried a voice, "or you will be all butchered as you stand. Surrender, Claude Duval. You have not a chance."

"Never!" said Claude, as he now with difficulty drew his pistols with his disengaged hand, and fired them one by one at the advancing men, and then threw them to the ground as quickly as he discharged them.

"Fire, Dick! Use your pistols now, Jack. Our only chance is to keep them in check. They are cowards, after all."

Dick and Jack kept up such a continual fire for a moment or two that the officers and officials of Newgate who had rushed out to capture the party were staggered; but then a voice cried out—

"Fire a volley upon them. Dead or alive will do for us."

About twelve or fifteen fire-arms were discharged at once. Cicely uttered a shriek, and fell over upon the neck of the horse. Claude caught her in his arms, and with one piercing cry of anguish, he held her bleeding form to his breast. In another moment he was surrounded, and half-a-dozen hands had hold of him. Claude Duval was taken!

A man got hold of the bridle, too, of Dick Turpin's horse; but with one blow from the butt-end of rather a heavily-mounted pistol, Turpin laid him prostrate; and then putting spurs to his horse, he went off like the wind towards Holborn. Jack, too, escaped by riding over a couple of the officers, and striking right and left with the heavy end of his riding-whip, which



THE CAPTURE OF CLAUDE AND DEATH OF CICELY.

had a couple of ounces of lead let into the handle of it, and did fearful execution.

Half-a-dozen of the officers pursued them; and the horses of the two who had been with the hackney-coach being mounted by a couple of the most courageous of the officers, they kept close upon their heels. It was a chase for life or death that.

That Dick and Jack would have had considerable trouble in escaping was pretty certain if one of the officer's horse's had not fallen upon the lower part of Skinner Street; and Jack perceiving it, turned upon the other, and made a blow at him that rather staggered him, although it did not hit him quite so fair as Jack intended to do.

This gave them a little latitude, and they went up Holborn at a pace that, considering the ascent, which was then much worse than it is now, was truly tremendous and appalling. It was well that the hill, though sharp, was short, and that they were soon upon the head ground, as the cattle could not have kept up at such a pace. As it was, however, Holborn was dashed through in its whole extent in a very short space of time, indeed, and they gained the long straggling thoroughfare of Tottenham-court-road, feeling satisfied then that no one was pursuing them.

It was then that Jack pulled up, and letting the reins of his horse slip along his arm, he placed both his hands upon his face, and sobbed aloud.

"Poor Claude!" he said—"poor Claude!"

Dick looked at him in silence. He felt that no ordinary topic of consolation would suffice at such a moment.

"Dead! dead!" said Jack. "Well, they are satisfied now. They have killed him at last, and Cicely, too, who loved him so well. They have died together!"

"Jack, you do not know that?"

"Oh, yes—yes. I saw her fall."

"But you did not see Claude fall?"

"I saw the hands of twenty murderers upon him, Dick. Do you think they would spare him?"

"Yes, Jack. They wanted to take him alive, and, in my opinion, they have. Oh, Jack, this has, indeed, been a fearful night!"

"It has—it has!"

"But come, now. We are men, and, therefore, like men, you know, we should meet such evil fortune as comes to us. Cheer up, Jack!"

"Cheer up, did you say?"

"Yes, I did; and why not?"

"Oh, no—no! This is the end of it all. I have but one wish now."

"Well—well, ride on gently, Jack. Remember that we are in London yet, and that our enemies may still be after us. What is your one wish?"

"That I were dead!"

"Oh, pho! You are not at all like a dead one yet, Jack, nor is Claude either, for all we know. Come—come, you look at the affair much too gloomily. There is hope yet, you know."

"Alas! it was a natural impulse for me to fly from the spot when I found that I could do him no good; but I ought to have staid and died by his side, that is what I ought to have done."

"No such thing, Jack."

"But I say yes, Dick. Do not tell me it is no such thing; you do not know how close was the bond of union between us."

Dick Turpin could not but see that Jack was in no mood to be reasoned with, nor did he blame him for the excess of feeling that he betrayed upon the occasion, for he knew how close had been the companionship between him and Claude Duval.

"Jack," he said, "your feeling is natural upon this occasion; but still, in the absence of information regarding the fate of Claude, you go too far."

"No—no. It will be a reproach to me as long as I live that I did not remain and die with him, as I ought to have done, and then all would have been well; I should have been spared the heartache which I have now, and which will never leave me."

Dick put his horse to a trot with the hope that Jack would instinctively follow the example, and he was not mistaken, for Jack assumed the same pace, probably hardly knowing that he did so at the moment.

Now a silence of some quarter of an hour's duration ensued between them, and they got right to Camden Town, and took the left-hand road, that would lead them to Highgate. More than once Dick Turpin looked back, and listened to hear if they were pursued by any one, but such was not the case. Of course, it was absurd for the officers on foot to come after two well-armed and well-mounted men; and the accident

that had happened on Holborn Hill to the two officers who were on horseback had had the effect of completely stopping their progress.

It was Jack, now, who first broke the silence by turning to Dick, and saying—

"Can you form any opinion, Dick, as to how it came about that Cicely was in that hackney-coach?"

"Yes, Jack, I can. Did you not hear her say that they had taken her into custody because she would not give the information concerning Claude Duval?"

"Yes—yes, I heard something."

"That was it, and no doubt they would have made up some sort of a case against her; but it was the most unfortunate thing in the world that she should arrive in the Old Bailey at such a moment as that."

"It was—it was."

"Yes, it has ruined Claude, for, after all, what could they have done with Cicely? Even if they were quite sure she had nothing to do but to tell them at once where to find Claude, no jury could commit her of the only legal offence they could bring against her of harbouring a felon, considering that she is his wife, which fact she could easily prove."

"Yes—yes, it was most unfortunate, as you say, Dick. This is, indeed, a most sad night for all of us. Where are we going now, Dick?"

"Towards Highgate."

"But what good can we do to Claude at Highgate? It is of no use surely our going there."

"Yes it is, Jack. Listen to me, now, patiently. I think that you are in a more composed frame of mind than you were, and that, therefore, I may tell you all my hopes and fears. May I do so, Jack?"

"Oh, yes, go on—go on, Dick."

"Then, Jack, in the first place let us consider what we know and what we do not of the affair. We know that Cicely is taken—we know that Claude is taken, but we don't know if Cicely be severely hurt or not—and we don't know if Claude be hurt at all. Now, here are you and I, both free and uninjured, and capable and willing to assist them both in every possible way, so, after all, their situation may not be so bad as it looks."

"You give me better hopes," said Jack, drawing a long breath.

"To be sure I do; but you are so easily depressed, Jack. That is the one fault of your character."

"I cannot help it," said Jack, mournfully. "Claude himself, poor fellow, has often told me of it, and begged of me to try to conquer the feeling, but I cannot; however, Dick, I will now submit to your directions in all that has to be done; only let us, if you would keep me from going out of my mind a'together, do something as quickly as we can."

"We will—we will. But it must be evident to you, Jack, that the first thing is to get accurate information of what has taken place."

"Yes—yes!"

"Well, then, I propose that we go at once, now, on to the Gate-house Tavern at Highgate, and put up our horses at some other place, so that we shall be separated from them, and seem to arrive there from country-ways on foot. There we will wait until the newspapers tell us what situation Claude and Cicely are in, for the affair will make quite a sensation, you may depend, and every particular will be published."

"Be it so, Dick."

With this determination, then, they rode right through Highgate, avoiding the Gate-house as they went, and they did not pause until they got to Finchley, where they drew up and asked at a road-side inn if their horses could be kept for a few hours, as they were going to call upon a gentleman in the neighbourhood, who had no accommodation for them. The answer was, of course, in the affirmative, and they left their horses well housed; then, on foot, they turned back to Highgate.

On the road they made what alterations in their apparel were in their power to do, so that by the time they reached the long straggling High-street of the village, they could hardly have been recognised as the same two persons who had ridden through it only half an hour before at a canter.

The Gate-house Tavern at Highgate stood then upon the same spot that it does now, only the old building has

disappeared and the modern structure, although bearing the same name, is not that which was at one time rather notorious as a baiting place for the knights of the road.

The change that Turpin and Jack had made in their appearance was rather for the better, as regarded their respectability and their looks, and they were received at the Gate-house with usual courtesy as gentlemen, although there was a little surprise at their appearing at such an hour as that. Still, there was then so much traffic on the Great North Road, that the hotels and inns were all open all the night.

All that they ordered was some mulled wine and a couple of beds, which, in the course of a quarter of an hour, they were accommodated with; and then Dick Turpin, as he shook hands with Jack for the night, said—

"Get some sleep, Jack. Remember that we can just now do nothing, but that if we are ever to do anything for Claude it must be by exertions that will require all our strength and power, so we ought to take care of ourselves."

"You are right, Dick. Good-night!"

They parted for the night, and Dick Turpin threw himself upon the bed, having only taken off his coat and his boots, and was soon fast asleep. Poor Jack, on the contrary, sat in an arm-chair, and ordered a fire to be lit in his room; and thus, for hour after hour, he sat, gazing at the burning embers, and in deep and profound thought regarding the position of Claude Duval.

It was not until the dim light of early dawn began to peep in at the window of the bedroom that Jack fell into an uneasy slumber; and then he was haunted with horrible dreams, and he fancied that he was in the midst of a vast crowd, that, with uproarious shouts, surrounded a scaffold, upon which he could see Claude Duval about to be executed. With all his exertion he could not get at him, and when he tried to call to him, he found that his voice had turned to a weak whisper.

With all the fright and terror of the dream upon his mind, Jack started and awoke, upon hearing some one knocking at the door of the room.

"Who is there?" he cried. "Who is there?"

"Don't you know me, Jack?" said Dick. "Open the door."

Jack did so, and Dick Turpin entered the room.

"Why, Jack," he said, "you have not slept a bit."

"Oh, yes, I have," said Jack, with a shudder. "I have had too much sleep."

CHAPTER CCLXXXVII.

THE ST. JAMES'S CHRONICLE GIVES NEWS TO DICK TURPIN AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

Dick could not but see by the face of Jack that he had passed but a very indifferent night, and he shook his head as he said—

"Jack—Jack, have you been husbanding your strength as I asked you to do, for the purpose of trying to do something for Claude?"

"No," said Jack, after a pause.

"I thought not."

"But I will, Dick. The morning light has brought something like peace to me, and I feel much better than I did. I am getting more myself. You shall not have cause to complain of me again. But I have had such a dream."

"A dream?"

"Oh, yes. You smile, Dick, but it was a dreadful dream. I thought that——"

"Hold, for mercy's sake, Jack! If you don't wish to give me the horrors for the rest of the day, I beg you won't tell me anything about your dream. Do you know, it almost drives me crazy when I hear any one begin with 'I thought that I was so-and-so, and then I thought,' and so on. Come—come, Jack, chase such nonsense from your brain. You know that one who was better acquainted with human nature than either your or I are has said—

'We are such things as dreams are made of.'"

"Yes, I remember; and he likewise says—

'And our little life is rounded by a sleep.'

I wish that mine were so. I should like to close my eyes for once and for ever. But I have promised you that I will make no more such allusions, or give way to such feelings, and I will

keep my word. Only tell me what you would have me do."

"Why, in the first place, Jack, I would have you attend to what I consider is of the greatest importance just now to us both.

"What is that, Dick?"

"Breakfast."

"Ah! I might have guessed what you were going to say. Well, be it so. I will not say that it will be unwelcome to me, and I hope that by the time it is over, we shall hear something of Claude Duval."

"If the newspapers reach here by that time, of course we shall. Let us order breakfast in a private room, and ask for the morning paper as soon as it can be got; but we must not appear to be too anxious about it, you know."

"Oh, no—no."

"I will be careful."

The Gate-house Tavern at Highgate, was a very large old rambling house, and there were so many rooms in it upon the first floor, that twenty people might almost have breakfasted quite privately, so that Dick Turpin and Jack had no sort of difficulty in getting accommodated. In the course of a quarter of an hour, a good breakfast of hot coffee, rolls, ham, and fine fresh butter, and plenty of cream, was before them, to which they did justice.

The room that they were in was a very pretty one, so far as its aspect was concerned, for it looked upon one of the ponds that were in the town, and there grew, close up to the window, a plum tree, some of the think old branches of which were half inclined to make their way into the apartment, and, as it was, the leaves rattled in the morning air against the window panes.

"You can let us have a newspaper," said Dick to the waiter.

"Yes, sir, yesterday's."

"Thank you; that will do till to-day's comes. When do you have it?"

"The post-boy drops them at the door, sir, at ten o'clock every morning."

"Thank you; that will do."

The waiter bowed himself out. An hour had yet to be passed before the time when the post-boy would leave the papers of that morning; so Dick and Jack wiled away the time as well as they could; and there was one thing that they made up their minds to, which was, that it would be highly desirable to get some cash as quickly as possible.

"My exchequer," said Dick, "is rather on the wane, and I think we are bound to keep our appointment with the porter at the inn."

"Do you think he remains true to us?"

"Indeed, I do."

"Well, then, let him have his money by all means, Dick, if we can get it; and the only way we can do so, is by going on the road to-night, and seeing what kind of luck we shall have. I know, too, that Claude has little or no money; therefore, if he still lives, we must take care to get some for him."

"The St. James's Chronicle, gentlemen," said the waiter, as he laid the paper, still damp from the press, upon the table.

Jack did not dare to look at the waiter lest he should perceive the anxiety which was but too manifest upon his face; so he hid it in his pocket handkerchief until the man had gone out of the room, and then Dick took up the paper with a grave countenance.

"What does it say?" gasped out Jack.

"Have patience, and compose yourself. Recollect where we are."

"Oh, yes, yes. But look at once."

"Hush! I will read to you all that concerns us in a voice loud enough for us to hear; but not loud enough for any one else to overhear, I hope."

"Do so, Dick. I feel that my agitation is too great to permit me to read it for myself."

Dick unfolded the paper, and, as a heading to one of the columns on the inside, he saw the words, "Capture of the notorious Claude Duval. Dreadful affray in the Old Bailey."

"Here it is," he said. "Listen now, Jack, and whatever I read, do not let your feelings get the better of you."

"I will not, I promise you that, Dick, if you will solemnly promise not to keep a word of the statement from me."

"Upon my word I will not."

Jack sat with his hands tightly

clasped together, and in profound silence, while Dick Turpin read as follows:—

"Last night, or rather at an early hour this morning, the Old Bailey and its neighbourhood were thrown into a state of indescribable confusion and alarm, by a scene which took place nearly opposite to the entrance of Newgate, concerning which, we will endeavour to give our readers the full particulars.

"It appears that the daring exploits of the notorious Claude Duval had so far attracted the attention of the highest authorities, that it was deemed desirable to resort to extraordinary means for his apprehension, and, after the most diligent inquiries, it was ascertained that a female of doubtful character, whom he calls his wife, was concealed at a farm in the neighbourhood of Ealing. It was then resolved at once to apprehend this person, and her capture was cleverly accomplished by a couple of active officers from Bow Street.

"Upon the coach in which she was being conveyed to Newgate reaching the corner of the Old Bailey, it appears that a most daring attempt was made to rescue her, by three mounted men, who shot one of the officers dead on the spot, and then proceeded to release the female from the carriage. The alarm, however, was given, and a strong force coming from Newgate, succeeded in capturing one of the ruffians, who turned out to be no other than the notorious Claude Duval himself.

"We regret to say that in the *melée* no fewer than four officers have received severe wounds, and two have been shot dead upon the spot. The female, too, who had been placed upon a horse, in order to effect her escape, was badly wounded.

"Claude Duval himself is now in Newgate, and it is expected that in a very few hours his associates will likewise be in custody."

Dick paused, and looked at Jack. He was very pale.

"You see, Jack," said Dick, "that there is no mention of Claude being hurt in the least."

"No. But poor Cicely—she is hurt badly."

"Yes. Shall I read on?"

"Is there more?"

"There is, Jack. The account goes on to another hour or two."

"Yes. Let me know all."

Dick now read in a subdued tone, which betrayed considerable emotion.

"We stop the press to announce shortly, that the female who was the original cause of the *fracas* is no more. She expired in the prison at about half-past four this morning, making the fourth victim already dead upon this extraordinary and desperate occasion."

"Dead!" said Dick. "So poor Cicely is dead, after all. Killed in a street brawl at last."

"It seems so"

"Alas, poor girl! It is a sad fate for her. Is it not so, Dick?"

"It is, indeed."

"After this, Claude will not look up. He will abandon hope. He will not even try to escape now, poor fellow! And if we see him, he will tell us that the best and the kindest thing we can do for him, is to let him die. I know that that is what he will say to us."

"Yes, Jack, in the first flush of his despair Claude Duval may say so, and may feel so, but that will pass away again."

"Think you so?"

"I am sure of it, Jack, and so we will not take such an answer from him, if we should succeed at all in seeing him. This has, indeed, been a sad—a very sad adventure."

"Is there no more?"

"No—no. Stop! What is this? Oh, only some editorial remarks: 'We congratulate the respectable portion of society upon the apprehension of the notorious Claude Duval the highwayman, who, no doubt, will now expiate his offences against the safety of his fellow-men at the Old Bailey."

"That will do for that," said Jack. "They will all have a kick at the dead lion."

"When you have quite done with the paper, gentlemen," said the waiter, popping his head into the room, "the gents down stairs would be much obliged if you could let them have it"

"Oh, certainly," said Dick, gaily. "There is no change whatever in the

price of meat, or either of corn, I see."

"Ain't there, sir?"

"No. You can take the paper. Thank you."

"Thank you, sir. Coming—coming—coming!"

The bells below were ringing violently, and the waiter rushed out of the room with the St. James's Chronicle in his hand.

It was then that Dick Turpin and Jack looked at each other in silence for some few minutes, and Dick was just about to say something, when the door of the room was abruptly opened, and a man, attired in a rough great coat, made his appearance in the room. The moment he saw that some one was there, he drew back, saying—

"Beg pardon, gentlemen. Didn't know anybody was in this room."

He was gone, then, before Dick or Jack could make any reply to him; but to the surprise of Dick, Jack slowly rose, and going to the door, he locked it carefully, and likewise slid a bolt that was in the lower part of it into its place.

"What's the matter, Jack?"

"Did you know that man? But no. Why do I ask you? Of course you did not, or you would not sit so quietly there."

"Who is he?" said Dick, starting up.

"Hush!—hush! We must make no noise. You have heard of a Bow-street runner named Godfrey, I suppose?"

"Yes. By Jove, I have."

"That's the man, then."

Dick mechanically produced a pistol.

"Put it up again," said Jack. "It is of no use. By the sound of voices, there are plenty of people down stairs, and although we might take a life or two, we should be sure to be overpowered in the long run. Force will do nothing for us in this emergency, I assure you, Dick."

"You are right," said Turpin, as he put the pistol into his pocket again. "You are quite right, Jack. I am enraged, however, at—at——"

"At what, Dick?"

"Pardon me for saying it, but I was about to add, at your coolness and decision, Jack."

"Danger awakens me to the full use of all my faculties, I think," said Jack, "And now I tell you that my opinion is: this Godfrey only came up stairs to look on, and that it was no mistake his opening the door of this room. I think that he knows us, too, Dick."

"The devil you do!"

"Yes; and that he is now organizing a plan for our capture. We must concoct some plan, or we are lost, at once!"

"To be sure. The window!"

"Hush! hush! What do you hear?"

"Footsteps upon the stairs, and low voices. They come nearer, Jack. Open the window, that's a good fellow! I am quite convinced now that there are a dozen people slowly creeping up the old stairs. The window, Jack!—the window! But don't make any noise over it, or we are lost! That will do. Bravo! that will do!"

"Are they coming yet, Dick?"

"They are; but they come slow, for they think to take us by surprise."

CHAPTER CCLXXXVIII.

DICK AND JACK GO UPON THE HEATH, AND MAKE A TRAVELLER DISBURSE.

Jack, while Dick was listening within some couple of yards or so of the door, had so cautiously opened the window of the room that it made not the least noise. Those who were coming up to the apartment from below were evidently coming with extreme care; and no doubt they were marshalled by Godfrey, the officer, who contemplated making a secure capture, even if it were at the expense of a life or two.

"Come," said Jack.

Dick, quite noiselessly, went towards the window. There was a good view of a garden below; but the height was very inconsiderable indeed, and, besides, by the assistance of the plum-tree there could be no possible trouble in the way of descending.

What a mercy for them it was that they had not their horses there at such a time!

"After you, Jack," said Dick, in a

low tone. "After you. Let us be off at once, if we can. Get out at the window."

"No, no—go first."

Tap! tap! came gently at the door of the room. There was no time to parley about precedence, and Dick at once got out, and slid down to the ground comfortably enough by the aid of the plum-tree. Jack got out of the window, too; but as he held on to the tree, he gently and noiselessly closed the casement again.

"That may give us five minutes' stretch," he said; "and a minuet is now to us as good as a life."

"Good!" said Dick. "Come on!"

They were both in the garden, now. A low fence was at the other end of it, and it was by that means only shielded from the high road through the village, so that it was a hazardous thing to cross that fence at all. But that was no time for doubts or hesitations, and they ran across the garden till they got to a kind of outhouse; but the moment they reached that, a voice said—

"Hilloa! who are you?"

Dick looked into the outhouse, and he saw a lad cleaning shoes and boots, and looking with amazement at them both.

"It's all right," said Dick. "It's only a joke! You didn't see us, mind, or we shall lose our wager."

"Wager?"

"Yes, to be sure. There's your share of it for not seeing us."

Dick placed some five or six guineas—he did not wait to see how many there were—in the hands of the boy, who immediately transferred them to his pocket, as he said—

"I am blind and deaf, too, gentlemen."

"That's right. We want to leave the garden."

"This way. Hilloa!"

A loud crash at that moment came upon all their ears. The door of the room so lately occupied by Dick and Jack had been burst open by Godfrey, the officer, and they knew that they had not another moment to spare.

"Quick!" said Dick, "which is the way?"

"Here you are," said the lad, as he opened a door at the back of the outhouse that led at once into the village, close to the top of a lane.

"That will do," said Dick. "Come on, Jack."

They did not pause another moment, but cowering down, they ran along by the garden railings of an old red brick house, and then past a blacksmith's forge, till they got to the top of the lane, down which they dashed at great speed. Those who know the lane, know that it goes down-hill from Highgate for some distance, and that circumstance gave the fugitives a great advantage in the speed they made. The hour was one at which not many persons were about, so that they escaped observation from any chance passenger in the lane, and Jack who was foremost, cried out to Dick—

"Follow me; I know every inch of this neighbourhood. Make no scruple of following me, Dick."

"All's right, Jack. I will keep up with you."

After they had got about a quarter of a mile down the lane, now, Jack made an abrupt turn to the right, and burst his way through the hedge that skirted the road. Dick followed him, and then they both set to work to pull the bushes and blackthorn over the gap they had made in getting through the hedge, so that it should not be observed. It was then that Dick said—

"Jack, I think we have done them!"

"Don't holloa before you are out of the wood, Dick."

"No, but there is a chance now."

"There is, and a good one, too. If we keep along this way at the back of this side of Highgate, we shall reach Finchley over the fields; and I do think if we can once get our horses we shall give them the slip."

"Not a doubt of it."

On Jack dashed across a wide meadow, and then they came to another hedge, at the base of which was rather a brawling, formidable water course. That was no time to stop for trifles, though, and they both jumped it without a moment's hesitation, and scrambled up the bank on the other side, little heeding the clay and mud that stuck to their hands and clothes. There was a turnip-field on the other side of that hedge.

Through the turnips they went at a good rate.

"Hoi! hoi!" cried a man with a smock-frock on. "Hoi! That won't do, you must not come there, you know. Go back."

"I think I see it," said Dick.

The man began to run after them, but they had got the start of him, and they cleared the hedge on the other side of his turnip field, and got into a meadow before he was half-way towards it.



TURPIN AND JACK RECOGNISED BY THE OFFICER AT THE GATEHOUSE TAVERN.

"On—on," said Jack. "We won't give up our speed, Dick, till we cannot help it. On—on!"

"All's right," was Dick's response, and over the field they went. But now they came to rather a serious obstacle. A wall, encircling some garden, skirted a long way out to the left, right into the fields. It was so formidable a thing to try to surmount, so they had

no resource but to go round it, which with great regret they did; but they found that on the other side there was an enclosed paddock, with some cattle in it. No doubt that was private property, and they were trespassing by going thr ugh it; but they did not stand upon ceremony, but vaulting the pailing, over they went.

Their progress was rather accelerated across this paddock by a young ox taking it into his head to run after them, with the idea that they were running away from him; and as they did not admire being tossed, they got out of that individual's way as quickly as they could, and then Jack paused, and held his hand to his side, as he said—

"Done up, Dick."

"I don't wonder at it," said Dick. "We have run a mile."

"Have we, though?"

"To be sure we have, and I would rather slacken my pace a little, I assure you."

"Then I may well feel exhausted. But, Dick, if you think you can go on a little faster than I can you know, you had better do so, and let me come at my leisure. Save yourself, Dick."

"Pho! pho! Jack, don't be saying such things to me, old fellow, at this time of day. We will sink or swim together. If the Philistines catch one of us, they may as well catch both. You don't mean to say that you have come to a dead stop?"

"Oh, no—no. I am better now. A pain caught me in the side that was all, but it has gone again, Dick, and I can get on, though not so fast."

"Allow me to say, that there is no occasion now for such a mad sort of hurry about it, Jack."

"No—no, not so much occasion certainly, Dick, that I admit freely. There is not so much occasion; but still, our horses are some distance off, and the sooner we get to them the better it will be."

"No doubt; but let us regulate the pace, now. Stop a bit, though, Jack, altogether."

"What for, Dick?"

"I will get upon this stile, and take a look about me. Perhaps I shall see that, not being pursued, we can take things a little easier altogether. You lie down while I make an observation of as extended a character as I can."

Jack flung himself upon the grass, and after the race that he had had it was a great relief for him to do so, indeed; and Dick climbed right on to the top bar of the stile they were close to, and holding right on by the branch of an alder tree, he was able to see far away across the meadows.

"Not a soul," he said.

"That's a mercy," said Jack.

"Only our friend, the ox yonder, very angry at our escape. That is the only enemy; but I am sure, upon my life, Jack, I don't think that in all my experience I ever had such a desperately narrow escape as this of to-day."

"It was a close touch."

"Much too close to be at all pleasant, I can assure you. But we will go on, though we need not hurry ourselves."

Dick descended from his elevated position, and then Jack, having found much relief to the pain in his side from the few minutes' rest he had had, rose, and they went on at a brisk walk only.

They came now to several openings to the right, which, if they had chosen to avail themselves of, would have taken them into the main road; but they did not think it at all prudent to do so. They kept in the fields until they saw the house at which they had left their horses; and they considered that there would surely be some back way to it from the fields.

Just as they were talking about that probability, they came upon one of the openings we have mentioned as leading to the main road, and as they did so, they heard the clatter of horses feet. They drew back, and flung themselves flat upon the grass, by the side of some timber that had been recently felled; and they saw six horsemen come up, and pause at the entrance to the turning that led into the fields. There was a cottage with a garden full of clothes hanging out to dry at the corner of the turning.

"Hoi! hilloa!" cried one of the horsemen. "House! house! Is anybody at home?"

"What is the matter?" said a female voice.

"Have you seen a couple of men pass here, my good woman?"

"Oh, I don't know. What do I care about them? I don't attend to whether men pass or not."

"Well, but have you?"

"Go along with you, do, and don't bother! No, I haven't. There, now, I suppose that will satisfy you. But I have seen a boy and a cow."

"It's out of the question that they could have got this far," said another of the mounted men, "even allowing that they took this road at all. They are hid in Highgate, somewhere, that is my opinion."

"Well, well," cried he who had first spoken, "let us come on."

They rode off at a sharp trot.

"What the deuce are they going to do?" said Dick.

"Give notice, most likely," replied Jack, "to the different villages all down the road that if we are seen we are to be secured, if possible. They will stop at every public-house, including that at which our horses are; but as they will mention two men and not two horses, they will get no news of us, I think; and our best plan is to let them get a good quarter of an hour's start of us now."

"Be it so, Jack. It's a rest at the same time, if you are at all comfortably situated. Are you so?"

"Oh, yes! yes! But this is not the sort of thing that you are accustomed to, Dick."

"Why, no, I can't say it is; but variety, you know, Jack, is charming."

Jack shook his head.

"Not this sort of variety. A succession of pleasures may be delightful enough, but a succession of risks, such as have fallen to our share lately, I must confess I don't exactly like so well. We have fallen upon cruel times, Turpin."

"We have, so far as poor Claude is concerned; but if he were with us I should not much mind our present situation."

"Oh, but it is a dreadful thing, Dick Turpin, when you come to consider that here we are, like a couple of Esaus—all men's hands are lifted against us, and our hands are lifted against all men! Here we are in our native country, outcasts and wanderers upon the face of the earth—hunted like wild beasts from town to country, and from country to town—a price put upon our heads, and our deaths considered not only a lawful act but a public benefit. This is a dread ful state of things, is it not?"

"Sixteen-stringed Jack," said Dick, "allow me to advise you to leave the profession, and to go into the church. I have heard of many a fellow who has tried the road, and found he did not get on there, and then gone, by a divine call, of course, to be a parson. Why should you not leave the road, now, and take to the pulpit?"

"Ah, I see that you will not attend to me."

"Jack, I know, and you know, too that we cannot be no other than what we are. Society won't own us, Jack. If we were to offer ourselves to the community at large, all that we should get for our repentance, and our wish to amend our ways, would be a halter."

"True. That is true."

"And, therefore, Jack, do not let us waste our time in vain regrets. We are what we are, so such we must remain. So, now, my dear fellow, let us get on and secure our two good steeds. We will go upon Blackheath and Shooter's Hill to-night; and it will be a bad thing if between us we cannot get some good booty. We must pay our friend the watchman of the inn in the Old Bailey a part of his debt, if we cannot conveniently let him have all of it. Come on."

"I am ready," said Jack. "Come on, then. There is truth in what you say, Dick."

CHAPTER CCLXXXIX.

TAKES A GLANCE AT THE AFFAIRS IN NEWGATE.

They found, as they had anticipated, that there was a back entrance from the open country to the inn at which they had left their horses; and as they were instantly recognised by the ostler, they had no difficulty in substantiating their claim to their steeds.

"We came across the fields," said Dick, as he saw the man look with some surprise at the condition of their

clothing, which, to tell the truth, had suffered not a little in their headlong route. We came across the fields, but we scarcely found the meadows dry enough."

"No, sir," said the man, "there's been a deal of rain, and they won't be dry for some time, I take it. I'll get a brush from the house, sir, and rub you down a bit."

"No, thank you. Just get out the horses, and we will be off."

"Very good, sir."

The horses were brought out, but Jack kept a good eye upon the road, as he could not exactly take upon himself to say if all the officers had ridden past or not, although a party of them had done so. Dick paid the ostler liberally, but not to such an amount as to create any surprise that he came by his money too easily, and they both mounted.

"You'd better look out on the road, gentlemen," said the ostler, "for they do say as there's a couple o'highway-men on it."

"Indeed! Who says so?"

"Why, the officers have been here, you see, and they says so, and I thought I had better tell you of it in case you happened to see anybody on the road that looked like 'em."

"Thank you. Good-day."

The ostler touched his seal-skin cap, and then Dick and Jack rode out of the inn-yard into the open road in the most independent-looking manner in all the world. If they had been magistrates of the country they could not possibly have looked more cool and self-possessed.

"Jack," said Dick, "does that fellow suspect us?"

"Yes."

"You really think he does?"

"I saw it in his eyes, Dick. I cannot take upon myself to say whether he means to do anything or not contingent upon his suspicions, but that he does think we may be the two highwaymen he spoke of is certain enough."

"Confound him!"

"Nay, we ought not to confound him till we know whether he is inclined to be an enemy or not to us. Recollect that he might have detained the horses."

"True; he might have done so; but as we have got them, I rather recommend a good canter, or perhaps a gallop."

"Fair and softly, Dick. We will get out of the high road as quick as we can; that will be one good job done. Ah!"

"What's the matter, Jack?"

"Look!"

Jack did look, and about twenty yards in front of him he saw a man on horseback with a cutlass by his side, and holsters to his saddle, and, altogether, a most mounted police-officer-like look about him.

"What's to be done?" whispered Jack.

"Put a bold face upon it, and ride up to him."

Dick did so, and bolting up to the man, he said, in a voice as though, he were very angry about something—

"Do you belong to the police?"

"Yes, sir, I do," said the man.

"Well, I only wish you were in the fields at the back of my house, instead of being on the road here. You see this horse that I am riding?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I very nearly had him stolen only a quarter of an hour ago from my paddock, at the back of Swains-lane to the north, by a couple of men, who were skulking about there for no good. They ran off when I called my servants."

"Two men, sir—on foot?"

"On foot, of course; but they did not seem inclined to be on foot for one moment longer than it would take them to steal a horse."

"Sir," cried the officer, "can you tell me which way they went?"

"Yes. Towards Hampstead, as fast as they could."

"Hang me, if I didn't think they would go that way, only Mr. Godfrey would not have it. Thank you, sir, for your information. The two men, sir, are notorious highwaymen that we are upon the look-out for. Good-day, sir."

With this, the officer, who was completely taken in by the bold, angry, and off-handed manner in which Dick Turpin had spoken, clapped spurs to his horse, and galloped in the direction of Highgate, to give the news that he thought he had now got of the fugitives.

"That will do," said Dick

"Yes," replied Jack, "I think it will. I could no more have faced the fellow in such a way, and looked so cool and collected while I spoke to him, than I could have flown,"

"Oh, Jack, extraordinary emergencies have to be met by extraordinary means, and there was no other way of disarming this great danger but by looking it steadily in the face."

"Which," added Jack, "is the way to disarm and to vanquish most great dangers, as well as small ones, if people could but be brought to think so."

Dick nodded, as an acquiescence to the truth of this proposition, and then they went on for about a mile at a rate which precluded the possibility of further conversation.

It was no easy thing to find direct routes to the neighbourhood they wanted to go to from such a very opposite end of the suburbs of London as they were now at. It was a long stretch to get to Blackheath from the neighbourhood of Finchley. There was the absolute necessity of crossing the Thames somewhere or another; and, beyond the fact that they did not think either London Bridge or Blackfriars at all safe for this purpose, they had no very distinct idea of which way they ought to go.

After about a mile further, they kept down a turning to the left, which, at all events, they thought was the best way they could then go; and Jack called out to Dick, saying—

"Have you decided upon our route, Turpin?"

"Troth! no! I have not. Have you?"

"Well, of course, I have not decided, because that is for you to do, as well as for me; but what do you say to getting across the country, now, westward to the Edgeware Road, and then skirting the parks, and getting boldly over the bridge at Westminster? If we, after that—admitting that we get so far in safety—keep to the left, we must come out about the Old Kent Road, and then all is easy."

"That will do, Jack. Be it so. I was just thinking what bridge would be the best, but now you mention Westminster, I cannot but believe that it will be the safest for us."

"The distance, too, Dick, will not be quite so great as it might look, considering where we now are, and where it is we want to go to."

"Certainly not. That will do, Jack, nicely. How far, now, should you say, at a rough guess, is it to Blackheath, from this present spot?"

"It will be but a rough guess, Dick; but talking of it in that way, and not at all pledging myself to accuracy as regards a mile or two, or, perhaps, three, I should say it is thirteen miles."

Dick nodded.

"Ah! Jack!" he said, "you know the country round about London pretty well, I do think."

"Tolerably," said Jack.

It was no part of the policy of the confederates to seek any adventures in the day-time. There was already too much racket about them, and too much excitement in the public mind concerning them and their doings, for them to run more risks by any attempted exercise of what they considered to be their professional calling on the road, as they went along. They thought, and no doubt, upon good grounds, that the impression would still be, both on the part of the officers, and the part of the public, that they were hanging about the northern suburbs of the metropolis, and so, their sudden appearance at Blackheath would be totally unlooked for, and they would be able to make, probably, a good night's work of it in that locality.

How far this calculation was correct or not, time, and a very short time, too, will now show to the reader.

The Edgeware Road was gained by traversing one of those long shady green lanes that lie between it and the Great North Road from London, and which in the summer time have such a delicate freshness and thoroughly country aspect about them, that it is marvellous they are not better known to the pale and dust-covered inhabitants of London. But the fact is, that when a cockney and his family goes a short distance into what he calls the country, it is always upon some high road, until he comes to a public-house, and there he sits him down over his glass until it is time for him to wend his way back again to the pent-up, confined place of his home again. The pleasant out-of-the-way

spots—the cool lanes—the verdant meadows, are as much unknown to the genuine Londoner as though they were a thousand miles away from him, instead of almost at his very door.

But this is a digression. Dick Turpin and Jack of the sixteen-strings soon left the Edgeware Road behind them, and made their way down Park Lane without any molestation, after which they got through a portion of Pimlico, and fairly emerged close to Westminster Abbey and within sight of Westminster Bridge.

They could but feel now that they were, as regarded their personal safety, in rather a dangerous locality for Westminster was better protected by the police than any other locality, of London, on account of the number of persons of importance connected with the government, who resided within its limits. Still the danger was that of a few fleeting minutes, for when once the bridge should be crossed they would be in a different region—for squalid and dirty as the other side of the water is now, it was pretty, and cleanliness and beauty itself, in comparison with what it was a hundred years ago.

"Now," said Dick, as they cantered towards the bridge, "if any officer of the police should happen to see and recognise your face or mine, it would be a capital morning's work for him."

"It would, indeed, unless I thought proper to reward him for his cleverness and interference with a bullet."

Dick laughed.

"I don't know, Jack, but that such a thing would serve the fellow right, and I should feel myself inclined to add to the reward by giving him another."

They reached the bridge, however, and no one favoured them with more than a mere passing glance, so that their progress might be said to be exceedingly satisfactory indeed, so far; and so the moment they had cossed it and were in the old, dirty, and squalid road on the other side, Jack drew a long breath, as he said—

"Welcome to all the misery, and the squalor and the dirt of over the water. We are a hundred times safer here than we were on the other side of the bridge."

"I think we are, Jack, and now I have good hopes that we shall see Blackheath to-night, and feel something like the feelings of old times stealing over us."

"Ah, if Claude were but with us!"

"Yes, that is a damper indeed, Jack."

"It is. I do not wish to give way to superstition, but with a shudder I feel as if a something whispered to me that his doom is sealed."

"What mean you?"

"I think that his time has come, Dick."

"What! For death?"

"Ay, Dick, for death! I wish I did not think it, but I do in spite of myself. The shadow of a dreadful fate for Claude Duval seems to be resting upon my heart, and I cannot shake it off."

"But you must shake it off, Jack."

"Alas, I cannot!"

"Then it will be your master, and it will have one injurious effect which you do not calculate upon, if you do not rid yourself of it."

"What is that, Dick?"

"It will paralyse your energies so that, taking all your attempts to be useless, you will fail in everything that you try for the benefit of Claude Duval."

"Oh, no—no, it will not have that effect, Dick, for I will die for him if it be requisite; and, indeed, I have often wished that when his career ended, mine should do so likewise."

"I could heartily scold you, Jack, for giving way to such gloom, but I will not. Come on at a good canter now, and I'll warrant that if the moon peeps down upon you on Blackheath to-night, and if we have anything in the shape of good fortune, you will be in quite a different frame of mind."

"I hope I shall, Dick."

"I know you will. This is the pace to go at. How the folks look at us, Jack, as we pelt along; we are creating what may be called a sensation. Mind that pig, Jack."

Jack had very nearly ridden over a pig who was basking, if we may be allowed the term, in the kennel, with a depth of about six inches of very luxurious mud about him.

Jack, however, did not ride over the pig, but jumped over that obese and alderman-like individual, and they

paced their way till they got into the Old Kent Road, and then at a more moderate pace they entered Greenwich, having done the distance from Finchley, which was rather more than thirteen miles that Jack had estimated it at, in the space of an hour and ten minutes.

"Pretty good going," said Dick, as they trotted through the town.

"Where shall we put up till night, Dick?"

"Let us ride on to Eltham. It is a quiet hum-drum sort of place, where you don't see a stranger above once a week. I think a man might go there and not be found out by his friends or by his creditors, if he were to remain there for twenty years. I am confident that he might stay until time had made a sufficient alteration in his appearance for him to pass as somebody else in the world."

CHAPTER CCXC.

A NIGHT SCENE UPON BLACKHEATH AND SHOOTER'S HILL.

The horses were not distressed by the ride from Finchley to Blackheath, and then on to the village of Eltham, but both Jack and Dick knew how very desirable it was to rest horses some time before they showed distress, so they alighted at the most creditable-looking inn in Eltham, after being well stared at by everybody in the village.

"Dinner," said Dick, "and the best of everything, and plenty of it, for the cattle."

This was an order that set everybody upon the stir at the inn, for the last gentleman that had been there had only had bread and cheese and half-a-pint of ale, and that was five weeks ago.

"A lively place this, landlord," said Dick, as he sat down with Jack in the well-sanded old parlour of the inn.

"Oh, very, sir," said the landlord, making a hideous grin. "However lively, sir, you may call it, we have had a good deal to think of lately."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, gentlemen. The pump has been out of order, and Mrs. Brown, who keeps the mangle of Eltham, has lost a hen, she says; therefore, with two such incidents, the public mind of Eltham, you see, sir, cannot exactly be brought to a state of stagnation."

"I should think not."

The landlord made his bow and exit, and Jack, looking at Dick, said with a laugh—

"Is that fellow a wag?"

"Not a bit of it. This place, I take it, would drive any man of ordinary energies insane in about a week, I think."

"It would me; but is there not an old palace or something of the sort, here?"

"Yes, but I think we had better, do you know, keep quiet. It don't want now but four hours or so to night, and the clouds are heavy, as if it would turn out a windy, and possibly enough, a rainy one, so we shall be able to get upon the heath and upon Shooter's Hill early. Let us stay here, Jack, till we feel that it is time to go out upon business."

"Be it so—and here comes the dinner."

We will now skip four hours and rather more by the leave of the reader, and behold the deep shadows of an unusually dark night dropping down upon Eltham and upon the whole country round about it, and wrapping up the bleak and bare heath as if in a shroud of direst black. Shooter's Hill, with its mass of vegetation to the right of the road, and the turret of its imitation castle, were completely lost amid the darkness, and ever and anon the wind came in fitful gusts across the wide expanse of the heath, carrying upon its noiseless wings particles of winter belating rain about the hour of midnight.

"It is time," said Dick, as he looked from the window of the snug room in which they were. "It is time, Jack."

"And I am ready, Dick. But before we leave this place, let us take the opportunity of looking to our pistols."

"Ah, yes, well thought of."

A few minutes sufficed for them to see that their arms were all in order, and then Dick Turpin rang the bell and ordered their horses.

"The horses, gentlemen?" said the landlord. "Oh, dear—oh, dear, it's a

raining—that is to say, it's a mizzling. I did think you were going to stop here, gentlemen. There's capital beds. Hem! We haven't had anybody to sleep here, do you know, gentlemen, since last September twelvemonths."

"Your beds must be well aired, then," said Dick.

"Oh, yes, sir, they are, indeed. We all sleep in them in regular order. There's the blue room, and the green room, and the red room, and No. 10, 11, and 12. Those are the bed-rooms, gentlemen, and we go from one to the other to keep them well aired for the gents; and the cook, gentlemen, if there's one uncommonly damp, sleeps in it two nights, as she is rather a warm kind of individual, in consequence of the kitchen fires, you understand."

"We have no doubt about the excellence of your accommodation; but business calls us to London."

"Well, if you must go, gentlemen, you must; only I am very sorry to lose you, as I am afraid we shall be dull afterwards."

The horses were brought to the door, and Jack and Dick mounted, and rode off. The inhabitants of Eltham flew to their doors and windows to see them go as well as they could, in the darkness that was over all things; and, no doubt, the advent of two strangers in the place who had actually dined there, served these simple people as food for conversation, for not only the rest of the evening, but some days to come.

The heath was reached; and then Dick and Jack drew rein, and tried to look about them. How bleak, and how black and dim the place was! They might, for all that they could see, have been in the midst of some uninhabited region of vast extent, where neither bird nor beast had a home.

"Now, Jack," said Dick, "this is the sort of night upon which professional gentlemen such as you and I may cry 'Stand!' to a man in; and as we want money, we must get it in our old way here. Where shall we post ourselves?"

"On the commencement of the ascent of Shooter's Hill Road."

"Be it so. This is the direction, I think. Come on."

We must now premise that the snug villas and the rows of houses that skirt Blackheath now had no sort of existence at the period of the life of Gentleman Jack. The heath was nothing but a wide expanse of open country, and although several roads were made across its expanse, it was about as rude and uncouth a looking region to be near a great city as could be well conceived.

Blackheath had been famous, some years before that period, for a number of daring robberies that had taken place upon it, and in its immediate neighbourhood; but by the death of the perpetrator of them, who had been shot one night by a Colonel Standish, who resided at Lewisham, they had been arrested, and since then the heath had not been popular among the knights of the road. The present visit of Dick Turpin and Jack, however, promised to have the effect of raisings its reputation a little.

It was only by guess that they could at all make their way to Shooter's Hill, for see they could not, and there was every probability of their going out of the right track, which, in fact, they did to a limited extent to the left; but they regained it again, owing to striking upon the road itself, which wound around Greenwich Park, and over the heath, and then right up the hill.

"We are right now," said Jack. "The road is here."

"How far will you go upon it?"

"I think just to the cammencement of the rise, for there either horsemen or carriages are compelled to slacken their pace; so it will be a good opportunity for us to step forward and lighten their purses a little."

"Quite philanthropical, too," said Dick, "for they will be able to ascend the hill all the better."

"To be sure they will; and here we are. I can feel, as well as slightly see, that we are upon the rise of the hill. And now, Dick, I don't care how soon we make a little cash."

"How cold I am!" said Jack.

"It is what poor Claude used to call a shuddery night, Jack."

"Yes—yes. I recollect the expression. He has often used it."

As Jack spoke, they heard the tramp

of footsteps approaching, and they were both silent in a moment. They had taken their station upon what horsemen and carriage drivers would call the near side of the road—that is, to the side next to Greenwich, so that they could come out from the deep shadow of the clump of trees close to which they were at a moment's notice, if it were requisite so to do. The



person who was approaching came on at a quick pace, and there was a kind of hurry about the walk which led Dick and Jack both to suspect that he might have something about him worth the taking.

"Halt!" cried Dick.

"Ah! who is that?" said the traveller.

"Resistance is in vain," said Dick. "Your money is what we want. You are now covered by a pistol, and if you are indiscreet, you are a dead man."

"I have no money—indeed, I have none worth the taking. A few shillings, perhaps, are all that I have about me."

"We don't know that."

"But I assure you it is a fact. Now, if you want to stop any one with money, there is Mr. Croke coming in his chariot. He lives a little way over the heath. He is a rich man, and a lawyer, and he is too old, too, to show you the light pair of heels that I can; and so good-night."

With these words the man scampered off at such a rate, that, in the darkness, all pursuit was quite out of the question.

"Not a very good beginning," said Jack. "Which way did he go?"

"Up the hill. But what odd sort of light is that upon the heath, Jack? There is a something coming through the darkness. It looks like some great animal with two flaming eyes."

"Why, Dick, what are you talking about? It is a carriage, I tell you, and those are the lights. We can see them, but not the vehicle. I wonder if that fellow told us the truth when he said somebody worth the stopping was coming?"

"I should not wonder. Keep quiet."

From out of the gloom some distance now before them, emerged a man on horseback; and, as Dick and Jack had calculated upon every one driving up gently to about that spot, he slackened the speed of his horse, and, in fact, reduced it to a walk.

Dick made his steed give a bound that brought him right in the path of the horseman, and by good fortune and accident rather than that he saw to do it, he got hold of the bridleof his horse, as he cried—

"Stand, or you are a dead man! Your money, sir, quickly!"

"Oh, have mercy upon me!" cried the horseman. "Help!—Oh, mercy! Don't kill me!"

"Your life is not worth a minute's purchase if you don't be quiet," added Dick; "and if you do, it is as safe as if you were in your own bed. Your money, sir!"

"Yes—yes, good Mr. a—a—Highwayman—yes, if you please. I haven't but twenty pounds or so with me; but if you will spare my life, you shall have them."

"Quick—quick!"

"Yes, sir—oh, dear, yes. There is my purse, sir, if you please. Will you be so good as to let me go now?"

"Who are you?"

"Augustus, sir, if you please."

"Augustus who? You have some other name than that, I presume."

"Yes, sir. Augustus Croke, and that's the old man, I mean my father, who is coming in the carriage, sir, if you please."

"Indeed? What is he?"

"A lawyer, good sir, and he's got his cash-box from the office with him."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Augustus, you reside just over the hill?"

"We do, sir," said the trembling Augustus.

"Then I can inform you that there are no less than twenty of us, and all well armed, and we have made a determination to cut the throats of the whole family, if we don't get the cash-box that your father has with him. If we do, no one will be in the slightest degree hurt. Now, with that knowledge, you see, that your best way is to prevent bloodshed, and to ride home and say nothing."

"Yes, gentlemen—oh, dear yes. Besides, what's a cash-box to one's life? and father can easily swindle somebody out of as much again—dear me, I mean, put it into somebody's bill of costs in the regular way."

"Never mind, Mr. Augustus; you used the proper word at the first. Swindle will do. Now go on."

"I heartily thank you, sir."

Augustus, finding himself at liberty to proceed, did so at once, leaving the old man, as he called him, to take the consequences of a collision with the highwaymen, and only regardful of his own safety in the matter. If fathers show to their sons that quile and roguery are the mere characteristics of their proceedings, what kind of feeling can they expect their sons to have?

"Will that fellow really ride home and say nothing?" said Jack.

"To be sure. Selfishness is the badge of all the tribe, Jack. But here comes the carriage of this Mr. Croke, and it may be that in the cash-box which has been so kindly mentioned by the young gentleman, we may find enough to make this little expedition quite worth our while. Is it lighter, Jack?"

"In good truth it is. The mist is going, and the morning is coming. We shall have a fine night upon the old heath yet."

"We shall, indeed. Why, the fog grows whiter, and even now I can see the trees on the other side of the road quite plainly. Look, too, how the white mist rolls away in huge clouds. Ah, there is the morn."

"The beautiful morn," said Jack.

At the moment that they spoke, the bright sparkling silver edge of the moon—it was nearly a full one, too—peeped up from the horizon, and cast a long streak of light over the heath. The night mists, like a routed army, began to dissipate quickly, and particles of blue sky, with twinkling stars in them, began to peep down upon the earth.

"This is not exactly a highwayman's night," said Dick.

"No, but it is a beautiful one; and there comes the carriage—you can now see it quite plainly—it will be here in three or four minutes now. It is to be hoped that this Mr. Croke, the lawyer, will have something worth the taking in the cash box, that his son Augustus has spoken of."

"Yes, enough I hope to let us pay our friend the inn watchman, who will be waiting for us at twelve o'clock by the park gate yonder, and enough after that to spare for the exigencies of poor Claude."

"If not, Dick, we must still take toll here, upon the side of Shooter's Hill, until we do get enough."

It was astonishing to notice now how rapidly the moon rose, and what an effect it produced upon the whole landscape, as it showed its bright silver face to this half of the great world. The air became purer and clearer. A few floating white-tipped clouds alone remained of all the thick vapours that had hidden the face of nature, and the trees, and the heath, and the hill showed sharply and clearly in the light.

CHAPTER CCXCI.

THE INN-PORTER WANTS TO MAKE A FORTUNE RATHER TOO SOON.

It was with a heavy heart that Jack now listened to the sound of the rapidly approaching carriage wheels which announced that the lawyer was nearly on the spot where he and Dick were in waiting for him. Poor Jack was beginning to feel that his day was past, and that his career on the road was really over.

And yet, who had been more daring than he in the time gone past? Who had, with the wild and reckless generosity of an unselfish heart, done more good and less harm than he had, at a time when an adventure was only the more acceptable to him, the more perilous it proved to be?

But all that had been in the time before poor Jack had gone through the

sea of horrors that had encompassed him, before his execution, the awful protractions of which, and his resuscitation, the reader is well acquainted with, since they have been narrated in the veritable pages of this narrative some time since. Those events had broken the spirit of the man, and had induced a nervousness that would stay by him until the grave should close over his hopes, his affections, and his fears.

After all, Jack was to be pitied, much as we, of course, must condemn his mode of life.

The spot upon which the confederates had chosen to wait for the coming of the lawyers carriage, was, as we have before intimated, a little upon the rise of the hill, so that the vehicle came but slowly towards them, owing to the necessity of slackening the speed of the horses up that steep ascent.

This was a great advantage to both Dick and Jack, and they were too old stagers on the road not to see it in that light, and to take every advantage of it.

The plan of operation of stopping a carriage when there were two men to do it was very simple, but very effective; one would go to the horses' heads, and threaten the coachman with death if he did not keep the animals quiet, while the other would pay his polite attentions to the occupants of the beleaguered vehicle.

"Now, Jack, you keep the coachman in check," said Dick, "and I will speak to the lawyer."

"Very good, Dick."

The bright moonlight shot through an opening between a chestnut tree and a tall poplar, making a complete path of light across the road, and just as the carriage came upon that spot, Jack dashed out from his hiding place and seized the horse next to him by the rein, while, pointing a pistol at the coachman, he cried out—

"Another step, and you are a dead man!"

The coachman dropped his whip in a moment, and sat looking as if the eyes of the highwayman, by their steady glare at him, had turned him at once to stone.

Now was Dick's turn, and he was at the door of the carriage on the near side in an instant. The glass was up, but with a touch Dick let it down, and resting the barrel of a large pistol upon the ledge of the little casement, he said—

"Now, Mr. Croke, it is not your money or your life, but it is your money, without your life or with it, whichever you choose."

"Thieves!" cried the lawyer.

"Oh, no, Mr. Croke. There is but one thief here, and that is sure to be you, for you are a lawyer. I am the toll keeper."

"The—the toll! What toll?"

"One that is levied by me upon rich rogues. So, be quick, or I will put half an ounce of lead into your brains."

"Oh, spare him!" said a female voice.

"Nonsense!" said Dick. "Spare a lawyer? Ha! That is a good idea. But as I never take even the life of a reptile without the necessity for so doing, why, I can afford to let you off this once."

"I won't be robbed," said the lawyer. "I never was robbed, and I won't be robbed by any man. This proceeding is contrary to all law, and I don't intend to put up with it."

"Oh, you don't?"

"No, sir, I don't; and rather than be robbed, I will wait here until assistance comes up, and I will have you apprehended, and appear against you at the Old Bailey. I can identify you, I am certain."

"Very good," said Dick, quite calmly. "It is the cash-box I want, that is all."

"The devil!" said the lawyer. "Who told you of that?"

"Augustus."

"My Augustus?"

"I presume so. I am only too happy in the consciousness that he is not near; so, Mr. Croke, I give you now about half a minute to decide whether you will trouble me to rifle your dead body, or give me up freely from your living one what I want."

"You will come to the gallows."

"Very likely; and you to a worse place than that, although you may die in a feather bed. You are pretty well known here, Mr. Croke, and as the half-minute is past, why —" Here Dick cocked the pistol, and before he could say another word, the lawyer handed him out a small canvas bag, saying—

"This is the whole of the money I have about me. It is a good sum, and I think you ought to feel satisfied with it."

"Perhaps I may; but, by the light of the moon, I can see some papers there upon the carriage seat. What are they?"

"Only some bonds, and bills, and promissory notes of no use to any one in the way of money, I assure you."

"Never mind," said Dick, as he reached his hand into the coach and took out the bundle of papers, "I will look them over at my leisure, and if they are no use, I will return them to you."

"Oh, no—no. Don't take them."

"I have them."

Something fell on to the road at Dick's feet from the papers, and upon looking down he saw that it was a watch, which the lawyer had slipped in there for safety.

"Is it a good one?" said Dick.

"No better," groaned Croke.

Dick sprang off his horse to pick up the watch, but just as he was rising with it in his hand, he heard the lawyer say—

"Take that," and at the same moment the report of a pocket pistol struck upon his ears, and his hat was struck from his head.

The first suspicion of Dick was, that he must be shot, considering the very small distance he was from Mr. Croke; and, indeed, if the lawyer had aimed at him anywhere but on the head he could not possibly have avoided hitting him; but, as it was, he missed him by a hair's breadth, and the bullet merely blew his hat off his head.

"Thank you," said Dick.

"Murder! help!" shouted the attorney, now, for having fired at the highwayman and missed him, he made quite certain that his own death would follow, as a matter of revenge. Dick fancied that these shouts would bring some one to the spot, so he opened the coach-door hurriedly, and seized the lawyer by the throat and dragged him into the road. Some female who was in the carriage was lying fainting at the bottom of it, so that the clamour she would have, no doubt, added to the scene was, very happily, so far as Dick Turpin was concerned, spared, and he only had to deal with Mr. Croke.

"Hilloa!" cried Jack. "How do you get on, Dick?"

"All right."

"I heard a shot."

"Yes, it was at me; but I have had my old luck, and it has missed me."

"Thank the fates for that," said Jack.

Mr. Croke was held by far too tightly by the throat by Dick to be able to do anything but make an odd gurgling kind of noise, more indicative of the difficulty of breathing than anything else; but he did manage to get upon his knees, for he thought that his last hour was surely come.

It was at this moment, when Dick hardly knew what to do with the man whom he did not wish to kill, that, Jack again spoke.

"Philistines, Dick," he said. "Down the hill they come."

This was quite a sufficient signal to Turpin of approaching danger; and upon the impulse of the moment, he flung the lawyer to the side of the road

under the trees, and hearing a loud splash, he felt quite satisfied that he was in a ditch.

"Off and away," he then cried. "Come on, Jack."

Dick was mounted again in a moment, and, indeed, it was quite a beautiful thing to see how his horse had stood, amid all the confusion, as firm and quiet as a rock, waiting for him, and watching him as though the creature had a knowledge of what was going on, and felt a warm interest in the result.

They both now, although the time had so nearly arrived for them to meet the inn-porter at the gate of the park, made their way towards Eltham across the heath, intending to make a round to get to their destination.

They had, no doubt, but the lawyer would not be so bad but that he would be able to tell those who were approaching down the hill which way the highwaymen had gone.

"Jack," he said, "who is coming, do you know?"

"About half a dozen mounted men, I should say," replied Jack, "judging from the sound of the horses' feet."

"Ah, indeed! Then it was time to go."

"Why, yes; a general fight is not the thing exactly that suits us, you know, Dick. But what success did you have with the lawyer?"

"As good as could possibly be expected. I have a small bag of gold, I think, and I have taken a mass of papers from him."

"Of what use are they?"

"They may be of use to some poor devil or another. At our leisure, Jack, we will look over them, and possibly we may be doing the greatest favour to some one by destroying them. He said in his terror—and when a lawyer is thoroughly frightened, he speaks sometimes the truth—that they were bills and bonds, and such like documents."

"Then, let us destroy them all."

"No, we will hide them somewhere. What trees are those before us, Jack?"

"They belong to what is called the Manor House Estate, and they show us that we have crossed the heath. If you want to hide the packet of papers, it is easy enough to do so in one of these trees."

"A good thought. It shall be done."

The trees of which Jack had spoken belonged to a kind of wilderness that shielded an estate called the Manor House, that was upon the skirts of the heath. The wilderness was not at all enclosed in any way; so that our adventurers had no difficulty in darting in among them, and then they dismounted, and Dick climbed up a tree some short distance, with the packet of papers belonging to the lawyer in his hand, and safely lodged them in a corner formed by several branches, so that they could not fall.

"That will do," he said; "and now, I think, as there are no signs of pursuit, that we may as well get round to the park gate, for I should not at all like to break faith with the inn-porter."

"Heaven send that he keeps faith with us," said Jack.

"Don't doubt it. He would be a fool and a villain both not to do so. What could he gain by acting otherwise?"

"I don't know," said Jack. "He might think it was more to his interest to take the reward offered to him by the authorities for putting them in the way of our capture, than to keep faith with us, Dick. Mind you, I don't say that I have any special reason to doubt the fellow; but, still, he might do so."

"Then, Jack, we will be doubly cautious. Have you any of your phosphorous matches with you? I want to see what is in the bag that the lawyer handed to me from the coach."

"Oh, yes, Dick, I can throw a light upon the subject."

In a minute or two Jack had one of the little matches alight, and then Dick, rapidly counting the contents of the bag, found about one hundred and twenty

guineas, besides some half-guineas wrapped up in paper, and separate in that manner from the whole ones.

"This will do," he said. "I will pay our friend, the inn-porter, and then, Jack, our whole energies must be directed to poor Claude."

"Alas! you may well call him poor Claude. Now, I am afraid, Dick, that he will never look upon the moonlight again."

"Don't despair, Jack. If you do, it will paralyse our efforts to aid him. Come at once to the park-gate, and let us settle that little business, and then all our thoughts belong to Claude."

CHAPTER CCXCII.

THE PERIL OF JACK AND DICK IS VERY GREAT INDEED.

It was quite impossible that any night could be more possibly lovely than that which now showed itself upon Blackheath upon the occasion of the visit of Jack and Dick. The few fleecy clouds that had been at intervals sweeping over the face of the moon had entirely disappeared, and there was the beautiful calm-looking luminary of the night sailing in a sea of azure of such a hue as is seldom seen in our climate.

It was a night upon which to dream of the past—upon which we might look with the radiance of hope upon the future—a night upon which the evil passions of human nature one would expect would cower from the presence of the soft and innocent-looking beauties of nature, and not show themselves till darker influences pervaded the material world.

Jack was very much affected, as he always was by such nights, and as he looked up at the moon, and the pale ray that fell upon his face robbed it of the little colour he had, he said—

"Dick, do you think you would like to go there?"

"Go where?"

Jack pointed to the moon.

"Are you mad, Jack? What the deuce do you mean by asking a fellow if he would like to go to the moon, eh?"

"I don't know; but it looks so quiet—so peaceful—and so serene, that it seems as if it would be a great privilege after death for the immortal part of us to wing its flight just through such a sky as this to night, to yonder far wondrous world, if it be one, and there rest in peace."

"Come, come, Jack, you will make yourself melancholy, as you know you always do, if you begin talking in that kind of way. Recollect how much we have to do in this world yet. Recollect Claude."

"Oh, yes, yes, we have him to cling to."

"And recollect poor Cicely."

"Alas! alas! Why did I not die long—long ago!"

"Because you are wanted now, Jack. That's the only reason I can think of, so don't talk of dying, I beg of you."

"I won't, Dick, till I have seen how Claude fares. I should not like to die and to leave him to suffer."

"No, Jack, come what may, we will get him out of the power of the Philistines, and so keep a good heart on it; and here we are close to the place of our destination. I have been thinking, Jack, that—that ——"

"That what, Dick? Ah, you too are beginning to think that our friend the inn-porter may not be to be trusted exactly."

"Well, perhaps, I have; but yet I think it is wrong to do so. Heaven knows that in the course of my career I have met with much good faith; although, at times, when and where I least expected it, I own that I have been betrayed;

and, therefore, Jack, without doing any injustice to this man, whom we are called upon, by having pledged our words, to meet, we ought to be very cautious how we do meet him."

"You speak my sentiments, Dick, to the letter. What is the course that you advise?"

"Nay, Jack, I was going to ask you that, you know, because I know that the affair has been upon your mind some time, and that you have been giving it some consideration, and I should not wonder at all if you have thought of some plan of operations that would enable us to make a little sure of what we are about before we run any very serious risk."

"You are right, Dick," said Jack, with a faint smile. "I was going to propose something to you with that object, only as you had professed to have confidence in the man, I did not know very well how to begin it; but now I have no sort of difficulty, and this is what I would advise that we do. I would go to a part of the wall of the park over which we can easily get—for it is so damaged in places that there are plenty of footholds, and there I would leave the horses on the outside, fastened to a stake, which we can run into the ground; and when we are in the park, and on foot, there will be no difficulty in making our way through the trees to the inner side of the gate, and so seeing, at all events, if any one is on the watch."

"Good," said Dick.

"If," continued Jack, "there is any ambuscade, and we are to be betrayed in any way, of course, it will be from within the park, where any one might be hidden, and not on the heath-side of the door."

"Certainly not. There might be any force they chose to bring against us in the park, and we no further off it than the thickness of the doors opening to the heath, and not know it. Come on, Jack, I approve of the plan, and am desirous to put it into instant execution."

Having thus wisely determined upon what to do, they both dismounted, so that they should not be seen against the clear night sky, and they led the horses by a round-about route to a spot evidently to the left of the gate or door which, no doubt, is well known to all our readers as that which opens directly upon the heath from the beautiful old park.

They reached the wall in safety, and there, sure enough, they found several parts of it which were in a considerable state of decay. The difficulty now was to find a stake to which to picket the horses; but after a time they did find one, and they gave the creatures just liberty enough to move about a little, but not sufficient to leave the spot.

"Now for it," said Jack. "I will climb over first, as this is my plan, you know, Dick, and if the place is all clear, you can follow me."

"As you please Jack."

Jack, with great care, so as not to displace any of the old bricks, and so give an alarm, climbed to the top of the old park wall; and then crouching down, so low that he might be said to be almost lying along the top of it, he shaded his eyes with his hands, and took a long look into the park.

How sweetly the moonbeams broke among the quiet and leafy glades of that lovely spot at such an hour, and how calm and beautiful the green sward looked, tinted with its strange metallic-looking, spectral colour, from the full beams of the moon!

All was still. The place looked as if it were dedicated to the very genius of solitude, one could hardly imagine it possible that by any circumstances such a place could be the scene of crime, of frivolity, to say nothing of riot and disorder.

"Is it all right?" whispered Dick.

"I think so," said Jack, in a very low tone. There was something about the solitude of the place and the moonlight which would have made speaking loud seem like a piece of profanity. It is strange how such spots of nature in their

solitary beauty, affect the imagination much in the same way that the dim majesty of some cathedral does.

"Come on," said Jack, "come on. This way that I have entered by is good. It is as easy as getting up a staircase."

Dick was by his side in a moment, and then he took a long look into the park.



TURPIN AND JACK STARTLED BY THE DEER IN GREENWICH PARK.

"How beautiful," he said. "Ah, what is that?"

"What—what?"

"There, moving among the trees. Don't you see something? There again now."

"Yes, a deer."

"Are you sure it was only a deer, Jack? Oh, yes, to be sure, there the creature comes out into the moonlight. It is one of the deer. How fair and beautiful it looks, now. Don't you admire it, Jack?"

"It don't seem like anything but the spectre of a deer in the moonlight," said Jack. "I wonder, now, if that creature's fine senses are cognisant of our presence? Look how its head is turned now, and how it listens. Ah! there it goes."

With a bound, the graceful creature was off in a moment, and disappeared among the trees.

"I think we may safely descend," said Jack. "Solitude and ourselves seem to hold possession of the old park."

They both cautiously now descended the wall, and after taking careful note of the spot, so that they should be sure to find it again, they began to creep along close to the wall, where there was a well-defined shadow cast by it, in the direction of the little gate.

Up to this time, everything had conspired to make both Jack and Dick think that they were suspecting the inn-porter wrongfully, and that nothing in the shape of an enemy was within either sight or hearing; but they had not proceeded very far, before they found some cause to come to a different opinion.

It was Jack who suddenly touched Dick upon the arm, and whispered to him—

"Stoop, and listen."

They both crouched quite close to the ground, and, indeed, Jack laid his ear to it, and then they heard a regular tramping of feet, that could not possibly be mistaken, and as they listened, they felt quite conscious that it was coming nearer and nearer each minute.

"What's that?" said Dick.

"Military," replied Jack. "They are coming this way, too. Ah, now they pause, and all is still—no, they come again, but they are straggling, and each man is making as little noise as he can. Dick, it is you and I that they are so obliging as to come to meet."

"Not a doubt of it."

Notwithstanding both Dick and Jack had taken all the precaution that we have seen they had taken, for the purpose of providing against such a contingency as this, it was quite evident that they had neither of them looked forward to it as very likely to happen, for there they were, now that they saw it had occurred, quite unable to think of what would be best to do. To be sure, flight was the most obvious thing, but their rage against the inn-porter was so great, it did not seem to them that anything was at all feasible but some plan of operation that would suffice to visit him with the retribution that he deserved.

At least, such was their first thought in the matter.

They drew back still further into the shade, and Dick was upon the point of saying something, when a low "Hush!" from Jack detained him, and then he heard a footstep upon the decayed leaves under some trees close at hand, and a voice said—

"It is time they came, surely, now."

"I should think it was," replied another one, "and once or twice I fancied I heard 'em. Well, they may come, but I don't see why half a dozen of us mightn't have done the job quite as well."

"That's my own idea, too. I don't like this mixing up of the soldiers with our affairs. We are officers, and we ought to be left to take the thieves, or not take 'em, as we think proper; but of late, it's nothing but—'Oh, let us have a guard of soldiers,' and then there's sure to be a mess made of the whole affair, for they don't like the job, and we feel put out of sorts, and no good is done."

"That's it," said the other. "But do you think, after all, that Turpin will be so green as to come?"

"I do. He is just the sort of fellow to come, if he said he would, and now

that it's all up with Claude Duval, he and the other will like to make all the friends they can ?"

"And that other ?"

"I tell you again that it's Sixteen-string Jack."

"Yes, you tell me."

"It's true. He was hanged, but brought to life again. The story is well enough known, now, to the beaks; and if he would get out of way, and not go upon the road again, it's my idea they would leave him alone."

"Oh, would they, though ?—Don't you think it."

"They wouldn't ?"

"Not they. Of all men they want to catch him, I tell you. Don't you know that he robbed the Bishop of London near Fulham once, and that ever since then, the great folks have determined to make an end of him ?"

"Oh—ah ! That is decided."

"Well, come on ; I suppose all our set is in the park by this time, along with that fellow from the Old Bailey, bother him, who will pocket, I suppose, all, if not the greater part of the rewards."

"The ina-porter you mean ?"

"Yes, confound him ! Don't forget our private signal, though. It's 'Keys and locks,' so we shall all know each other among the trees. Come this way. I suppose those red coats from Tilbury are now not far off the gate."

The two officers passed on, and after they had gone both Jack and Dick felt that they had so much to think about that they were silent for some few minutes, although they might have spoken in an under tone to each other without any danger.

It was Dick who broke that silence.

"Jack," he said, "are you there ?"

"I am, Dick. Did you hear one of them fellows say it was all up with poor Claude Duval ? Oh, Dick, did you hear that, or have my ears as well as my fears deceived me ?"

"I did hear it, Jack, but it goes for nothing, or ought to go for nothing, with us. What does it come to, after all, but just to this, that the officers think they have him safe. You know that as soon as they get a fellow into Newgate they all think that his career is over ; but there's lots of chances after that, when there is courage within the walls and friends without."

"Heaven help him !" said Jack.

"Well, as to that, Jack, I suppose we are not the sort of fellows to call upon Heaven for help, although there are worse than we who often do so."

CHAPTER CCXCIII.

EVIL FORTUNE THICKENS ABOUT CLAUDE DUVAL.

It is time now that we turn our attention to the condition of Claude Duval himself, after that frightful struggle in the Old Bailey that had so very unexpectedly had the effect of placing him in the hands of his foes. We shall soon, however, take up again the proceedings of Jack and Dick in the endeavours they made to do something for their much esteemed associate.

The horror that came over poor Claude Duval when he found that it was Cicely who had fallen a victim to the scuffle that had taken place in the Old Bailey, was such that it completely confused his intellect for a time, and the first return to anything like positive consciousness that he had, was finding himself in a cell in Newgate.

"Hilloa !" cried a voice. "What do you bring it in now, Master Duval, eh ? How are you ? Better, I suppose ?"

"Who are you?" said Claude, faintly.

"Timothy Maggs."

"Oh," said Claude, "I don't know you."

"Why, no, I don't know how you should, seeing that we never was properly introduced; but you know as you are in the stone-jug?"

Duval nodded.

"Well, I'm a watching of you."

"Oh, indeed," said Claude again. "You are a turnkey, I suppose?"

"No, I'm a *hextra*."

"A what?"

"A *hextra* they calls me. I hangs about the stone-jug, you see, and if any of the regular chaps is ill and can't come and do duty, they gets me to do it, and the governor, he says, 'Where's Maggs?' he says; 'he's the man—where's Maggs?' he says."

Mr. Timothy Maggs seemed to be so delighted at the recollection of what the governor said, that he laughed until the tears came into his eyes, and then starting up, he cried out—

"There's the doctor, I hear him a coming. You wouldn't go for to say that I spoke to you, for my order was to wasn't, you see."

"Oh, no—no," said Claude faintly, "I will say nothing, you may depend; but, implore you to tell me if——"

"Hush! here they is."

The door of the cell was opened, and three or four people appeared upon the threshold of it. The cell was so situated, that in daytime it was not quite dark, inasmuch as through the thickness of the wall there came, close to the ceiling, from one of the inner courts of Newgate, a faint reflected light, which, when the eye got used to it, was quite sufficient to enable any one to see any object in the cell. No doubt, though, to any one coming directly from the open air the place would have been positively dark for a considerable time,

Claude looked at the people who came into the cell rather listlessly, and he saw that one was the governor of Newgate, he knew him very well by sight another of them he supposed to be one of the sheriffs, and by the manner of a third he soon found that he was the surgeon of the prison.

"Well, how is the patient?" said the latter.

"He's been a looking about him," said Mr. Timothy Maggs.

"Oh, indeed. Well, Duval, how are you to-day?"

Claude shook his head.

"Come—come," added the surgeon, "you are not much hurt, and you will soon recover from your present state."

"And go comfortably out and be hung," said the governor.

Duval looked him keenly in the face, as he said—

"I want an answer but to one question. I beg that some one of these who are here present, will have the charity to answer it truly for me."

"What is it?" said the sheriff.

"Is—is—*she*"——Poor Claude could get no further for a moment or two, and then gathering all his strength, he managed to say in a hoarse voice—"Is Cicely dead? That is my question."

There was a rapid glance passed between the governor and the surgeon, and then the former said—

"Yes, she is dead!"

Claude Duval closed his eyes, as if from that moment he would gladly shut out the world from all converse with him. They heard something like a low gasping sob, and then all was still.

"Gammon," said Mr. Maggs.

"How dare you!" cried the governor. "You scoundrel, how dare you say that?"

"Oh, dear me, sir. I only meant as it was all gammon of Claude Duval to go, for to pretend as he was a crying, that's all I meant."

"Leave the cell!"

"Yes, Mr. Governor, if you like, in course I shall leave the cell. Good-day to you all, gentlemen. I only said gammon—gammon."

Timothy left the cell, and then the sheriff, turning to the surgeon, said—

"Sir, can you say that this prisoner may be left with safety alone in his cell?"

"Yes, if frequently visited."

"Very well. You hear that, governor? That will be much better than leaving a man with him, and you will probably be so good as to send a different man upon each visit that is made to him."

"I will, sir," said the governor. "I know what you mean, sir. Lord bless you, these sort of fellows would offer a man five hundred pounds, as soon as look at him, if they thought he could help them out of here, but I think we shall be one too many for Claude Duval this time. Do you hear, Duval? You are to be left alone now, but you will be often visited, for all that, so that you had better keep quiet."

Duval made no reply whatever to this, and then they all left the cell, and he heard the lock shot into the socket, and the bolts and bars put up into their places, and he heard the retiring footsteps as they all left the cell door, and then he felt, indeed, that he was alone.

"Now," said Duval, "if I could only die—if I could only at the wish to do so bid a last adieu to this world, I might be happy. Death! Is it not, after all, within the grasp of all those who choose to clutch at it? Why should I not die? The power to leave this mortal life is one which has evidently been freely left to human nature. In a thousand different ways any one may shake off all the troubles and the griefs of this state. It is great and benificent of Providence to have given man such a power. Shall I not embrace it?"

This was the first time during all his eventful career that suicide had ever occurred to Claude Duval, and now it never would, but that he felt all the agony of spirit which the fate of poor Cicely, who had loved him so truly and so devotedly, was calculated to produce.

What had he now, he asked himself, to live for, now that that gentle spirit had gone from him?

With the inclination growing upon him each moment to take his own life, Claude Duval rose from the pallet bed which he had been laid upon, but he felt so weak and ill that the very effort to get to his feet brought on a death-like sickness, and he sunk back, fully believing that without raising his hand against himself, nature herself would soon relieve him of the ills that he seemed born to.

While Claude Duval is in this desperate condition we will follow Mr. Timothy Maggs from the cell, and take a brief glance at that rather eccentric gentleman's proceedings.

Mr. Maggs was, as he himself had intimated, a kind of supernumerary at Newgate, a "hextra" as he said in his peculiar vernacular. He was a man who had made himself singularly useful to the turnkeys of Newgate, and, indeed, to all the officials of the stone-jug, as it was facetiously called. His imperturbable good humour—his disregard of any fatigue, and the fidelity of his actions, all recommended him very much to the notice of the authorities.

If a turnkey were ill, or drunk, Maggs was the man who supplied his place. If ever the governor wanted any one for extra duty of any sort, he sent for Maggs. The Lord Mayor had, at the request of the Governor of Newgate, sworn him in as a constable, and he would have had a permanent situation in Newgate, but for his extreme usefulness as an extra. What would they do for the want of such a man, if Maggs had regular duties to perform? They would have to look out for another Maggs forthwith.

Upon one occasion, too, Maggs found out that half a dozen of the most desperate prisoners that Newgate ever held within its iron bounds, had planned

an escape, and he took the information direct to the governor, and the whole affair was blown.

After that circumstance, all doubts, if there were any, regarding the fidelity of Maggs to the administration of the law, vanished, and the most unbounded confidence was reposed in him.

And yet, strange to say, in spite of all this, will it be believed that Maggs was playing a part? Yes, Maggs's sympathies were with the prisoners, and not with the jailers, and his mission to Newgate was to comfort, console, aid, and abet felons, which, according to act of parliament, is a high crime and misdemeanour.

But the sagacious reader will say—"Why, then, did Maggs go to the governor with information of the plot to escape of the half dozen desperate characters?" We will tell the sagacious reader. One of the party had already betrayed his comrades, and sent a letter to the sheriff containing the full particulars of the plot, so that Maggs having found out as much, not only disappointed that rascal of the reward he expected to get, but raised his own character above suspicion, by going to the governor with the particulars, so that when the sheriff came post-haste, and cried out to the governor—"Here is a plot to escape, hatching, sir, under your very nose," the governor rubbed his hands coolly together, and replied—"I know it."

By this little scheme, Maggs, therefore, did no harm whatever to the cause in which he really was enlisted, but raised his usefulness wonderfully by increasing his reputation.

True, that time the authorities chuckled over the idea, that in Maggs they had a cunning and efficient spy, while the "famiiy," as the thieves called themselves, knew that in him they had an able and daring assistant and friend in Newgate.

Several of those apparently perfectly inscrutable escapes from the prison had been managed by Maggs; and, indeed, with his facilities of going in and out of the stone-jug, it was comparatively easy for him to render what aid he chose to those there confined, for there was a general order to let him go about the building at pleasure.

Such, then, was the man who had been appointed by the governor to stay in the cell with Claude Duval, and to endeavour to get, if that were possible, some sort of information out of him regarding his associates.

When Maggs left the cell to the occupancy of the governor, the sheriff, and the surgeon, he took his way to the vestibule of Newgate, and was passing out through the wicket, when the man who was on the lock said—

"Well, Tim, do you think Duval will swing?"

"Rather."

"You do—do you? Well, he is rather an out-and-outer, ain't he, now? I did begin to think a little time ago, that we should never have him here at eight o'clock of a Monday morning."

"By-the-by," said Maggs, "have you heard anything more of what has been so much talked about. I mean about the hanging the fellows here in the Old Bailey. instead of at Tyburn."

"Why, yes, they do speak of it; but it won't do, Mr. Maggs. Oh, dear, no."

"You think not?"

"I know it won't do. Lor bless you, it's agin all custom and rule. Why, the fellows have been hung at Tyburn times out of mind, and the idea of hanging 'em here is outrageous."

"But, why?"

"Oh, you want to know why?"

"Yes, I do. For my part, I don't see, Mr. Wilks, what difference it makes to a family cove, whether he is tucked up and has to dance upon nothing here, or at Tyburn-tree. I should just as soon say good-by to this here world from one place as another."

The turnkey drew himself up, and giving his head a slight motion from side

to side, he said in quite an oracular tone of voice, as he looked in the face of Maggs most steadfastly—

"I tell you what it is, Maggs. I don't mean for to go for to say as it really, mind you, makes much difference to a fellow whether, as you say, he is tucked up here or at Tyburn-tree; but what I look at is this—this here, Mr. Maggs, is what I look at."

"Well?"

"It's an innovation!"

"Ah, to be sure it is that."

"I rather think it is; and when I say that, I rather think as well that it's a clincher."

"So it is" said Maggs. "Good day."

The turnkey continued shaking his head some time after Maggs had left, for he really did consider within his politic brain, that what he had said was, in his own phraseology, a clincher. How many people now-a-days fancy they get over difficulties with just such clinchers as Maggs received from the turnkey!

A dubious smile played upon the lips of Maggs as he left Newgate, and he strolled very leisurely up the Old Bailey towards Holborn, and then took his route across Smithfield. Maggs never once looked behind him, but now and then there came that side-long glance which a man who thinks it just within the limits of human possibility that he may be followed, darts from his eyes, and once he made a full stop, and seemed quite absorbed in contemplation of the sheep pens in Smithfield.

It was quite evident Maggs was in no hurry, for it was a good half hour after he had left Newgate before he reached Barbican, and then turning down a narrow turning, he approached a little, mean looking public-house, and after one hasty glance around, entered it.

There was really nothing in the appearance of the public-house to indicate anything but rather straitened circumstances. One would have supposed it to be one of those little out of the way old fashioned houses that are cut out completely by the more modern blazing establishments of the day.

A ruddp faced, simple looking man was behind the bar, who just gave a nod to Maggs, as a couple of people were indulging in a pint of ale there.

"A nice day," said Maggs.

"Very," said the landlord. "What is it to be?"

"A glass of the old October."

"Ah, that's the drink. You know what to order, I rather take it."

"Why, yes, I ought by this time. Is the slate there?"

"Yes, here it is."

The landlord, from a high hook upon which it was hanging, took down a slate, to which by a piece of string was appended a pencil; upon this slate Mr. Maggs did not write anything, but he rudely scratched a compass, such as is placed at the corner of maps, with N. E. S. W. at its different points. Close to the W. Maggs scratched a hand with the finger extended, something after the fashion of a finger-post on a country road, and then he placed under that the figure 12.

"Hang it up again," said Maggs.

The landlord took a glance at it, and said—

"Rather particular?"

"A little."

With a nod, the landlord hung the slate up again, and then, after drinkingy his glass of old October, Mr. Maggs left the public-house, and went his way back to the Old Bailey.

Now, if any one had been very curious all that day at that little old fashioned public-house, they would have seen the landlord show that slate to at least twenty people, who only each gave a sort of nod when they saw it, and then it was hung up again.

We shall soon find that it had a significance of a peculiar kind.

CHAPTER CCXCIV.

THE THIEVES HAUNT AT WEST END, HAMPSTEAD.—MAGGS'S ADVICE.

THE mystery of the slate at the little public-house, near to Barbican, is one that will soon be made apparent to the reader. By the communication that Maggs had made to the "family," it was clearly understood that he meant as many of that fraternity as thought proper to do so, to meet him somewhere in the West.

Now, as there was but one place of rende zvous in that quarter of the environs of London, it was not possible to make a mistake upon the subject, and, therefore, it was well known where at the hour of twelve that night they were to meet.

We will now, therefore, at once conduct the reader to the place of meeting of the thieves at West End, Hampstead.

To those unacquainted with the district, we may state that there are two routes from London by which West End, Hampstead, may be easily reached. The one is a long narrow tortuous lane from Kilburn, and the other is by a road westward from the old church at Hampstead, and which, after crossing the several lanes that go northward, conducts the traveller to the little red looking village called West End.

At the period of our tale, West End consisted of a little cluster of cottages that stood in a hollow, and in the neighbourhood of them there were some mansions with very portentious iron gates and extensive lawns, past which the road went right on to the Edgeware-road.

Some daring robberies and one murder about the spot had, however, had the effect of making the neighbourhood not at all popular, and some of the largest of the mansions wanted tenants. One of them in particular had been for a long time deserted. It belonged to one of the aldermen of the City of London, and it was in the keeping of a highly respectable man, recommended by Maggs!

Yes, Maggs had sufficient influence to give such a recommendation, and, therefore, was it that Hawthorn House, West End, Hampstead, became one of the stations for the most active of the "family."

The worthy alderman, who, by the bye, amassed his money in the manufacture of candles, was much astonished that nobody gave him an offer for Hawthorn House; but if any one seeing the board up signifying that "This Family Mansion" was to be let, entered to look over it, something like the following conversation would take place between the projected tenant and the respectable man and his wife who took care of the premises:—

"Well," the visitor would say, "I think the place will suit me."

"I am so glad to hear that," the respectable man and his wife would both say in a breath; "for then we shall get somewhere else."

"Indeed? Why, why—What is your objection to this place?"

Upon this, they would both put on quite an air of confusion, and the wife would say,—"John, I think you ought to tell this gentleman, for he is a real gentleman as any one may see in a moment by his looks."

This was so highly flattering to the intending tenant, that he commonly proffered half-a-crown for the expected intelligence, and then John would say—

"It would be a very cruel and impious thing to let you and your amiable family come here without your knowing that you would never get a night's rest."

"Never get a night's rest? Why not?"

"On account of the shrieks, sir."

"The shrieks?"

"Yes, sir; they do say as the place is haunted, sir; but I can't bring my mind to believe it, and if any body was strong-minded enough to go on sleeping and never minding horrid screams and shrieks in their very ears till their heads seem ready to burst, they might like the place well enough."

"God bless my soul," the intending tenant would then say. "I—I, that is I shouldn't mind myself, but my wife is rather delicate. Dear me, it won't suit at all; good-day. I am very much obliged to you, my man, for mentioning it at all. Oh, dear—oh, dear, what a place to be in."

With some such expressions as the above the party walk off, and thus



DICK TURPIN STOPS AUGUSTUS CROKE NEAR SHOOTER'S HILL.

Hawthorn House will probably, to the great despair of its owner, who little suspects the sort of reputation his property is acquiring, remain without an offer or even a visitor.

It was to this place, then, as half-past eleven was pealed out by the old church clock of Hampstead, that several people might have been seen wending

their way, both from Hampstead and from the lane leading to the spot by the way of Kilburn.

These people were part of the "family;" but they took good care to make their approaches to the house in such a manner, as not to attract much attention from the neighbourhood.

There was a door in the oaken paling at some distance from the regular entrance to the avenue leading to the front of the house, and it was by that door that those members of the fraternity who went there, who had resolved to respond to the summons of Maggs, entered the premises.

At that door it was that the man who took care of the house, rather too well for the worthy alderman who owned it, stationed himself, to see that none but the properly entitled persons gained admittance.

The first who arrived wore a cloak and a hat that entirely concealed all the upper part of his face. He tapped at the little oaken door, and Charley Lang, as the man was named who was within, opened a little square orifice in it, and said in a low tone—

'What's o'clock?"

"You can't see for the clouds," was the reply.

"Oh, all right—Can you walk in?"

"Yes; with a jemmy or picklock,"

"All's right," said Charley, as he flung open the door; "you are one of the right sort, at all events."

In this manner, and with the same amount of questioning, and getting the same answers, he, within the half-hour from half-past eleven to twelve o'clock, admitted to the garden about twenty persons.

The night was dark and lowering, although no rain was falling. Great masses of dark clouds seemed to have stooped from the sky to rest upon the tops of the tall old trees, and where there was the least additional shadow, the night was so intensely dark that it was impossible to see even dimly the ground at your feet.

"Has Maggs come?" said one of the last, who made an appearance at the oaken door in the wall.

"Why, no," said Charley. "and I wonder at it."

"So do I. He is generally punctual enough, and there goes twelve o'clock."

"Ah, there it goes, sure enough; and if he were here, I should not feel that it was any good staying at this gate."

"He is here."

"Is he? How do you make that out? Go and tell that to some one else. I have kept too good a watch here for that. No—no, he has not passed me."

"You are mistaken, Charley."

"Ah! that voice—"

"Is the voice of Maggs. Do you know me now?"

"The devil! Why, it is you, and I didn't know you a bit?"

"Of course not. Don't you remember now the last time I was here, we were talking about disguises, and you said that you would know anybody, through any disguise, that you had once seen sufficient of to say that you had had a good look at them?"

"I did—I did."

"Well, you know, old fellow, that I differed from you, and held to the contrary, and now I hope you are convinced, for you didn't know me."

"It was your voice that deceived me; I don't know how you could alter that so well."

"That's a secret; but I can do it."

"I know you can, Mr. Maggs; but don't say anything about my not knowing you to the 'family,' or else they will have a laugh at me, and I don't want that."

"Not a word," replied Maggs. "I only did it for a friendly joke between you and me, that was all, old chap, and I don't let it go any further; so, now you

may fasten the door, for none of our sort will be here to-night, now, except those who have already come."

"No, it's all right," said Charley Lang, as he bolted and locked the door. "There's a pretty good muster of 'em, I can tell you, Mr. Maggs."

"Is there? How many?"

"Twenty-one with you."

"That will do. We don't like to go on without you, Charley; so you can let little Bill keep on the watch, while you come to the hall with the rest of us."

"Ay, ay," said Charley Lang. "Little Bill, though he is a chick of my own, and only a matter of nine years old, is a regular rum 'un, he is. Why, Mr. Maggs, I'd back that boy to keep watch, when a man couldn't do it. I'd wager he'd be on the look-out, and never wink once for twelve hours at a stretch."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, to be sure; and I do think he'd smell an officer half a mile off."

"He is invaluable."

"He is. Come this way, and I will rout him out. I daresay he is in the kitchen, as before, like a dog on the watch."

"No, I ain't, father," said a little squeaking voice. "Here I is."

"Lor bless us!" ejaculated Charley. "Here he is. There now, who would have thought it? I don't see you, Bill, though."

"No, father," squeaked the voice again. "'Cos it is so jolly dark, that is the reason you don't see me, father; but here I is."

"Murder!" said Charley, as he fell flat upon the grass in consequence of his son and heir making a bolt between his legs, to make his presence visible. "Oh, murder! I'm jolted to death almost. What the deuce did you do that for?"

"It's only me, father."

"Only you! Curse you, what do you mean by upsetting your father in this way, you little vagabond? Is this what you call honouring your parents? You will come to a bad end, that you will, Bill—you will come to a bad end."

"Perhaps, he didn't mean it," suggested Maggs.

"I don't suppose he did," said Charley, "or else, uncomfortable as such a thing would be to the feelings of a parent, I should have to skin him."

"Ha—ha!" laughed Bill.

"Hold your row!" said Charley. "Now mind, Bill, you keep watch all along o' this side of the garden, and let us know if there's any danger. Keep your ears and your eyes open, and your mouth shut, Bill, that's the way to keep a look out. Ain't it, Mr. Maggs?"

"Yes, I believe it is; but on such a night as this your eyes are not much good to you, I rather think, are they, Bill?"

"Oh, but he's like a cat," suggested Charley, "he can see in the dark."

"Can you, Bill?"

"A little," replied Bill. "Howsomdever, I'll keep a good look out, father, and if anybody comes here as shouldn't, I'll settle 'em."

"Oh—oh!" said Charley, as he walked to the house with Maggs. "He says he'll settle 'em. Did you ever hear such a rum 'un. But I'm glad to see you, Mr. Maggs, because, you see, I have a respect for your opinion, and I want to ask your advice."

"What about?"

"About Bill. I don't know what to bring him up to. I shouldn't like it to be anything low, you know, 'cos why, the boy has a kind of genius; and it mustn't be anything that wants bigness and strength. 'cos why, he's little and ain't got much. What do you think, Mr. Maggs, would be the best thing in life for Bill?"

"Upon my word, I hardly know."

"Well, but you does know a something of him, Mr. Maggs. Just think it over, now, in your quick way, and let us hear you opinion about him."

"Well, but, Charley, you are the best judge; you have thought the matter over in your own mind, no doubt. What is your idea upon the affair, eh?"

"Well, in course I have thought it over, and I'm divided, you see, in my opinion whether it's best to make a cracksman of him, a swell fogle-hunter and a snap-dragon, which you know means the grabbing of tickers and all them sort o' things, or to let him go on the road with some of the old hands."

"You mean, then, to bring him up to the old business?"

"In course."

"Well, I will turn it over in my mind, and let you know what I think about it when I see you again, Charley; but I don't think he'll do for the road. It strikes me as he is cut out for the smoking swindle."

"Well, perhaps he is. You think he'd be good at getting into houses when the people ain't at home, Mr. Maggs?"

"I do, if you can teach him the use of the tools well."

"Oh," said Charley, with a voice of conscious pride, "I tell you what, Mr. Maggs, I wouldn't say it before him on any account, 'cos why, it's a bad thing to make the young 'uns conceited afore their time—they will pick up that fast enough—but I'll say it to you, that that boy can pick a lock as well as you or I."

"You don't mean it?"

"I do—I do. It was only the other day that I wolloped him and locked him up in one of the old kitchens, and I thought he'd be a crying, so I got down close to the door and listened, and I heard a little kind o' rattling noise, and in a moment or two something fell on my back."

"Was it Bill?"

"No, it was the key that I had left sticking in the lock of the door, and he had first of all pushed it through, and when I found that, I began to guess what he was about. He was picking the lock, and in half a minute he did it too, and coming out right head over heels over me, he cried out—'Done the old 'un at last.'"

"Did he, though?"

"Yes. 'Done the old 'un at last,' says he. Oh, lor! You can imagine the feelings of a father. 'Done the old 'un at last,' says he, meaning me, you know. I was the old 'un. There's a boy for you, and only nine! What do you think o' that? There's a genius for you, Mr. Maggs. 'Done the old 'un at last,' says he. Oh, dear—oh, dear, I always laugh till the tears come into my eyes when I think on it. Oh, he'll be a rum 'un, he will. 'Done the old 'un at last," says he. Oh, dear—oh, dear. 'Done the old 'un at last.'"

CHAPTER CCXCV.

THE FAMILY COMES TO A RESOLUTION TO BEFRIEND CLAUDE DUVAL.

By the time Charley had concluded his choice little anecdote about the genius of Bill, a genius which promised as fairly as possible to conduct that precious young gentleman to the gallows, he and Maggs had reached the house; and passing through two rooms upon the ground floor, and then along a passage paved with stone, they reached a spacious apartment, which was called the hall.

This hall had at one time been a sort of great kitchen or servants' hall, but its size and the altitude of its roof had pointed it out to some modern improvers of the mansion as fit to be converted into the principal apartment upon the ground floor. With rather a questionable taste, since the rest of the building was not at all of that style, this hall had been fitted up according to the gothic notions of the Elizabethan era, and certainly very old fashioned and cosey it looked.

At one end there was an immense fireplace, with a tremendous carved

chimney-piece above it, and at the other there was a kind of gallery, with huge carved oak balustrades, capable of holding some twenty people. The roof was supported by massive transverse beams of wood, and the walls were of oaken panelling. There was not much in the way of furniture to the room, but the thick and massive draperies of the windows still remained, and were to be sold with the house, and a large oaken table in the centre, about twelve feet in length and some six or eight in width, together with a number of old oaken seats, constituted the whole of the furniture of the place.

There was but one light burning in the immense room, which was forty feet in length and about twenty-five feet in width, and that solitary light was stuck between the outline of a stag's head that graced one of the panels.

The whole of the thieves who had responded to the call of Maggs were assembled in this hall. One of the oaken seats was placed upon the table, and was intended for the chairman, he who had called the meeting being usually placed in that seat of honour and office.

It was a strange thing to see the faces of the little throng of persons there assembled by the faint light of that one candle, and mark the different physiognomies, and yet see that there was throughout the whole, one prevailing expression of suspicion and cunning. There was an uneasy look, too, and a quick shifting glance about the greater number of them, that sufficiently betokened the unquiet life that they led, and the constantly present feeling that was in their minds, of not knowing but that some hand might be stretched out to capture them, and some one say in the customary phrase of the officers, "You are wanted."

And to hear these men speak, one would think they were all fascinated with the career of crime they had chosen, and that if they could they would not earn their bread by any of the ordinary channels of industry.

Perhaps, though, they all had a shrinking fear at their hearts—perhaps they all had their solitaray moments when they gave way to the horrors of remorse and all the fears of the untimely end they might well look forward to. Perhaps it was only when other eyes were upon them that they played the part of the bold, daring, reckless villain who would not be shackled in his notions of right and wrong by the laws of society.

Well, at all events, they gave Maggs a cheering welcome when he made his appearance in the hall, and he had to hold up his hand and say "Hush!" to stop the tumult of applause that they were inclined to bestow upon him, and it was quite a study now to see what a different man the Maggs of the thieves' meeting at West End, Hamstead, was to the Maggs of Newgate.

Here, amid his fellows, and away from those who thought not only that they were his masters, but he was their humble servant—he stood a good six inches high—his voice had a different tone, and he spoke, too, the English language with a tolerable amount of correctness; but at Newgate he played a part, and shuffled about half lost, and when he spoke he frequently made the most common and ridiculous grammatical errors, so that the turnkeys thought themselves just a little educated above poor Maggs, although they respected him for his very useful qualties.

What a strange life it was for that man to lead! Surely he had some secret motive for it, which will become apparent. We shall see.

"Bravo, Maggs!" cried one. "Here we are, old fellow, and I don't think there's one who saw the slate at the King's Head but is here now."

"Not one!" cried several together.

"Hush," said Maggs. "Caution. I do believe that we are about as safe here as it is very possible for us to be, but still, caution should ever be the word with us, comrades, and above all things, we should never presume upon our safety. We should always act, and speak, and think, as though the Philistines were about us."

This little speech acted as a kind of damper upon the spirits of the party. Several of them looked as if they could have said—"That is very true, but we

would rather not hear it." However, after a pause, during which they looked about them with all the suspicions and uneasiness that the words of Maggs suggested, one said—

"Well, Maggs, get into the chair, and let's hear all about it."

"Ay—ay!" cried the others, but in subdued tones, "that's it."

Maggs, with more lightness and agility than any one, to look at him, would have been induced to give him credit for, vaulted on to the table and took his seat in the chair. It was quite evident that he gave himself something of the air of a captain over the others, for his first words were—

"Gentlemen all, I thank you for responding to my notice so readily. You all know that I am not a man to bring you here for nothing."

"No—no," said several,

"Very well, then. I may as well tell you at once that it is about Duval."

There was an ominous silence at this moment, but Maggs did not appear to be in the smallest degree disconcerted, for he continued quite calmly—

"I have thought over the matter in every shape and way, comrades, and I think it will be a great shame if we leave Claude Duval to the hangman. You all know him well—you all know that he never cared to keep a guinea if one among you wanted it. You know that he ever held his life as nothing when any of you were in danger. I don't mean to say that he came among you much, for he could not do so—his life was spent upon the road; but many is the guinea he has sent to the different cribs where he thought it was wanted; and when it happened that any one was hustled out of the world at Tyburn, didn't Duval ask the first family man he met if there was a wife or kids?"

"He did!" cried a voice.

"And if he heard there was, didn't he send all he had to them?"

"He did," said the voice again. "He sent fifty pounds to Jemmy Noakes's widow, and her two little girls."

"Is that Noakes as swung for the bank robbery?" said another.

"Yes."

"Oh, then, he didn't do it?"

"We all know that," said Maggs, "and we know that the man that did do it came forward at the Old Bailey and said as much, but they wouldn't believe him, cos they had another charge ready against him, and they hung them both."

There was a chilling silence of some few moments' duration now, and at length Maggs continued—

"What I want to know is, what sort of feeling you have in the matter? Are you, or are you not, inclined to strike a blow for Duval? If you are not, it's no use me saying any more, and the meeting is over; but if you are, hold up a hand each man."

Every hand was held up in silence.

"Good," said Maggs. "Does any one know where Dick Turpin is?"

"With the blackbirds," said one.

"No," said another; "if so, he's as dead as mutton. There's twenty nine dead bodies lying in a chalk-pit at Gravesend, now, for an inquest."

"He went off from that place," said another, "and there was one with him that none of the family don't seem to know how to tackle."

"How do you mean?" said Maggs.

"Why they say it's a ghost."

"And so it is," said one. "I was close to the cart when Sixteen-string Jack was turned off at Tyburn, and now they want some of them to make out that he is alive, and rides about with Duval and Turpin."

"It's true, too," said Maggs. "Mind you, I never said much about it, because I didn't know from Jack himself whether he would like to have the thing spoken of; but I know it's true that Sixteen-string Jack is in life. He was recovered after the hanging."

"Is that possible, Maggs?"

"Yes. It has been done in some three or four cases at the outside, but not more; I fancy, if it were tried in all, one in a thousand might come to life again; but certainly not more; but Sixteen-string Jack lives, I can assure you."

"He's been deuced, quiet, then."

"He has. He walked again; but when he did so, he was not the same man he was before. He lives, but he is the shadow of the bold highwayman that he had been. In that hour that he shut his eyes upon the world, he seemed to live twenty years, and Jack rose up again an old man."

"Poor fellow!"

"Yes, and he would have lain himself down and died again, but for one affection that he still clung to. It was his affection for Claude Duval, to whom he has clung, as the only thing left in this world to care for; and he has gone about with Claude, and at times, some speak of the old spirit that has blazed out in him; but, take him for all in all, he is wrecked, and I should say that it only wants the death of Duval to break his heart."

There was a murmur of conversation through the assemblage, and then one said, in a clear, distinct voice—

"Only say, Maggs, what's to be done, and I take my solemn oath, by my right hand and my left, and by my faith to the family, that I will do my best to do it."

"And I—and I—and I!" cried all those present.

"I am abundantly satisfied," said Maggs. "What I want to do is something that may be done by cool, determined, resolute men, without danger to life or limb to any one—I want to get Claude Duval out of the stone-jug."

"Hear! hear! We will have him out."

"I think we shall; but the first thing to do is to find Turpin, and if you find him, you will find Sixteen-string Jack with him. Now, what I ask of you all to set about is, to find them, for you know I am situated so that I can't go upon the hunt for them myself. I think, I am doing as much good to the family in Newgate, and more, too, than I could possibly out of it; so, you see, my hands are full."

"They are, Maggs. You are doing more good to us all being what you are, than any dozen of us beside can do," said one.

"Of course, he is," said the others, "and he knows it."

"Well, I do know it," said Maggs; "and so it is that I don't want to be detected in what I'm about, you see; and now, will you find Turpin and Jack, and bring them here as soon as you do?—If you are successful in so doing, you can leave word for me at the King's Head, and we will all meet here to morrow night at the same hour that we have met to-night."

"Agreed—agreed, Maggs, that will do."

A shrill whistle at this moment burst upon the ears of the assemblage from without, and in a moment every man was in an attitude of alarm.

"Quiet—quiet!" said Maggs—"quiet! Charley, what's that?"

"Bill."

"Then, something is amiss?"

"A few.—Stay here, all of you, while I go out and see. It isn't anything very bad, or else he'd whistle twice, and if it was more than bad, he'd whistle three times; but as he has only come the whistle dodge once, you see, it's a kind of a warning that's all. Keep quiet, till I come back to you."

"Yes, that is it," said Maggs. "Keep quiet till Charley comes back. Who has arms?"

"All."

It had an odd sound that "All," uttered as if it was by twenty men, each in a whisper. It was like a sudden rush of wind, and then all was still again.

Charley left the hall at once to proceed upon a reconnoitring expedition as to the cause of the clamour, and while he was gone the most intense stillness reigned in the place, for every one was most eager to catch the first sounds of

his return with information concerning the warning that the sagacious and precocious Bill had thought it to be his duty to give.

Minute after minute, though, passed, and no appearance of the return of Charley took place. At last Maggs said, in a low tone—

"I don't much like this."

"Nor I—nor I," said some half dozen others.

"Mind you," said Muggs, "understand me. I don't mean for half a moment anything against Bill and Charley; but I can't help thinking that something may have happened to them, and in that case, you know, this isn't the nicest place in the world for us to stay in just now."

It was at this moment, when a general echo of the sentiments of Maggs came from the lips of the assembled throng, that the door of the hall through which Charley had passed opened, and he appeared.

The light was too dim and indifferent to permit of their seeing very well the expression of his face; but his manner was hurried and anxious, and before any questions could be put to him, he said—

"Their's only two of them, and they are getting over the wall."

"Who? Who?" cried everybody.

"Hush! Caution!" said Maggs.

In a moment all were still, and Charley was permitted to proceed with what he had to say to the assemblage.

"Two of the Bow-street lot," he added. "Bill heard 'em speaking on t'other side of the wall, and in course come and gave us an idea that something was up, you see; so that I soon got to where I heard 'em, too. By some means or another they have got upon the scent, and they fancy they have nothing to do but to walk in here and take everybody."

"Indeed?" said Maggs.

"Yes, that's their idea, I know it, for I heard them say as much."

CHAPTER CCXCVI.

THE DEATH AND THE BURIAL OF THE TWO POLICE SPIES.

It may appear at first sight strange, that two officers could be found who would be so apparently absurd as to say such a thing concerning an unknown number of men, that they would take them all into custody; but the history of police proceedings shows us, that, after all, it was by no means out of concurrence with ordinary practice.

It was a common thing for an officer to go alone into a thieves-house, as the public-houses they frequented were called, and from amid some thirty or forty of the profession, pull out one and inform him that he was wanted.

One would fancy it quite an incredible thing that the others, being in such force, would permit that one to be taken from amongst them all; but they did. A pair of handcuffs would be clapped upon the wrists of the wanted gentleman, and away he would go; and the mirth and jollity of the company, in the course of the next five minutes, would suffer no diminution on account of the little incident that had just taken place.

Such a proceeding, though, only took place among the ordinary depredators, and the officers had a much harder task when they fell in with such men as Claude Duval and his associates.

Upon the present occasion, too, there were some of the most determined spirits belonging to the family present, and as regarded Maggs, were he to be taken in such company, it would be as good as death to him.

Hence the information that Charley had brought caused a considerable sensation. It was a great thing, too, upon the part of the thieves, that their

particular haunts, such as the one they were now in, should not be discovered by the officers; therefore, this unexpected visit from the enemy was doubly vexatious.

Maggs spoke clearly and distinctly.

"Family men," he said. "There are too many of us to find hiding places



A MIDNIGHT CAROUSE OF THE "FAMILY" MEN.

here, and, if not, the officers are as good at that sort of fun as we are, so it's hopeless nonsense to attempt it. I can tell you for one, though, that I don't intend to be taken."

"Douce the glim, and we're then off," said one.

"Yes; but they know of the crib here, and it's all up with Charley," said another.

"Never mind me," said Charley. "Do the best you can for all, and never mind me."

"That is very kind of you, Charley," said Maggs; "but, after all, we can't very well do without you or the crib either. I hardly know what to advise, my men, for the best. I am rather in a fix about it."

"They have got scent of this place as a place of meeting," said one; "and, therefore, it's all up as regards coming here any more."

It was quite evident, now, that there was a great deal of indecision about the party to know what they could be at; but at length Maggs spoke with a tone of decision, saying,

"Charley, where is Bill? Will he give us any other notice?"

"Yes; when you hear him whistle twice, you may be sure that the officers are upon the premises. They were coming over the wall."

"Very well, there is but one chance, and that is, for us all to try and get away. It is quite possible, then, that Charley may bamboozle them into an idea that they have been mistaken after all, and if so, why, the place may be good for us yet."

Charley shook his head, and Maggs saw the action. "You don't think that will do?" he said.

"No, I don't; but—"

"Well, go on."

"There's one thing to consider, and that is, that these two fellows have most likely made the discovery themselves, and kept it to themselves, for they don't tell each other, fool-like, from a kind of jealousy that's always raging among 'em."

"That is true," said Maggs.

"And so," added Charely, "if anything should happen, you see, to these two—any little accident, you see, family coves—why, then, here we are all right again."

There was not a soul present who did not fully understand what the proposal of Charley amounted to. It was neither more nor less than a hint to murder the two officers. A blank silence ensued, and no one seemed to like to take the responsibility of making a remark upon the subject.

Then, before Maggs, who at length opened his mouth to speak, could say a word, there came one clear distinct whistle from the outside, and then, before its echoes had died away, there came another.

"There they are," said Charley.

"No doubt of it," said Maggs. "Now, comrades, don't do anything in a hasty way, but keep quiet, and let us find out who they are before we speak. Out with that light."

A hat was thrown at the candle, that burnt dimly between the horns of the stag's head, and away it went. One could hardly have supposed that the extinguishing of that little light could have made such a difference to the hall, but the sudden darkness was truly profound and black, and the difference between no light and a small light was found to be immense indeed.

"Hush," said Maggs, as some faint murmer of voices came upon his ears. "Hush. Let us all listen, not speak."

All was still, and so continued for the space of nearly five minutes, and then a voice from the garden called out most startlingly—

"Halloa! halloa! If there is any family man here, let him have the goodness to give a shelter to a couple of the right sort, We have had the grabs at our heels, and happened to see Joe the Kiddy go in here, so we thought it might be a family crib."

"What's the meaning o' that?" said Charley.

"A death warrant," said Maggs.

"A what?"

There was a commotion among the thieves at these words, pronounced clearly

and distinctly in the darkness, and then one said—"Listen to Maggs; he's going to *expiflicate* that ere to us."

"Go on, Maggs—go on."

"Comrades, I said, those words were a death warrant. I shouldn't like to shoot a man who came and said like a man, 'I'm an officer and must do my duty;' but when a fellow comes as a sneak"——

"Hear! Hear!"

"And a spy, and pretends to come among us—"

"Yes, yes, all's right."

"Then, I say, comrades, woe be to him, for by the laws of all nations he dies. Where is Joe the Kiddy?"

"Here, Mr. Maggs."

"Do you know anything of the fellow who just now spoke of you, Joe?"

"Not a jot. My idea is, that they have been on the watch, and have seen me come in here, and that they want to see all the faces present, and then they will take our measures nicely, and be down upon us next time we come here. I'm only a humble individual, and they call me Joe the Kiddy cos I wears a pair o' kid gloves in a crowd at the Opera, and nobody thinks as how I can pick a pocket with them on; but I have practised the dodge, and can come it famous, so, you see, Mr. Maggs, that's why the fellows call me Joe the Kiddy."

"Exactly," said Maggs. "Now my advice is, that we let these two fellows in, but in the dark mind you, and hear what they have to say."

"Agreed, agreed."

"Well, Charley, will you go and speak to them? Don't let them think for a moment but that we are quite as green as they can possibly wish us to be, and bring them into this room, and let them say their say. I'll speak to them."

"They will know your voice, Maggs, by seeing and hearing you so often at the stone-jug," said one.

"No thank you, I've got another voice always ready for such gentlemen," said Maggs, "as Charley knows well, don't you, Charley?"

"I do, and it got the better of me, I can tell you; and after that, if it don't do for a pair of the grabs, I'm a Dutchman, that's all."

At this moment the officers who were in the garden got impatient, and called out again—"Hilloa! it's all right, my coves, if there is any of the family here. We are of the right sort, and no mistake."

Charley hurried out to them, and so still did the thieves in the hall keep themselves that they heard quite distinctly every word that passed between Charley and the officers. The former, indeed, rather raised his voice, so that Maggs and his friends should have no difficulty in hearing what he said, and the officers, as people will do, took the tone of their voices from his, and spoke quite as loud.

"Who are you?" said Charley. "Where do you come from?"

"We are country hands," said the officer who was spokesman of the two; "we don't know much of the London family, but we are all right."

"Didn't you say you knew Joe the Kiddy?"

"Only by sight."

"Well, it's rather awkward. I don't know what to say to you. What line are you in?"

"A little of all sorts, but we do the footpad dodge when we can, although at times we crack a crib; and if nothing else turns up, we don't mind a little area sneaking, or we fumble with the fives, you see."

"Well, you seem to be the right sort, so come in, if you will; but I advise you both now, as I hear by the voices there's two on you, to be a little careful what you are about, for we will stand anything but nonsense here."

"We wouldn't deceive you for the world. If there's any one thing that we don't like more than another, it's a sneak."

"It's the same with us. Come this way. Can you see?"

"Not over well, but we can make our way by the sound of your voice, if you

will say a word or two now and then. It a precious rum unfortunate sort of night, and the rain is a coming down above a bit now."

"Yes, it is. This way, mind the step—it's just before you."

"D—n it!"

The step that Charley had alluded to, was a step down, but the officer naturally enough thought that it was a step up, and he lifted his foot, fully expecting to find it, but as it was not there, down he went as though some deep hole were before him. His first impression was that such was the fact, but he quickly recovered himself, and only got as far as "d—n it," in his rage. The other officer cried out—

"Stand off—stand off! I am armed!"

"Of course you are," said Charley; "you would make but a poor hand at your business, if you wasn't, old fellow; but what is the matter?"

"Oh, I thought—that is, I had an idea that my comrade had fallen down some place or another, that was all."

"It's no matter," said the other; "confound it, I thought you meant a step up instead of a step down. But I haven't broken any bones."

"Only a little shaken, I suppose?" said Charley. "Lor, bless you, these sort of things do a man more good than harm in the long run. Come on, there's no other step either up or down."

"I'm glad to hear it," said the officer.

Charley led the way direct to the hall, where there was a death-like stillness, and at once opening the door, he said in a loud voice—

"Family men, here are two from the country, they say. They don't call themselves any one thing more than another, in particular; but they turns their hands to any little thing that comes uppermost."

"Yes, it's all right," said one of the officers. "We are the true sort."

"That's a comfort," said a voice—it was the voice of Maggs, but so completely different from any voice the thieves present had ever heard him speak in, that a rather anxious whisper passed among them of "Who is that?"

"It's very dark here," said the officer.

"Very," added his companion.

"Well, it's likely to continue so," said Charley, "for all I know to the contrary."

"How so? What do you mean when you say that?"

"I just mean what I do say, that it's dark now and likely to continue so. It's our way, you see, to meet in the dark, and so we say our say to each other without any sort of trouble; but if you don't like it, you can be off again, you know."

"Oh, no—no; only, you see, as we are strangers and from the country, it would have been a great thing for us to have had the pleasure of looking at some of the London coves of the right sort. But of course it is all right enough, and as we are only visitors, we ought to be the last to make any complaints, so we are quite content, gentlemen."

"If," said Maggs, in his peculiar voice, "the strangers are anxious for a light, why, of course, they can have one. I suppose they know our custom?"

"What custom?"

"The search warrant, we call it. Whenever any one comes to us and says he is a family man, we don't doubt him for a moment, but four of us search him."

"Oh, indeed; but you said something about a light."

"I did. Charley, my boy, get us a light if these gentlemen wish it."

"Directly," said Charley, and he left the room. He was not gone above three minutes when they all saw the flash of a light, and there he stood in the entrance of the hall, holding a torch that blazed away at a good rate above his head. The scene in the great old hall was now strange and picturesque. The thieves were grouped about the place in such a way that scacely one of their faces was

visible, and Maggs still sat upon the chair that was on top of the table, but a half mask covered the whole of the upper part of his face.

"Well, now, are you satisfied?" said Maggs, in the same tone that had so puzzled the thieves. "Now you have a light."

"Yes; but—but——"

"But what?"

"We can see nobody."

"Why, what unreasonable men you must be. I thought you wanted to look at each other to make quite sure that neither of you was a spy and an officer of Bow Street in disguise. That was my idea."

These words were quite sufficient to convince the two officers that they were known, and in a moment they drew back to the door of the hall, and one of them took a short thick holster pistol from his breast-pocket, as he said—

"I am an officer, and I warn all here present that I am one who will stand no sort of nonsense. It was my duty to come here, and here I am. The man who makes the least question of resistance to me, that minute breathes his last!"

The positive boldness of such words as these from one man to no less than twenty, for a few moments had all the effect that the officers were accustomed to find resulted from the daring spirit in which they usually carried on their somewhat perilous profession.

CHAPTER CCXCVII.

DICK AND JACK GET NOTICE OF THE THIEVES' INTENTIONS REGARDING DUVAL.

UNDER ordinary circumstances, no doubt, the two officers would have managed to awe the assemblage of thieves sufficiently, at all events, to enable them to effect their own escape; but the circumstances then present were very far from ordinary, and those who were at the mansion felt that the very existence of one of their most secret and important places of meeting was at stake.

It was no uncommon thing for a Bow Street officer to go into a public-house, and with a pistol in his hand, pick out his man from amid thirty or forty of his companions; but that dodge, as Mr. Maggs called it, would not do there on any account.

It was Maggs who replied to the officer who had spoken so boldly to the assemblage.

"Well," he said, still speaking in that feigned voice which completely set at naught all ideas of detection—"well, what next?"

The others maintained a profound silence, and the officers thought that they really had it all their own way.

"We don't want any one in particular," said he who held the pistol in his hand; "but we know where to light upon a snug party of the family when we do want any one. Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" echoed the other officer. "Come along, Bill."

"Yes, that's all very funny," said Maggs; "but what if we say No to your going?"

"Do you say it?"

"Well, I'm thinking of it."

"Who are you, then? Only tell me that, and I'll pop a pair of darbies on you like a flash of lightning, and take you to the nearest cage."

"You are a bold speaker," said Maggs.

"You are a bold performer, too. My name is Godfrey."

"Oh, I know that. I have often met you in Newgate. My name is Maggs."

As he spoke, Maggs took off his mask and sat quite composedly upon his chair upon the table, fully revealed to the sight of the two officers, who were as much astonished as if some apparition of some one whom they knew to be with the dead had risen up before their eyes.

A suppressed kind of murmur, like the drawing of a long breath among the thieves, might now be heard, for they all felt how completely Maggs was committing himself by this bold act, and they knew that he was not the likely man to do so without an object.

The officers glanced at each other, and then at Maggs again, in whose identity they seemed hardly able to believe.

"Is it possible?" said one.

"Quite possible," replied Maggs, in his natural tone, which startled them still more.

"Are you Maggs, the trusted odd man of Newgate?"

"Just so—the trusted odd man of Newgate—the extra——"

"The confidential supernumerary of the sheriff?"

"The confidential supernumerary of the sheriff!" repeated Maggs, with all the calmness in the world, as though nothing particular were amiss.

"And yet you are here?"

"And yet I am here."

"The companion—nay, the leader and the captain of this gang of the family of London."

"The companion—nay, the leader and the captain of this gang of the family of London," responded Maggs, with an imitation of the voice of the officer that produced a laugh among the thieves.

"Then may I be—Well, never mind that. There's no occasion to swear about it; but I'll have you in Newgate to-night, or I will know some better reason why than I do at present. Come along, Jenkins. We will take this fellow with us, at all events."

"Beware!" said Maggs, drawing his right hand from his breast, where it had been hidden, and showing that in it he held a double-barrelled pistol. "Beware I say, Mr. Godfrey; you are a bold man, but it won't go down here."

"Won't it? I summon you to surrender, Maggs."

"I decline."

"Take that, then"

Bang went the officer's pistol at the head of Maggs. Through the smoke the shot was returned, and with a shriek Godfrey, the officer, sprang up into the air, and then fell a corpse with a bullet in his brain.

The other officer made an ineffectual attempt to escape; but the sound of the shots seemed to have awakened any slumbering wild or angry passion in the breasts of the thieves. With a yell and a rush they threw themselves upon him, before he could take aim with the pistol that he had hastily produced, and he fell with his skull broken in, and his face covered with blood, by the side of his companion, to the floor of the room.

"Hold!" cried Maggs, as he stood up to his full height upon the top of the table. "Hush!—hush!"

The shout of triumph that had been half raised by the thieves, died away to a strange moaning sound, and then all was still.

"Hold, I say," added Maggs. "Are they dead?"

"Dead enough," said a voice.

"Dead as dust," said Charley.

There was, now, a pause of a moment or two's duration, and then Maggs proceeded, in a clear, distinct voice, to speak.

"Comrades," he said, "the world and the law will call this murder! Let us understand that quite clearly; but, thank God, they fired the first shot. They might or they might not have got else off, if they had behaved a little differently, but they tried to carry off the thing with a high hand, and it wouldn't do."

"No, it wouldn't do."

"Of course it wouldn't. The fellow fired at me. He had his chance, and I didn't flinch from the shot. It was my turn then, and there he is. Do you call this murder?"

"No—no—no!"

"Nor do I. They were spies, too, and, by all the laws that ever were, they deserved the death they have come by. But we did not kill them on that account. They were mad enough to suppose that they could come here and just, at the mere suggestion of their business, shoot whom they pleased. Are we brute beasts that we are to put up with that sort of thing? What sort of men did they suppose we were that from our fellow-men, just because they are called constables, we should put up with slaughter or imprisonment at their discretion?"

"Down with them, and all like them!"

"They are down enough, now," said Charley. "But, I say, Maggs, old boy, you have not come off scot-free, after all; you are covered with blood, and here it is running down you on to the table."

"That is nothing," said Maggs. "Godfrey was a pretty fair shot, and the only chance I had was that I was above his aim, rather; so, you see, the bullet just passed through my cheek, and a wound in the face is sure to bleed well. Give us a drop of cold water, Charley."

"Ay, that I will, Maggs. Never mind, old fellow, if you have got a scratch you went in and won, you know."

"He did!—he did!" cried the others. "A cheer for Maggs."

"No—no," said Maggs, "silence. We have still something to do. This is a bad and awkward job, to say the best of it, and it ain't over yet."

"Ain't it?" said one, as he touched the dead body of Godfrey with his foot. "It's over with this one, I rather think."

"And the t'other one, too," growled a herculean man, who had dealt with a small crow-bar the blow to Godfrey's companion that had stretched him dead by the side of his comrade. "I heerd his noddle go scrunch!"

"I don't mean with them," said Maggs; "but I mean that we have something yet to do. We must put them under ground, and that quickly too; and everything that belongs to them must go in the grave with them. We have then our secret in our own keeping, and if we blab it is our own look out."

"Yes—yes; bury them," said several. "We will soon manage that—Here's Charley with the water, Maggs."

Without another word, now, Maggs descended from the table and well washed the wound in his cheek, and then he wrapped a towel round it as well as he could so as to leave his mouth free, for the wound was in a very awkward place for bandaging at all.

The thieves watched him in silence until he had, with the assistance of Charley, completed the bandaging of his wounded face. It was quite evident that they looked entirely to him for directions what to do under the peculiar circumstances in which they were placed, and no one made the least movement to interfere with the dead bodies of the officers till he gave the word. It was in an odd muffled voice then that Maggs addressed his companions, for he found that if he spoke freely, the wound in his cheek bled sympathetically, and he already felt rather weakened by the excessive hermorage that had taken place.

They all listened to his words as though they were uttered by some oracle whose behests there was no such thing as gainsaying, and who was certain to advise its disciples to the best.

"I don't think," began Maggs—"I may, of course, be wrong; but, I say, I don't think it at all likely that anybody but ourselves has the least idea that these two men are here. It isn't the fashion of your regular Bow Street men to say much about the expeditions. If one hits upon what he thinks may turn out a good thing, he may tell another for the sake of having strength with him and companionship; but they will neither of them let it go any further; therefore, my idea is, that these two fellows will be just missed, and that's all."

The thieves nodded their acquiescence in this opinion.

"All we have to do, then," added Maggs, "is to put them out of sight as soon as we can, and then this old crib remains as good as ever to us, and, perhaps, better, for it may be a good while before there's another hand as keen as Godfrey to come prying about it."

"True, true enough that," said several.

"Charley, my boy, you know the garden well."

"Rather," said Charley; "and I can tell you of a nice place to put 'em. I wonder now if Bow Street officers is good manure for gooseberry-bushes?"

"For what?"

"Gooseberry-bushes, Mr. Maggs, 'cos the very best thing to do is to pop 'em both in the kitchen-garden, and rake 'em nice and smooth over, and pop in some slips of gooseberry-bushes over 'em, you see, and then the whole affair will look as natural as blazes."

What Charley meant precisely by a place looking as natural as blazes, it is rather hard to say, except that it was his mode of expressing the very height and acme of the natural, and so we must take it.

"Come on, then," said Maggs. "Let us set to work. I'm afraid I can only look on, for if I exert myself much I shall bleed to death. I am weakened enough as it is, but I will stay here, my lads, and see all snug."

"No—no," said one, "you go to town, Maggs, and see to your wound. We will take care that everything is right here."

"I couldn't do it," said Maggs. "I must see and know that nothing is left amiss, or I should feel too anxious for rest. It won't be a long job, though. Come on! There is not a window in the parish that looks into the garden of this house, that I know for a fact, so we can use lanterns to the work. Come on, Charley. There are four spades and a pick-axe or two, which will get through the work quickly."

"That's your sort," said Charley, "it's all right. Come this way!"

"One thing let me beg of you all to recollect," said Maggs, "and that is, silence. We may be free from eye, but we don't know how near some ear may be to us."

They now, with almost noiseless steps, and only making now and then a few short observations to each other in a whisper, proceeded to the garden after Charley. The rain was still coming down, but it came nearly straight, and had subsided into one of those small misty kinds of rain, which, when once set in, seem as if they would last for ever.

The thieves waited upon the grass-plat while Charley went to the kitchen for a couple of stable lanterns, with which he soon re-appeared. He then spread the tools that Maggs had mentioned, and in silence he led the way to the kitchen-garden.

"There," he said, "the ground is loose enough already, and there won't be much trouble about the job."

He proceeded to a large, and apparently well dug up bed, and placed the lanterns about six feet apart from each other.

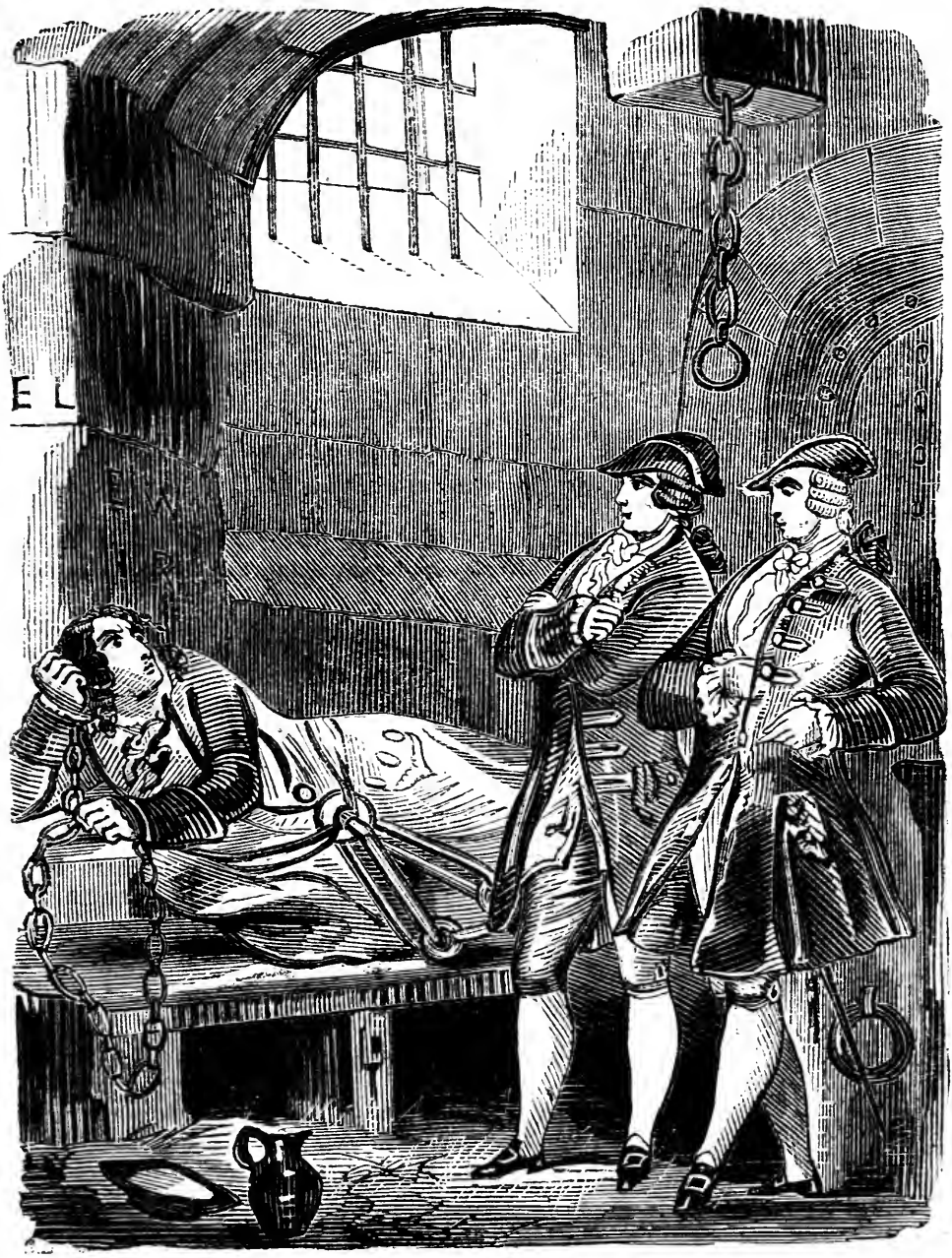
"There," he said, "that will be the spot, and the best thing to do is to carry every shovelful of earth away for some time, and scatter it over the garden, for there will be lots to cover them up with."

"Yes, Charley, that's it."

It was a strange and awful-looking scene now that was being enacted in that garden amid the pattering of the rain. The space of ground did not admit of more than three persons working on it at once, one with the pick-axe, with which the soil was loosened in masses, and the other two with spades, by the aid of which they quickly moved it; but by turns, every one present, except Maggs, had a share of the labour, for they relieved each other at it.

In this way a grave, somewhat over six feet in length, and about three in width, began rapidly to appear, and by the constant fresh hands that were brought to bear upon it, they soon got it to about five feet in depth. They

began then to find that each shovelful of earth they took out was replaced by an equal volume of water from some spring that they had touched upon, or from mere ground drainage.



CLAUDE HAS TWO UNEXPECTED VISITORS TO HIM IN NEWGATE.

"This will do," said Charley, as he threw down his spade. "We are deep enough. And now for the bodies."

"Yes," said Maggs, as he lifted one of the lanterns. "Now for the bodies. Who will go and get them? Don't speak all at once."

CHAPTER CCXCVIII.

SHOWS HOW TURPIN AND JACK PROCEEDED TO DO SOMETHING FOR CLAUDE DUVAL.

THIS was a part of the business from which the thieves shrunk back rather, and the tone of irony in which Maggs spoke was a result of his conviction that they would so shrink from that part of the job.

Nobody moved or spoke.

"Come. old friends," added Maggs, "I can answer myself for it that you are not at all afraid of a live officer. Don't let me think that you are afraid of a dead one."

"It's an ugly job," said one now, in a low tone, "but still, we all know that it must be done, so I won't shrink from it, for one."

"Nor I," said another.

"I will go with you," said Maggs, "so let us come on at once, old friends, and we shall soon have this part of the business over."

After it was found that Maggs intended to be of the party that was going for the bodies, there was no lack of volunteers, but Maggs said, with a good-tempered smile—

"No—no. Two will do, or four, at the outside—perhaps four will be better, as then they can be brought both at once, and that will save some trouble, certainly, so come on, four of you."

Maggs and Charley led the way. The latter carried one of the lanterns, and so they proceeded to the large hall, where the strife had taken place that had ended in the tragical death of the two officers who had thought proper to run the fearful risk of coming in the character of spies to the thieves' haunt.

Charley held up the light, and its rays fell upon the sickening spectacle below. The thieves again shrunk back with shudders; but Maggs, who saw this hesitation, and who knew how valuable time was in such a case, cried out—

"Up with them at once, my lads. It's like taking physic, this is. The sooner you get it over the better. Up with them."

Thus urged, the members of the "family," who would not at all have been particular about what they did in vice or daring, but who by no means liked to have anything to do with the dead, picked up the two bodies, and in silence followed Charley, while Maggs brought up the rear.

Those who were around the grave soon saw the others approaching with their ghastly burthens, and they moved aside as they came near.

"Pitch 'em in," said Charley.

With a heavy fall, the first body was cast into the grave.

"Now, the other."

Dash went the second; but they lay rather awkwardly, occupying much more room than as if they had been more carefully placed in that narrow and last home of theirs. Maggs pointed this out, saying—

"Will nobody go down and put them straight? I am afraid to jump it for fear of my wound breaking out afresh; but if nobody else will, why, I must."

"No," said Charley, "you be quiet, Maggs, or you will bleed to death. I'll do it."

They all looked at Charley with interest as he sprang down into the grave upon the bodies, and began to kick them straight. A few seconds completed that part of the job, and then he scrambled out.

"All's right. Fill in."

The thieves showed no lack of diligence, truly, in setting about that part of the work. The idea that they were once and for ever getting rid of a spectacle they none of them liked to look upon, inspired them with strength, and in the course of three minutes the grave was nearly level.

"Stamp it down," said Maggs. "Stamp it down, or upon the first rains that get through it you will have it all settling and sinking."

"Yes," said Charley, "and that wouldn't be so pleasant for me, as I stay here, if any one should choose to take any notice of it."

Some six or eight of them now stamped upon the fresh placed earth in the grave, and naturally reduced its height. More mould was then thrown upon the top of that, and then they stamped again, until even Charley was tolerably satisfied, and he said—

"Don't trouble yourselves any further. I'll plant the gooseberry bushes in the morning, and then the place will look as natural as possible."

"Then the job is over," said Maggs.

"Over quite," said the others; and then they stood in a throng by the side of the grave of the two officers. It was by no means the policy of Maggs, who had taken the initiative in this business, to allow the thieves just then any time for reflection; so he spoke at once about yet what was to be done.

"Attend to me, now, family men," he said. "What we want all of us is to find out where Dick Turpin and Sixteen string Jack are to be found, for if anything is to be done of much good for Claude Duval, they are the fellows to help us. Now I do think that if some half-dozen of you were to set about looking for them in earnest, they would surely be found."

"Oh, yes," said one. "If you, Maggs, will provide the horses, we will set off; but you know it would be a twelvemonth's job at the least to try it on foot."

"It would be more than that, ftiends, for I don't think you would ever come up with either of them in that way. I will give you every one to the extent of six a note to old Peter at the Bull Inn near Smithfield, and he will provide a horse for the love of it."

"I will go, Maggs," cried one. "And I—and I—I, too."

"Stop! Don't any of you try it that ain't a good horseman, for if you do you will just get into a scrape, and perhaps spoil old Peter's nags."

Several shrunk back upon this statement; but Maggs knew them all well, and had soon picked out six upon whom he knew he could depend quite well, and to them he gave the necessary order for horses.

"And now," he said, "I, for one, must bid you good-by, Charley, and the sooner you be off the better, I think, for it ain't very far off morning."

"Yes—yes, let us go."

"Go easy, though, and not all at once. You know where we meet again, and let me beg of you all to be something more than cautious now about this place, for after what has happened, we don't know what may happen. Good luck to you all, and good night."

The thieves were all soon gone, but Maggs managed to remain behind till the last, and then, placing his great rough hand upon the shoulder of Charley, he said—

"I say, old fellow, you won't like this crib now?"

Charley did not reply for a few moments, and when he did, it was rather in a confused tone that he said—

"I don't know, Maggs, that I should care to say as much to any one but you; but the truth is, I shouldn't like it."

"It is not natural that you should, old fellow; but all I ask of you is, to stay till this affair of Claude Duval is put into some sort of tune, and then I should say, 'pack up and be off at once;' but do stay till then, Charley."

"I will stay as long as you like. I daresay it's likely enough that at times, at night, mind you, when the wind is a howling, and the rain is pattering down, I may think of them two poor devils as lays yonder, so still and quiet now; but if I do, Maggs, I know better all the while, and when the sunshine comes again in the morning, and I see that it shines all the same on their graves as anywhere else, I shall laugh at myself for a fool for thinking anything of it."

"Never you mind that, Charley. It's natural you shouldn't like it, so depend

upon me, old fellow, and I'll find you another crib before long. I tell you, Charley, I shouldn't like it myself, so how can I expect anyone else to do so?"

"You are a good fellow, Maggs, and I am obliged to you."

"Don't mention it. Good-night, now."

Charley held open the door in the garden-wall, and watched the retreating figure of Maggs, as it went through the darkness, until it was completely lost to him, and then, as he closed the door, he shaded his eyes with his hands, and looked round him as he never before had looked in that place.

He paused, and blew a shrill whistle by the aid of his fingers. It was soon answered, and then Bill stood before him.

"Well, father, it's all right, I suppose?" said Bill.

"Oh, very likely. Go to roost, Bill."

"Yes, I'm a going. Did they cook the goose of them nabs, father?"

"What?"

"I say, did they settle the hash of them fellows—eh?"

"Go to bed and don't ask such questions. Hark you, Bill. There's some things that the less you happen to know about the better for you, so don't you be too inquisitive now, old fellow."

"Well, but I only——"

"Be off, will you?"

Bill made a precipitate retreat, and then Charley, as he took his way to the kitchen, muttered to himself—

"Confound it, I shall be pestered by his curiosity now, I suppose, night and day. No, Maggs is right, I shall never like it. No—never."

Leaving Mr. Charley, now, to his own reflections, we will follow Maggs to London, whither he intended to walk on foot; for it was one of his maxims, whenever he was upon any secret expedition, to trust much rather to his own speed, than to make evidence of his having been upon any particular road, of the drivers of vehicles, whether public or private.

To be sure, in the Edgeward-road, for Maggs went home by Kilburn, he got a lift at the back of a carriage for a mile or two, before he was observed by the footman, in the rumble, and that saved him considerably.

It was about five o'clock in the morning when Maggs, looking as calm and cool as possible, and wearing rather a stolid, stupid look upon his face, ascended the steps of Newgate, and tapped at the wicket.

"Hilloa!" cried the half asleep turnkey, who was "on the look." "Hilloa! who's there? Mind, no tobacco or spirits to be brought into the prison."

"It's only me," said Maggs, in a mild tone.

"Oh, Maggs?"

"Yes, Mr. Moss, it's only me; but I'll come again if you thinks it's too soon, sir, only I thought I might be wanted, you see, so I thought I would tap at the wicket."

"Oh, ah, it's all right. Come in."

"Thank you."

"Oh, don't mention it; we are always glad to see you, you know, 'cos, arter all, you are a good-tempered chap."

"I tries to do my best," said Maggs, as he slipped through to wicket, which the turnkey just held open wide enough to an inch to let him in. "I always does all I can to oblige the authorities, Mr. Moss."

"So you do, Maggs. So you do. I say, old fellow."

"Yes, Mr. Moss?"

"Just step over the way and get a pot of half-and-half. I'm as thirsty as a coalheaver, I am, and there's nobody, you know, that one can trust to get it but you."

"Don't mention it, Mr. Moss. I'm only too happy to be of any service to a gentleman like you, you know. I'll go at once."

"Thank you. Don't hurry, now I know what a fellow you are when you

are going an errand for anybody. You are so glad to do it, you are half ready to break your neck."

"Oh, no—no. I will take care. You like it with old ale?"

"I do—I do."

Maggs went over the way for the beer, and the turnkey shaking his head as he looked after him through the spikes at the top of the wicket-gate, said—

"He's the best tempered fellow as ever I came near, though he is a little soft. Lor, I don't know what he'd do if it wasn't for old Newgate. I do think he's attached to the very stones at the door, and if he isn't so bright as some folks, why, he's as faithful as an old mastiff dog, is Maggs, that he is; and here he comes with the half-and-half, a carrying of it as steady, so as there should be as good a head on it as ever was. Come in."

"All right, Mr. Moss. It's the oldest ale."

"Drink, Maggs."

"No, Mr. Moss, arter you, sir, is manners."

"Well, here's luck."

The turnkey did leave about a wine glass of half-and-half at the bottom of the pot for his worthy and esteemed friend, Maggs; but the latter drank it with quite a look of satisfied humility, and the turnkey stamped upon the stone pavement as though he would prettle the liquor in his stomach properly by so doing, as he said—

"By gosh, it's prime, that."

"Very good, sir."

"I say, Maggs, old boy—why—what's the matter with your face? You have got it tied up, old fellow."

"Ah, I do think as it was some of those horrid family coves, as they call themselves, that did that. I was just passing the end of Field Lane, when out came a couple of fellows, and one of 'em made a cut at me with something, and laid my cheek open, as you see it. I daresay, Mr. Moss, now, they knew as I came to the prison here, and did all I could for such gentlemen as you."

"I shouldn't wonder. It's a confounded shame, though; but my mind has been a little bit disturbed or so, Maggs, by a something that has happened here only about half an hour ago."

"Indeed, Mr. Moss, it would need to be something particular to disturb such a mind as you have, sir."

"Well, my good fellow, perhaps you are right there, and I will say, Maggs, that for real downright good judgment, at times, you beat any one that I ever heard of; but I'll just tell you."

"Do, Mr. Moss—oh do, sir."

"Well, I was sitting on this here chair a thinking of nothing at all, but I wasn't asleep—mind you, I never go to sleep while I am on the lock."

"You couldn't, Mr. Moss, cos it's contrary to the rules."

"Just so," said Moss, with a slight smile of pity for the simplicity of his friend Maggs. "Just so, as you say, I couldn't, for it's contrary to the rules. Well, here I was, wide awake, when some one came bang up the steps as if he owned all Newgate, and giving such a rattle at the wicket, that it was nigh enough to have it down, he cried out—

"'Hilloa, turnkey!—You fellow, th ere!'

"'Yes, sir,' says I, a running up to the wicket, for I thought, to be sure, it was some great man or another. 'Yes, sir,' says I.

"'How is Claude Duval?' he cried.

"'Better, sir,' says I.

"'Oh, very well, d—n you!' says he, and away he went, leaving me a staring like a stuck pig, and afore I could think of sending anybody to nab him, he was off, and out of all sight and hearing. Now, what do you think of that, Maggs?"

"I don't know what to think. If you can't think what it was, Mr. Moss, it ain't at all likely that I should."

"Well, there's something in that; but I'm regularly bothered by it, it was so cool. Well, it's no use plaguing oneself. Just step over the way, and get another pot, Maggs."

CHAPTER CCXCIX.

RETURNS TO DICK TURPIN AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK IN THE PARK AT GREENWICH.

While all these things were going on in London, Claude Duval being in his gloomy cell in Newgate, and Mr. Maggs doing all that was in his power to work out his release, Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack were by no means idle.

It will be recollected that we left them in no very enviable position in the old park at Greenwich, where, if they had not in so strange and unexpected a manner overheard sufficient to convince them that they where in great danger from the treachery of the inn-porter, they would in all likelihood have fallen into the snare laid for them by that foolish individual.

Foolish he was, in every sense of the word, for in the first place, it is foolish to break faith with any one; and in the second place, he was foolish, even viewing the affair solely as regarded what he might get by it, and throwing all common feeling and honour overboard, for he would have got double and treble from Turpin and Jack, than ever he could hope to wrest from the cupidity of the officers, who would, of course, grudge him every penny-piece that he might take from them, even if the plan to apprehend Jack and Dick had been successful, of which the officers themselves could not help entertaining the gravest doubts.

When the fortunate discovery that the two adventurers made, assured them that they were all but caught in a trap, their first idea was not to leave the spot until they had taken some revenge upon the inn-porter.

"Jack," said Dick Turpin in a whisper. "Let us get back again the way we came, and be off at once."

"But that rascal?"

"Yes, we know that he is a rascal, but what can we do? You see, or rather you know without seeing, that the Philistines are in force about this spot, and you know that we have no chance with such a mob of them."

"No; and yet——"

"Yes, I know what you would say, it is a hard thing to let that rascal off, and I admit that it is; but of all things that keep well, Jack, command me to revenge, which, as long as you like to take care of it, never turns mouldy or sour."

"There is truth in that. Come on."

They surmounted the wall again, and were well pleased when they found their horses quite safe under its shadow. To tighten the girths, and to mount, was the work of a few moments, and then they lingered a little, and listened, for they could now hear plainly the tramp of horses feet upon the heath.

"By George! they have got some mounted men from Woolwich, I'd lay any money," said Dick.

"Then come—we have no time to lose."

"Not a moment. This way, Jack."

Dick was well enough acquainted with the heath, and he struck off to the right, keeping well under the shadow of the park wall. That is to say, supposing their foes to be to the wall, they went then to the right, which took them through the valley at the base of Shooter's Hill.

A quarter of an hour's riding brought them out by the river side, at some distance below Greenwich, but it was a very wild and desolate-looking spot of ground that they debouched upon. The river lay glistening before them, lazily heaving to and fro, looking thick and slimy, as it was just beginning only to feel

the influence of the rising tide. On the opposite shore they could see a few dim lights, that seemed as vapours flitting there, and as they varied in intensity to be going out and in each passing moment. A keen whistling wind was blowing.

"Not a very comfortable prospect this, Jack," said Turpin.

"Far from it. Do you know the route by the river side?"

"Why, yes, I do, but I am thinking, as it leads direct into Greenwich, that it won't be the best for us to take Oh! if we could only get across the water now, Jack."

"Impossible."

"Nay, nothing is impossible of that kind. The only difficulty will be to get a craft that will hold the cattle."

"That is what I mean Dick, when, I say it is impossible. You don't think that a wherry would answer the purpose, do you, and you don't think of swimming the river, I suppose?"

"Neither, Jack; and yet I think there is a chance. You see, it is high water, and, in fact, it is only just on the turn. There then lies my hope of getting across; and now tell me if you see anything black about half-way between here and the middle of the stream?"

"Yes, a barge of some sort."

"Very good. There is generally but one man on board the Thames barges, or a man and a boy at most, so there will not be many people to pay, you see, and I don't think there will be any great difficulty in getting the horses on board."

"Well, if it can be done—"

"We will see.—Hilloa—boat here—boat!'

"Here you are, sir," said a waterman springing up from Heaven only knows where in a moment.

Dick dismounted, and whispered to Jack to hold his horse, and then turning to the man, he said,

"Can you row me to that barge out yonder?"

"Yes, sir, surely."

"Very well, do so; I will pay you as if it were for a large job."

Jack said nothing, but he could not think it possible that Dick Turpin should succeed in getting across the river with two horses. He did not fully estimate the magic power of gold, though, for in the course of five or six minutes Dick came back to him, and said, laughingly—

"He will do it. The waterman will help him, and he will pull the barge in, as it is high water, close enough for us to jump on board with the horses. If we had not the command of our cattle as we have, I don't mean to say it would be possible, but we can do it."

"Well done, Dick; it will be no bad thing, certainly, to place the Thames between us and certain parties."

"A capital thing. But here they are."

The barge lazily made its way by the aid of its long sweeps close enough to the bank, and then the man on board lit a lantern, as he called out—

"All's right, gentlemen. I suppose it's a lark or a wager of some sort; but I'll put you on shore, if your horses will do it."

"Put out the light, then," said Dick, "they won't jump towards the light."

"Very good, sir."

The lantern was at once extinguished, and then Dick said—

"It's loaded with potatoes, the barge, Jack, and there will be a good foothold for the cattle on the sacks. Don't jump till I tell you."

"No, I will manage all right."

The leap was nothing, but Dick turned his horse and took the whole breadth of the road-way first, and then just lifting him by the bridle, and giving a touch with the spur, the creature cleared the space easily and lit upon the potato sacks.

"Bravo!" cried the bargeman.

"Bray-vo!" sung out a little boy of about six years old, who was on board. "Bray——"

"Hold your row, will you?" said the man, throwing a potato at him.

"Now, Jack," cried Dick, "all's clear."

In another moment Jack was on board. His horse stumbled a little upon the potatoes, but quickly recovered, and both he and Dick then dismounted, and held the creatures by the head, and patted them into high good humour.

"Now off with you," said Dick to the bargeman, as he slipped a guinea into the hands of the waterman, who was highly delighted with his remuneration for such a little job, which altogether had not taken up ten minutes.

The barge lazily swept out into the river again, and the man in a voice of great deference, said—

"Land you where you likes, gentlemen; opposite or further on; it's just as you likes to say, gentlemen."

"All we want is to get across," said Dick, "so you can land us at any spot that is most convenient to yourself."

"Very good, sir."

The barge made a diagonal progress across the stream, and it must be recollected that the Thames was in a very different condition then to what it is now. There were no steamers to render the river-highway troublesome and intricate, nor were the banks so lined with buildings for the purposes of trade as they are now; therefore, it was much easier to perform such a feat as that performed by Dick Turpin and Jack upon the night in question, than it would be to do so at the present time.

There was a little wooden quay that jutted out into the water a short distance, and the bargeman pointing it out, observed, that if he just put his barge alongside of it, it would be the easiest thing in the world for the gentlemen to walk their horses on shore.

That will do, my good fellow," said Dick; "pull into there, and as we shall soon be on shore, there is your five guineas for the job."

"Many thanks to your honours. This here money will make me and my wife and little 'un a deal more comfortable this winter as is coming, than we should have been; so long life and good luck to you."

"Thank you."

The barge shot very gently alongside the old quay, and in a minute both Dick and Jack were on shore.

"This is well done," said Jack, "I admit. Good night to you, Mr. Bargeman, and it will be just as well that you say nothing about this little affair to any one."

"Not a word, sir. Lord bless you, sir, my master would set to abusing a fellow like a maniac if he know'd it. Good night to you both for a couple of real gents as you is."

Dick laughed.

"Oh, gold—gold," he said, "is it any wonder that men cheat, and swindle and cringe, and lie, and rob for you, when you are such an enchanter that a few bright pieces of your precious substance wins all hearts!"

"And creates a couple of highwaymen," said Jack, laughing "into two real gents."

"Just so. But how the deuce are we to get out of this?"

Jack whistled and then laughed again, for a brief glance at their position now showed them that they were in a sort of yard, enclosed on the two sides, with the river one way and a pair of great gates the other, so that they were completely shut in.

"Here's a fix," said Dick.

"A regular man-trap," said Jack. "You don't think this is a regular sell of our friend the bargeman?"

"Oh, no—no; and yet—"

"Yet, you don't know what to think?"

"No, I was not going to say that; I was going to add, that surely there could



JADK AND DICK'S DESPERATE ENCOUNTER WITH THE POLICE OFFICERS.

not be much difficulty in getting out. Let us try it. There is a way in here, and, consequently, there must be a way out, for everybody don't come here by the Thames, you may depend."

"No, but there may be some chance against letting us out. This is a timber-yard, Dick, don't you see?"

They both rode forward through the yard, which was about a hundred feet in length, till they came to the two great gates, and then, through the chink left by their point of closing, they could plainly see a light shining. What that light meant, or whether it was in a street or leading to some private dwelling, they had no possible means of knowing. Dick here dismounted, and tried the gates, but they were evidently fast on the other side.

"Be careful, Dick," said Jack.

"Oh, yes, but we can't stay here, you know."

As he spoke, Dick gave the gate a couple of kicks, that made it shake again, and then a terrified voice called out from the other side—

"Murder and turf! what's that I see? Oh, bedad, I see nothing, but I mean hear it? Murder, what is it?"

"Open the gate."

"Is it the gate?"

"Open the gate, fellow."

"Oh, then, by the holy poker, it's a ghost of somebody ye is, surely!"

"No, it's all right; open the gate at once, or it will be worse for you."

"Worse for me, is it? I will, then; it can't be much worse for me than being a private watchman here, and only getting seven shillings a week and no perquisites from that same, any way."

"Well, here's a guinea for you; but you seem as if you didn't care about it by your keeping the gate between you."

"Is it a guinea? Then, murder! the gate shall not stand in the way, any how; and here it goes, bedad."

The gate swung on its heavy hinges, and the Irish watchman lifted up his lantern, and when he saw two mounted men, his mouth and eyes opened to such alarming widths, that it seemed very unlikely that they would ever close again.

"Well, what's the matter now?" said Dick. "Do you take us for a couple of ghosts?"

"Ghosts, is it, sir, you said?"

"Yes, stupid. What do you take us for?"

"Oh, bedad, then, did you come out of the river? or did you drop from the moon?"

Dick placed a guinea in the hand of the watchman, and said to him, with great solemnity of manner—

"A silent tongue shows a wise head. Good night."

"Eh?"

"Good night."

"A Y Z, did you say? A silent tongue and A Y Z? But murder and turf, where did you come from?"

Dick laughed, and put his horse to a trot, and Jack followed him. They heard a large bell begin to ring, and then they quickened their pace, and were soon a couple of miles from the wharf by the river side. It was Jack who drew rein just as they heard a clock strike four, and said—

"Dick, I have a fancy to call at Newgate."

"Call at Newgate? You are joking, Jack?"

"No. I think I should like to call and see how Claude Duval is. I am weary, and want some rest. We can put up our horses after that, you know, at the old place, where we shall be quite safe, in Barbican. But I feel as if I couldn't sleep a wink till I know that Claude is better."

"But, Jack, when you talk of visiting Newgate—Really, now——"

"I know what you would say. You think it a mad-headed plan, and that I must be out of my mind to dream of it; but nothing is easier. There will be only one man on the lock at the wicket gate, and if any one goes up to him suddenly with a bounce, he will be as civil as possible. You can wait for me at the corner of Newgate Street; for, of course, I will go on foot. I assure you, Dick, there is no danger in it whatever, and it may easily be done."

"If there were danger, Jack, you know, I am not exactly the fellow to shrink from any little enterprise on that account; but as you put it, I don't suppose there is any danger. The safety of these kind of things lies all in the way they are done."

"Just so, Dick. To hesitate, is to be lost."

"I know it. Will you let me do it?"

"Don't ask me, Dick, old fellow. I feel pretty sure that I can manage it, because my whole heart and soul are wrapt up in Claude's safety. I admit that my nerves are shaken, and that, under ordinary circumstances, you could do such a thing much better than I; but now the strong motive gives me power."

"Very good, Jack. Be it so."

They now rode on at a slashing pace to London, and it was in reality Jack who had so audaciously mounted the steps of Newgate, and asked the turnkey who was on duty, how Duval was.

It will be remembered that the turnkey had informed Maggs of the encounter, and Maggs, who at once guessed that it was either Jack or Turpin, felt very much vexed that he had not reached the prison a little sooner, for in that case he would have been able to tell which of them it was, and what was doing for Claude Duval.

CHAPTER CCC.

DICK AND JACK PUT UP AT THE OLD PUNCH BOWL IN BARBICAN.

Somewhat encouraged by the answer that the turnkey at the gate of Newgate had given to the inquiry concerning Claude Duval, Jack had joined Turpin at the corner of Newgate Street at once, and they both trotted towards Smithfield at a smart pace.

"He is better," said Jack.

"Glad to hear it," replied Dick. "You feel all the better, in consequence, don't you, Jack?"

"Indeed, I do."

"I thought you would; and now what you want, old fellow, is rest. I know that you will be much more efficient after a good ten or twelve hours' sleep than you can possibly be now, and although I know that I can do without rest as well as most men, yet I feel as if a good snooze would be rather a glorious thing."

"There is truth in what you say, Dick. I am quite willing to put up at the old quarters, in Barbican. I feel that nothing can be done for Claude just now, and with the conviction that he is better, which I suppose, after all, means that he is not dead, I will try to be content for a little time, at least; so let us push on."

A very few minutes sufficed now to take them across Smithfield, and then rapidly crossing Aldersgate Street, they made their way to Barbican, and drew rein at the low doorway of a public-house, adjoining to which was a livery stable.

"We both of us know this old crib well enough," said Dick, as he dismounted. "You have been here too often, I suppose?"

"Yes, Dick, often enough before you were thought of on the road."

"Like enough—like enough, Jack. Where the deuce is the bell? Oh, it is here. Ali's right! It is so covered with mud that I began to think it had gone, and that the old shop had got into other hands."

Dick Turpin had been feeling under the ledge made by the front of the old wooden step of the ancient doorway, and there at last he found a square piece of metal let into the wood-work, which, upon being smartly pressed, he knew rang a private bell that was in the bed-room of the landlord.

The bell, and the mode of ringing it, was only known to those who were in the thorough confidence of the landlord, and it was an understood thing there when it was rang he should attend to it immediately.

Three minutes had not elapsed when a voice, through a little wicket in the great door, that was about six inches wide, said—

"What is the caper?"

"Turpin," said Dick. "That's you, Ben, ain't it?"

"Rather. Come in, old fellow. Ha! who is with you?"

"Look at him."

"How can I look by this twixt and between sort of light? But it don't matter. Come in, both of you."

"What, on horseback?" said Jack.

"Bother take my head," said the landlord, "what am I thinking of? Wait half a minute, and I'll open one of the gates next door for you."

The name over the gate of the livery stables was not the same that appeared over the door of the public-house, but the whole concern was under one management, and in a few seconds one of the gates was opened, and Dick and Jack led in their horses to a very tidy kept and comfortable stable-yard. The gate was bolted and barred again, and then the landlord, as he speedily lighted a stable-lantern, turned sharply and said—

"Now then, Dick Turpin, who is your friend?"

"You don't mean to say that you don't know me?" said Jack.

"Why, Jack?"

"The same. It is true that I have not seen you for a couple of years now, but as you have seen me since that awful day when all the world believed me dead, you are not surprised that I still linger."

"Still linger? What do yo mean by talking of still lingering, Jack? We expect to see you, and hear of you, for many a long day to come. But I can guess what has brought you both up to London: it is about Claude."

"Yes, to be sure."

"Well, poor fellow, I am afraid he is booked at last."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, that they will keep him till he is of no use, now that they once have him safely."

"You mean that they will hang him," said Dick Turpin; "but there are two words to that bargain. We are going to try what can be done, and it is not a trifle that will stop us, either as to money or danger."

"Well, I can give you some news, too, and that is, that the 'family' have made up their minds to try their best."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, I do. You have heard of Maggs?"

Both Dick and Jack shook their heads, and the landlord smiled as he added—

"You have heard of Colonel Blue?"

"To be sure; the dashing chap that used to be on the western road, some years ago; but there was a report that he was shot."

"So he was, but it did not kill him, though it laid him up, poor fellow, for nearly two years, and there I kept him in a little room in the top of this very house. I don't mean to say that there was much trouble in so keeping him, because nobody was after him. They all thought—that is, the nobs and the beaks—that he had been shot dead, and so they might well, for a bullet was in his chest for a fortnight, till a young fellow, a doctor that came to attend upon him for nothing, and was as kind to him as he could be, got it out."

"Poor fellow!"

"Yes, the getting of it out nearly killed him, for it was by only making a hole in his back that it was done, and he fainted away, and lay like a log for eighteen hours; but the young doctor chap—oh, he was a trump!—he sat by him all the while, and brought him through it at last."

"And what became, then, of Colonel Blue?"

"Why, when he got up again he was so altered, that nobody would have known him, and he was spoilt for the road quite."

"No doubt."

"Well, then, the family made a what-do-you-call-it—a subscription for him, and it came to three hundred pounds and more; but he would not have it, and he made a kind of a speech to 'em in this very house, in which he told 'em that

though he would not take the money, cos, you see, he thought he could manage to keep himself, he thought as much of it as though he had, and as he could not go on the road, he would see, while he yet had to live, what he could do for them all."

"That was capital."

"Well, he took the name of Maggs, and what do you think he did?"

Dick and Jack both shook their heads.

"I'll tell you: he got acquainted with all the officers and turnkeys of the old stone-jug, and at last they thought so much of him that they let him go in and out just as often as he liked. The sheriffs place such a confidence in him, that they can't do without him, and in that kind of way he keeps his eyes open, you see, and does no end of good to the poor fellows of the family."

"No doubt of it."

While the landlord was giving this brief but interesting biography of poor Maggs, both Dick and Jack had placed their horses in stalls, and removed the saddles, and then Ben, the landlord, gave them an ample feed, after which he conducted his guests through a secret door in the hay-loft into the public-house.

"Now, my tulips," he said, "what's to be the first caper? Only say."

"Something to eat, and something to drink," said Dick.

"And then six or seven hours' sleep," said Jack.

"All's right, I thought as much. You don't look as if you have had much of that last article of late."

"Indeed we have not, Ben."

"Well, you may have a dose of it here, if you like, you know, and nobody will grudge it to you, I know. Come this way, and I will put as good a bottle of old wine before you as you would wish to see, and a couple of cold fowls."

"That will do," said Dick; "it is a feed fit for an emperor."

"Well, he might do worse, I think."

Ben was as good as his word. A little table was soon spread with the viands he had suggested, and both Dick and Jack made a hearty meal, after which Ben said to them—

"Now, tell me, 'cos, you see, upon that will depend where I put you: Do the beaks or the nobs know of your being hereabouts?"

"No, certainly not, so far as we are aware of it."

"Very good; then there's no need for cramming you both into the little room near the tiles, and you may as well have a comfortable sleep in a good bed-room. Come this way."

Ben took them to a large double-bedded room, and having shown them how the door could be fastened, so that it would be next to impossible for any force to break it open, and explained the use of a little bell that they could ring if they wanted him, and promising to call them in about six hours, he bade them good evening, and left them to themselves.

"Not bad quarters these, Jack," said Dick, as he flung off his coat and boots, and threw himself upon one of the beds.

"Far from it, Dick. My mind is full of poor Colonel Blue's fate."

"Yes, it is a sad one; but why was he called Colonel Blue for? I was going to be told several times, but something always happened to stop it."

"Oh, just because he wore, while on the road, a suit of light blue, that is all. Why he was called colonel by the family was, I suppose, just because they thought him a clever fellow, and chose to abide by his orders."

"Ah! just so. Good-night."

"Good-night, Dick. You have forgotten all about fastening the door."

"Dear me! so I have. Oh, dear, how precious sleepy—sleep—I—you——"

Dick Turpin was fast asleep. Jack fastened the door according to the directions that had been given by the landlord; and then, after looking to his pistols, and being satisfied that they were all right for immediate action, he laid them handily upon a chair by the bedside, and composed himself to rest. The sad story of Colonel Blue, however, gave a tone and colour to his dreams, and

more than once he thought that he felt in his own breast the bullet that had been so nearly fatal to the highwayman.

How long they slept they had not the most distant idea of; but they thought the time was surely short, when they were awakened by a steady scratching at the door of their room.

"Who's there?" said Dick.

"Ben it is," said the voice of the landlord.

Dick sprang out of bed and let him in, and Jack laid his hand upon his pistols, for he thought that there might be some alarm. The landlord, when he made his appearance, said—

"A visitor for you both is below."

"You don't mean it?" said Dick.

"I will give him a warm reception," said Jack, as he took up one of his pistols.

"You mistake me," said the landlord; "it's a friend."

"We have not many of that sort," said Dick.

"Probably not; but this is one—it is Maggs."

"Ah, indeed?—Let him come up; but it would have been just as well if he had let us have another hour's sleep as well as the one we have had."

"Another hour's sleep, do you say? Why, goodness gracious! it's half-past eleven o'clock, and it wasn't six anything like when you came here."

"The deuce it is!"

"To be sure. Let me see. Twenty minutes to twelve. But still, I'm sorry I have disturbed you, at all events, and Maggs will come again."

"Oh, no—no!" said Jack; "it is time we should be up and stirring, Ben. I am very anxious to see him, for in its result his fate ain't far unlike my own. I am something like an old hulk that's past service; and if it had not been for him who now lies in a cell in Newgate, I don't think I should have encumbered the earth quite so long as I have."

"Don't say that, Jack," cried the landlord jocularly; "but I'll bring Maggs to you at once, and breakfast, too; for I suppose that will be as acceptable as any visitor, just now?"

"True, Ben," said Dick—"most true. Jack, I know, is always hungry, ain't you, Jack? Young blood, you know—eh?"

Jack shook his head rather mournfully, and the landlord left the room to bring up Maggs, who in a few minutes made his appearance, and was warmly welcomed by both Dick and Jack.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "of course, my duty to the Sheriffs of London is now to run over to Newgate, and give notice that you are both here, so that they may send a posse of constables to take you."

"Not a doubt of it," smiled Dick, "that is your duty, Mr. Maggs; but your inclination is quite a different thing."

"We are delighted to see you, Colonel Blue," said Jack.

"Hush—oh, hush!"

Maggs sunk into a chair, and appeared to be taken suddenly ill, so that both Dick and Jack were rather alarmed, and would have gone for aid, but he raised his hand to them to remain, and spoke in a low voice—

"Don't call me by that name. It recalls too much of the past to me. I want to forget it. You don't know all my story. Nobody does, and I don't think that anybody ever will; but if you would spare me a pang such as this, never call me that."

"I deeply regret that, unknowingly, I have done so now," said Jack. "Accept my apologies, Mr. Maggs."

"Say no more about it. How could you possibly know? Ben forgot to tell you, no doubt; but it is passed now, and forgotten. Come, let us talk of something else."

"Of poor Claude, then—how is he?"

"Better, and hopeful."

"That is well. It gives me new strength to hear those words."

"Which of you was it who called at Newgate to inquire for him?"

"It was I," said Jack.

"Well, they are all furious about that. The governor was ready to tear his hair out by the roots when he heard of it, for he guessed at once that it was one of you, and he would, I know, have given a hundred pounds out of his own pocket to have nabbed you. It was rather a dangerous thing to do."

"Only in one way," said Jack. "If any of the officers who had been out had happened to come home just at that moment, there might have been danger; but as I went to ask a civil question only, I rather think if the turnkey had tried his chances, it would have been at his own risk."

"I understand you, Jack. The turnkey was a little in danger, then, I take it?"

"He was, but as the fellow was quite civil, it all ended well, as I thought it would."

"It has; but don't try it again. I can bring you better news of Duval than you can get at the gate of Newgate, and now listen to me, and while Ben is getting the breakfast, I shall be able to tell you what the family think of doing."

With this, Maggs, without concealing anything, related at length to Dick and Jack all that had happened at the thieves' haunt, at West End, Hampstead, and concluded by advising them both to attend the next meeting that was to take place there, which would be at the midnight that was coming.

"I will turn the matter over in my mind during the day," said Maggs, "and I hope and expect to be prepared with a distinct proposition to make some of the particulars of which must depend upon what happens in Newgate to-day. I would recommend you both to stay here and to keep close. If there should be any suspicion that you are so near at hand, I shall be pretty sure to hear of it, and will take some means of letting Ben know."

"A thousand thanks," said Dick "Cannot you breakfast with us?"

"No. I shall be wanted at the stone-jug, I am so very useful."

CHAPTER CCCI.

DICK AND JACK ATTEND THE MEETING AT WEST END, HAMPSTEAD.

Maggs shook hands with them both, and then left the public-house to attend to his duties at Newgate.

Jack and Dick were very much pleased with this visit of Maggs to them, and they really began to entertain a confident hope that something would result in Duval's favour from the meeting of the thieves that was to take place on that evening at the mansion by West End, Hampstead.

Of course, they decided to be present, and they thought it very desirable, indeed, to remain where they were until nightfall, when they intended to ride to the northern part of the metropolis at as early an hour after sunset as possible, and see if there was anything to be done upon the road before the meeting at the mansion at West End.

"We shall want, of course, as much money as we can possibly get together, Dick," said Jack, "for who knows but it may be necessary to pay everybody who may happen to stand in the way of our poor friend, Duval's, liberation."

"True enough; money does wonders, and as society has thought proper to put him into the stone-jug, we will levy what taxes we can upon society for the purpose of getting him out of it again."

"That's the proper philosophy of the thing."

The day passed rather gloomily to both Dick and Jack in the public-house, for

they were anything but accustomed to such a life of inaction, and they were much pleased to see Maggs about half an hour before sunset.

"Well. How is Duval?" said Dick.

"He is much better. He won't believe that Cicely is killed. Alas, poor fellow!"

"But she is no more," said Jack.

"She is buried," said Maggs.

"That's conclusive enough. But why will not Duval give credence to the fact of her death?"

"He says that she has passed through so many dangers with him that he will not believe it, and he states that once at Winchester she was severely wounded."

"Ah, yes," said Jack, with a sigh. "Well do I remember that awful scene in the old cathedral. But, Maggs, will it not be better not entirely to dissuade Duval of such an idea? If he really thought her no more, it might have such an effect upon him that he would feel completely prostrated, and would not even second any attempt that we might make for his rescue."

"That is well thought of," said Dick.

"I did think of it," said Maggs, "so I left him in such a state of doubt that he may cherish what notions he pleases upon the subject, and yet he cannot say that he was led astray by any one. Of course, what the prison authorities say to him, he sets no account by at all."

"He knows, then, that you are a friend?"

"He does. I could not keep that knowledge from him any longer, so I told him all that had happened, and it made quite a change in him to hear it, though it touched me a little to hear him say—'I shall yet be happy with Cicely.'"

"Poor fellow!" said Jack, "he had better though awaken to a knowledge of the truth when he is with us, if we can but rescue him, than when surrounded by those who will have but little, if any, sympathy with his grief."

Maggs assented to this, and promised that he would not say anything to destroy all hope upon the part of Claude that Cicely still lived, and then he left Dick and Jack again, and they began to prepare themselves for the road.

The horses had had a capital rest, and they had been tended with so much care at the stables next door to the public-house, that they might be fairly expected to be in the very best condition, so that the two friends were anxious to mount, and be off at once.

The landlord went out himself and got them some powder, for they were nearly out of it, and by the aid of a tobacco pipe they cast themselves about a dozen bullets, each, to fit their pistols, and then they were quite ready.

"You will come back here, I suppose?" said the landlord.

"Why, yes," said Dick, gaily, "if the Philistines let us; of course, it will be all the better, whatever is done for Claude, that Jack and I should be near at hand, and I suppose something will be at least settled to-night; so now good-bye."

"Don't say, good-bye," said Jack; "it sounds too ominous. Good evening is better, as that looks as if we were sure to come again, you know, Dick."

"Well, then, good evening be it."

They had before starting determined upon which way they would go, and the route that Dick had suggested, and which they had adopted, was to proceed up St. John-street Road, and past the Angel at Islington, and up the Holloway Road to Highgate, from which place they could get down Swain's Lane to Hampstead Heath, past the estate of Lord Mansfield.

This course they thought better than going through Smithfield and up Holborn, which would have been the most direct way to Hampstead, but yet, perhaps, in reality, the longest, as they would have been much more liable to interruption from a number of the official persons connected with Newgate, who were always hanging about Fleet Market and Holborn Hill.

The evening was rather fresh and gusty, for a south west wind was blowing and threatening rain, although none had absolutely fallen yet, and not a star was

to be seen. There would be a nearly full moon as the night advanced, but it would not rise until some half hour or so past midnight, so that there were some hours of gloom and darkness yet to look forward to upon that eventful night.

After the long confinement in the public-house, it was quite a treat to Dick and Jack to be in the open air again. They merely put their cattle to a



gentle trot and soon got to Islington, and then passing the High-street they turned into the Holloway Road, which was then very little built upon, and they began to feel that they were in the country.

"Ah, Dick," said Jack, "I think if I were to be compelled to remain for very long in London, it would be the death of me after being accustomed to the open country so much."

"It's all habit, Jack."

"Well, it may be; and yet, of course, there can be no comparison in the quality even of the air and that which we have been breathing in the city. You admit that, Dick?"

"Yes, Jack; and I admit that ever since we left the Angel at Islington, we have been followed by a man with a cart."

"Eh? You don't say so?"

"Yes, I do, though. Don't look round; I have had my eyes about me, Jack, I assure you, and I have noticed that a covered cart, driven by a man dressed in a smock-frock, has accommodated itself to our pace, Jack. What do you think of that?"

"I don't know what to think; but I did think that for the last minute or so you were very wayward as regarded your peace, but now I understand it. You were experimenting upon our friend in the cart?"

"I was, Jack, and I did not like to say anything to you of it until I felt quite sure about it, but now there is no mistake. We are dogged by some one, but what for, I cannot take upon myself to say."

They both listened now intently for some time, with the hope of gathering some further information concerning the man, and the cart that was pursuing them, and they brought their horses to a walk, in order to see if the vehicle would pass them, which, indeed, it did in a few moments.

The cart was a covered one, such as might be used by a tradesman in the conveyance of goods of a perishable nature to his customers, and if the man who drove it was, indeed, a spy of the police, he certainly played his part very well, for he went on without paying the smallest apparent attention to Dick or Jack.

"Are we mistaken?" said Jack.

"Not a bit of it, my friend. He thinks that we are on our guard now, that is all."

"Well, we will continue so. Let us go on, but let us, till we come to some turning, keep the cart in advance of us, and then if we go down that turning a little way, we shall soon see if it follows us."

"Very good. There is the Seven Sisters' Lane just a little further on upon our right hand. Suppose we go down that, Jack, as though we intended to get to Tottenham."

"Agreed."

The man who was driving the cart did not pay the least attention to them, but went plodding on, apparently intent upon getting up to Highgate, and Dick and Jack turned down the Seven Sisters' Lane, and put their horses to a gallop for about half a mile, and then Dick said—

"Jack—Jack. Pull up."

"Yes, all's right."

"Here is a very low fence at this side of the road. Do you think your horse will take it?"

"To be sure he will, Dick."

"Then let us get over at once. You see, we are quite close to the corner of Hornsey Lane. I think if we stay in the meadow over yonder for a few minutes we shall see if our friend, the covered cart, approaches."

"Yes, but our horses' heads will be seen."

"Not a bit of it. There is a hay-stack yonder. Don't you see it? We will get over the other side of that, and dismount. The horses won't leave it while we creep back to the hedge and reconnoitre."

"That will do."

In another moment they were both over the hedge, for the cattle did the leap beautifully. The haystack was not twenty yards from the spot, and the horses were pulling hay out of it, and Dick and Jack were crouched down under the hedge, in the space of half a minute.

"This is what I call, diamond cut diamond," whispered Dick, "if that cart should be after us."

"Yes, but——"

"Hush, Jack—hush! What do you hear?"

"Wheels, by Jove!"

"I could have sworn it. Keep snug now, Jack, whatever you do. I know the sound of those wheels. It is the covered cart. Hush—hush!"

The cart was evidently coming on at good speed down the road, for they could hear the patter of the horse's feet above the sound of the wheels, which would not have been the case if it had been coming slowly. Besides, one fact was quite certain, and that was, that the cart must have been turned back to get down the lane at all, for it had passed the end of it before Dick Turpin and Jack went in that direction.

In about another minute and a half the cart stopped close to where they were, and a rough voice called out—

"I say, this won't do—I don't hear them."

"Nor I either," said another.

"Well, what would you have me do?" said the driver. "I advised you to nab them both at the turnpike, but you wouldn't, and you see now what has come of it."

"Oh, you don't know anything about it. The object was not to nab them till we knew where they were going; and here am I almost cramped to death in this infernal little cart, where you can't stretch your legs, and we have missed them after all."

"So it seems. What's to be done?"

"Oh, go on," cried another.

"No, what's the use? Where are we?"

"Close to the corner of Hornsey Lane."

"Then who is to know whether they have gone to the right, or to the left, or straight on?"

"To the left, I'll be bound," said the driver. "You see they only turned down here to get out of our way, that was quite clear, for I saw they had their suspicions, and that they were going north there is no doubt; my opinion is that they will take the Hornsey Road, and turn up to the left as soon as they can into Highgate."

"Well, that is likely, so let us get on as fast as we can. Put the horse to his speed, Andrews."

"All's right! But, you know, four of you in the cart make up no light weight, and he isn't used to it."

"Oh, get on—get on!"

The man laid the whip across the horse rather severely, and the animal went on at a kind of canter that must have been very distressing to those in the cart; but as speed was now their object, they put up with all contingent inconveniences philosophically enough, and the cart, with its freight of four officers, was speedily out of sight, and then out of hearing.

"Pleasant this," said Dick.

"Oh, very," said Jack. "But what does it all mean?"

"I cannot say for a certainty, but I hope that it only means we have been recognised in Islington or in St. John-street-road, by some of the traps, and that this is an expedition planned and drawed out by them on the spur of the moment, merely to see where we are going to."

"That would be a thousand times better than for them to have had a watch upon the public-house, and to have dogged us all the way from there; but, I suppose, now we cannot do better than be off."

"Yes, and as quickly as possible."

The horses were eating away at the loose hay, which each moment they tugged out of the stack, so that they had no inclination to stray from that spot, and Jack and Dick were soon mounted again. A leap similar to the one that had taken them from the road, now took them back to it, and then they galloped into Holloway again.

"Now," said Dick, "it won't do for us to go on any further this way, for if we do they will meet us, as safe as possible, just on the rise of the hill."

"No—no," said Jack. "Let us push on. They will be behind us if we lose no time. I know every inch of the road, and that distressing gallop they went at it is quite impossible they can keep up, while our cattle are fresh enough to trot even up the hill, steep as it is in some places."

CHAPTER CCCII.

DICK AND JACK ROB THE BARNET NIGHT-FLY.

Dick was not the one to shrink from anything that only required speed and courage to carry it out, and without making further reply to Jack than merely, "All's right," off he went at a gallop that got over the ground at quite an alarming rate.

Jack was not quite so well mounted, to tell the truth, as Turpin, but still his horse had great power and endurance, and carried him up the hill probably with less distress than the smaller animal which Dick bestrode.

They both reached the summit of the rise together, and Dick, turning in his saddle, cried out—

"Bravo, Jack! I don't know now but that for real service you are as well mounted as I am."

"I'll change with you, Dick."

"Why, no, thank you. The fact is, I am attached, as you know, to the creature, and should be loth indeed to part with her."

"I know it, Dick, and only jested when I made the proposal. But we are passing the end of Swain's-lane, are we not?"

"By George, yes—so we are. Come on. This is capital. I do think we have distanced our pursuers fairly. Hilloa! what's that in the hollow yonder?"

Swain's-lane, as is well known, no doubt, to many of our readers, commences on the high ground on the level of the High-street of Highgate, and gradually slopes down to a valley, after which it rises again to the height of the level of Hampstead-heath. The declivity is, however, but slight, although viewed from the top of the lane it looks, by the slanting of the road, rather considerable.

It was while pausing for a moment at the top of the lane, where there was a farrier's shop, that Dick Turpin and Jack saw, right down in the hollow, a light moving along the centre of the road-way, and swaying from side to side as some vehicle moved along with it.

"Is that our friend with the cart?" said Dick.

"Why, hardly. They surely would not hoist a light."

"I don't know that. They might do it to deceive us, you know; but suppose we inquire at the farrier's shop here? I can hear some one at work in it."

"Do so."

The half-door of the farrier's place had blown shut, but Dick pushed it open, leaning from his horse for the purpose of doing so, and called out to the man, saying—

"Have you seen a cart go by here a little time ago?"

"No, sir," said the man. "There's nothing been by but the Barnet night-fly, and it's in the lane now."

"Well; but how is it in the lane? That is not the route, is it?"

"No, sir. But they say there's highwaymen in the Holloway-road, so it was thought safer to go the round through Hampstead to-night. That's the reason, sir."

"And a very good one too. Come on, Mr. Trevellian, we shall be late at Lord Mansfield's, I am afraid."

"I am afraid so too, my lord," said Jack; and then they both went at a trot down the lane, having thoroughly mystified the farrier, who said to his boy, when the clatter of their horses' feet had died away—

"Ah! there's a couple of the nobs, I take it, a-going to Mansfield Park."

"Jack," said Dick, thoughtfully, "don't you think, old friend, that the Barnet night-fly, as the old rickety coach is called, that travels between Barnet and the Old Bull in Holborn, has some very particular reason for going out of the way to-night?"

"Not a doubt of it."

"Ah, well, I think so, too. Perhaps there is something rather more than usual to-night among its luggage."

Jack laughed.

"I know what you mean, Dick," he said. "You want to stop the night-fly. I stopped it once five years ago, and I don't think I have clapped eyes upon the old rumbling vehicle since; but if you have any fancy for the fun, let us try our luck with it, for the sake of poor Claude."

"We will."

Now, the fact was, that the Barnet night-fly had been induced to change its route upon this occasion, owing to a report that a couple of highwaymen, named respectively Captain Hawk and Crow, were waiting for it in Holloway, at a very unfrequented part of the road; but those who travelled by it little suspected that they were, in a manner of speaking, getting out of the frying-pan into the fire, and that in escaping two men, who, perhaps, were really far enough off, they were coming right into the way of the two others, who, probably, were much more determined than the others.

To the modern reader it probably often appears astonishing how a number of people in a stage-coach allowed themselves in old times to be stopped and robbed by one or two highwaymen; but, upon a little consideration, the wonder vanishes.

In the first place, people who travelled in those days never carried money or valuables with them, unless they were obliged to do so from special circumstances; and then, again, there was no certainty of being stopped, so there was no unity of design upon the part of the passengers in adopting a system of defence, and no one liked to be the victim for the sake of others who would not assist him.

Thus it was that some preferred to give a few pounds to getting into a broil, and others even who had more to lose, and more courage, felt that they would have single-handed to fight a bold, reckless man, who made a trade of risking his life, and who was much more likely to get the advantage in the encounter, and so very prudently declined it.

But then, it will be said, that most of the coaches even for short distances had guards. Granted they had; but the guard was generally some idle, drunken fellow, whose fire-arms were out of order always when they should be in order, and in some cases there is very little doubt but that he was bought over by the thieves and by the landlords of the inns that were on the road frequented by the highwaymen, so that only the shadow of a resistance was made when the passengers wanted the real substance of it.

In fact, highway robbery was then a complete business, and was then carried on upon such a system that when a coach was stopped, and the affrighted passengers heard the ominous sounds of "Stand and deliver!" they had no means of knowing the real extent of the attack upon their property.

The reader is well aware, though, that under the present circumstances, Jack and Dick have no accomplices, and simply run this risk of stopping the Barnet night-fly for what they can get, and at the chance of whatever kind of contest it might lead them into; but the passengers could not know that.

"Now," said Jack, "I hope that there will be no fool who will show fight

for the sake of saving his few pounds; but if there be, Dick, don't be hasty, whatever you do."

"I never am hasty, Jack. I have taken many a shot without a thought of returning it; for, you see, in some sort, I cannot blame people for doing their best; but still, it won't do to stand too much nonsense, you know."

"Certainly not. Come on, then. I will go to the horse's heads, if you like, Dick, while you see to the passengers, or *vice versa*, just as you please."

"You stop the machine then, Jack, and I will see after the swag, if there is any to be got."

"Very good. The sooner, then, we get the affair over the better, for we don't know, now, but our friends in the cart may take it into their wise heads to come this way."

The old vehicle continued its lumbering course along Swains-lane, and those who were within it were congratulating themselves upon having played such a trick upon the highwaymen, whom they supposed were waiting for them in Holloway.

"I tell you what it is, ma'am," said a man who sat with his back to the horses, and who had been very much alarmed at coming through Highgate, because the coach had stopped there to take upon a passenger. "I tell you what it is, ma'am. For my own part, I would not let the whole fraternity of highwaymen rob me; but it's the duty of a gentleman, when there are ladies present, to be as quiet as possible."

"Oh, but, sir," said the lady, to whom he had addressed this speech, "I'm sure no lady would mind a gentleman making a little noise in beating off a robber."

"Oh, dear, no, certainly not—eugh! eugh!" caughed and wheezed an old man. "I hope, sir, as you will be so good as to kill all the robbers, not but that I, so help me Abraham! am so poor that they cannot rob me."

As he spoke, this old man, who was of the Jewish persuasion as it is called, clutched tighter a square mahogany box that he had with him.

"Why, sir," said the first speaker, "I heard you promise the coachman a guinea for coming this way."

"Did I, sir?"

"To be sure, you did," said the lady, "and I heard you likewise. Lucy, my dear, didn't you hear it too?"

"Yes, aunt," said a young girl, "but I wish you wouldn't speak about highwaymen and robbers, for it makes me feel quite cold to listen to you all, that it does."

"You need be under no apprehension," said the first speaker. "If the ladies wish it, of course, I should feel myself quite justified in shooting, or otherwise slaying and disposing of any one who had the unparalleled audacity to stop the Barnet night-fly."

"Well," said the lady, "it's a great comfort to me, and has been so ever since I read it in the St. James's Chronicle this morning, to find that that dreadful Claude Duval is in Newgate, and hanged at last. That is something."

"But he is not hanged, aunt, yet," said the young lady.

"No, my dear, but he will be, so it's much the same thing. The monster, they do say, that if any young lady gave him a kiss, he would let her keep her rings, and watch, and money, and, in fact, never rob her at all."

"Oh, how nice—no, I don't mean that——"

"Lucy! How dare you?"

"Oh, aunt, indeed, I didn't mean it, and, of course, I would rather be robbed twenty times than kissed by a highwayman; and if I did kiss him, it would only be to preserve the property of others, you know, aunt, for don't I look upon all I have as yours?"

"Hold your tongue, will you, Lucy. How dare you talk of kissing in that way, and men present too?"

"But, my dear young lady," said the Jew, in an insinuating tone of voice, "my dear young lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"If we should now—oh, dear, I hope it is not at all likely!—but if we should be stopped by a highwayman, and he should offer to let you keep all your things if you will give him a kiss, will you be so good as to say this box is yours?"

"No, sir."

"Oh, dear, she won't do it!"

"No, sir; I would scorn to tell a falsehood even to a highwayman."

"Oh, dear, I was never so particular."

"Have you anything, then, valuable in the box?" said the man.

"Oh, no—no—no! Not at all. Nothing but some bits of woollen stuffs, you understand, with the prices of the wholesale manufacturers marked to them, that is all. I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that I have only half a guinea and one shilling with me, for I never carry about money, and, indeed, I am rather a poor man than otherwise."

"Oh, indeed."

"But you will, my dear young lady—you will promise me that if we are stopped, you will take my box on your lap, and say it is yours?"

"I will do no such thing."

"Sir," said the aunt, "when you expect my niece to put a box on her lap you insult me, sir."

"Oh, well, I don't much care; so help me, Abraham, we are half way down the lane now, and I don't think there is any likelihood of being robbed; but I would have given you a little ring for your finger, miss, if you had promised what I asked you. I have just a few in the box."

"Oh," she said, "then, in fact, the box is full of valuable jewellery?"

"Oh, no—oh, no—Oh, don't say that—gracious me, oh—oh!"

In his anxiety to make the passengers believe that the box contained nothing of value, the Jew dropped it off his lap on to the floor of the coach, and it made such a musical jingle of gold, that everybody burst out laughing, and then the man said—

"Woollen cloth makes a funny noise, don't it?"

"Oh, very," said the lady.

"Ah!" said the young lady, "I thought as much; but I won't be kissing highwaymen to save all your money."

"Is it all gold?" added the man.

"Oh, oh," groaned the Jew, "you will drive me mad! Don't speak in that way—don't mention gold—you don't know who may hear you, and we may all get our throats cut, because I have some—some brass medals, you understand, in this box."

"Brass medals?—Oh, oh! What are they worth?"

"About thirty shillings, upon my soul."

"Then, I will give you two pounds for them at once."

"Oh, no—no"

Everybody laughed again at this, and the Jew was terribly disconcerted; but still he had one comfort and that was that the Barnet night-fly was getting over the ground at the rate of five miles an hour, and that, under such circumstances, another hour or so must bring it into London.

"Ha!—ha!" said the Jew after a time, allowing his anger to get the better of his judgment. "I have no doubt, miss, but you would have been kind enough to have offered to save my box for me, but for one little reason? Ha!—ha"

"And what may that be?" said the young lady.

"Why, highwaymen take a good look at those they ask a kiss from, and they don't care about it when they see red hair and a squint, so that you would not be put to the trouble of kissing him at all. Ha!—ha!"

"You odious wretch!" screamed the young lady. "Me squint?"

"Ha!—ha!"

"Well, I do hope now that some highwaymen may stop the Barnet fly, just to give me an opportunity of saying—"

What the young lady meant to say was put abruptly to an end, by the sudden stoppage of the Barnet fly, and then a loud voice—it was the voice of Jack, aggravated to a high pitch—cried—

"Move your cattle on another foot, and you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER CCCIII.

DICK AND JACK REACH THE THIEVES' MEETING HOUSE WITH A GOOD BOOTY.

These words, addressed to the driver of the Barnet fly, were quite conclusive to the passengers of the fact, that the coach was stopped by highwaymen.

The effect produced was various. The valorous person who would be so ready, but for the presence of females, almost to kill and eat a highwayman, slid down at once among the straw at the bottom of the coach, calling out—

"Good Lord, deliver us!"

The Jew uttered a cry of terror, and clung to his box as though he were in a ship at sea, which was expected each moment to go down, and that was the only loose plank that could be got hold of as offering the smallest chance of safety.

The two ladies were alarmed, but certainly not nearly so much so as their male companions, and, probably, the younger of the two felt anything but sorry that she had an opportunity of repaying the Jew for the very ungallant manner in which he had spoken of her personal attractions only a few moments before.

They heard the driver speak.

"Oh, don't shoot a poor fellow, good sir. I won't move on; but if the 'osses should go 'or to come to get rather restive, don't say it was me, sir."

"Hold hard, on your life," said Jack.

Then Dick Turpin rode to the side of the coach, and let down the windows, as he cried out—

"Hilloa! Who have we here?"

"Nobody, good sir," said the valorous person in the straw, "nobody, my dear sir, if you please."

"So help me Abraham, only two poor men, I declares," said the Jew.

"Don't murder innocent people," said the old lady, "but go along at once, do."

"I shall not detain you long, madam," said Dick. "Has any one spoken?"

"No, sir," said the young lady.

"Oh, a young lady, and a pretty one, I'll be bound, by the tone of her voice. I hope you are not frightened, my dear?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Well, that's right. We won't trouble you for your money, but as there are two gentlemen here, why, I will just politely ask them for their money, watches, and valuables."

"Oh—oh—oh!" groaned the man in the straw.

"My excellent shir," said the Jew, "I assure you as we are poor peoples—oh, excellent shir, I assure you that three and sixpence is all I have, my dear shir. I wish it was more, but here it is, quite at your service."

"Three and sixpence, Moses?"

"Oh, sir, my name ish Aaron."

"I don't care whether it be Aaron or Moses, but if you want to persuade me that all you have is three and sixpence, you are very much mistaken indeed, for that won't do at any price."

There was now a strange clicking noise at the door of the carriage, and the Jew said—

"So help me, what ish he a doing?"

"Only hammering the flint of one of my pistols," said Dick, "that's all, as I



THE FEARFUL LEAP OF TURPIN'S BLACK BESS.

see that nothing will bring you to your senses but a bullet. I suspected as much from the first."

"Oh, no—no. Good gracious, no, I have found a guinea in one pocket that I forgot."

"Indeed."

"Noble sir," returned the man in the straw. "Noble, and most merciful

ndividual, I hope that you will have the extreme goodness to accept of the eighteen and threepence that I have about me, and I promise that the next time I pass this way to take care to have more money, for it is quite a pleasure to be even robbed by so great and gentlemanly a man."

This voice sounded so odd and smothered to Turpin, that he cried out—

"Where is that Methodist parson, who keeps on preaching in such a ridiculous strain?"

"He's among our feet," said the young lady, "and it's exceedingly inconvenient, I declare."

"Confound his impudence," said Dick, as he swung open the carriage-door, and put in his hand. "Where the d—l are you, sir? Oh, here's somebody's leg, at all events."

"Murder! dear sir—it's mine."

"All's right, then."

With one pull, Dick got him out on to his back in the road, where he lay as if dead.

"You be quiet now for a few moments, will you?" said Dick, "or I will request my horse to stand upon you. Now, Mr. Abraham, be quick."

"Oh—oh, so help me, here ish the guinea."

"What, you still keep at that tune, do you? Ladies, be so good as to keep your heads as far back out of range as you conveniently can, for I am about to shoot this Jew."

"Murder—murder! I will give up twenty pounds."

"Give up your box at once, with all the money in it," said the young lady, "and don't be getting us all shot just because you don't care for your life, you ugly wretch!"

"No—no, I have got no box."

Bang fell the box on to the old lady's toes.

"Drat it," she cried, "it has lamed me almost. Mr. Highwayman, it is a mahogany box, full of money, I do believe, and here it is on the floor of the coach."

The Jew got desperate, and flung himself down upon the box, but Dick Turpin got hold of him by one arm and pulled him out of the coach, box and all.

"Jack?" he called out.

"Yes, Dick?"

"Come here, and take possession of a box. It is not too big to strap behind you with the vallise. Tell the coachman that if he moves on we will overtake him in a minute and put half-a-dozen slugs into him."

"Oh, lor! I'll get down," said the coachman.

"No," said Jack, "stay where you are, but hold hard."

The Jew's box was wrested from him, and Jack strapped it to the back of his horse, and then the Jew, turning round, fled towards Highgate again, calling out with all his might—

"Thieves!—thieves! Murder! Robbery! Fire!"

"Confound the fellow, he will raise the country," said Jack.

"It can't be helped; hold my horse a moment; here's a sneaking rascal on his back in the road."

"No—no," said the man, rising to a sitting posture and holding out both his hands, in one of which was a watch and in the other a purse of money. "No—no! Take all I have, and spare my life."

"Bother your life," said Dick, as he took the purse and money, "what is it to us?"

"Oh, thank you, gentlemen—thank you!"

Jack now got one of the carriage lamps out of the proper place, and looked into the coach by its aid. The two females were there, trembling.

"Don't be alarmed," he said.

"Oh, but we are," said the old lady.

"We can't help it," said the young one. "Here is all the money aunt and I have got."

"Never mind, keep it," said Jack, as he shut the door. "You need not be at all frightened, ladies. We have the honour and the pleasure of bidding you good-night."

"You are not Claude Duval?" said the young lady to Dick Turpin.

"No, my dear, poor Claude's in Newgate."

"But I thought he might have escaped, only I know that you are not him."

"Why do you know that?"

"Oh, because he—he—they do say that he always kisses any young lady he meets in a coach that he stops."

"Well, my dear, Dick Turpin often does the same," said Dick, as he saluted her.

"Oh, gracious," said the aunt, "are you Richard Thingummy."

"Turpin, madam. Good-night."

"He's rather a nice man," said the young lady.

"Hold your tongue, do," said the aunt. "I'm petrified at you."

"Forward, Jack," said Dick.

They were off in a moment, leaving the Barnet fly to get on the best way it could, for the driver was too much terrified to use his skill in guiding the cattle, and they were so old that they felt quite delighted at the rest they were getting, and one of them had fairly dropped asleep.

Dick and Jack felt all the awkwardness of the fact that the coach would be, when it did start again, travelling in the same direction with themselves, nor did they doubt but that the Jew would soon, from Highgate, procure an armed and mounted force to follow them down the lane; but still, they relied upon the speed of their horses, and with the fact that if they met with no interruption they would be stowed in the mansion at West-end within the next twenty minutes at the very outside.

"Come on, Jack; let us make speed," said Dick.

"What the deuce made you take this box?" said Jack. "Do you think there is anything in it worth the having?"

"Yes, I do, or I would not trouble you with it, Jack. It belonged to one who was far too anxious to retain it for it to be worthless. I make no doubt in the world, but that it contains a rich booty, and that it will be about the best piece of swag that we have picked up upon the road."

"Very good," said Jack, "then I have all the less objection to the corner of it sticking into my back in the way that it does.—Hark! I think I hear horses feet."

"And I know I do."

"After us?"

"Yes, on the same road, and so after us; but whether accidentally merely or in pursuit of us, I can't say. It don't seem at all likely that the Jew could have got assistance so promptly."

"No, unless he met any mounted men on the road, and got them at once to aid him."

"Never mind. Here's the heath."

They had now got fairly on to Hampstead Heath, and, of course, their object was to get to the right towards West-end as soon as possible.

"Dare we cross the heath?" said Dick.

"No. By no means."

"Is there no path?"

"None that way, and if we were to try to cross it, there are so many holes made by the inhabitants of the parish to get sand, that we should go down horse and man to a certainty."

"That would be awkward."

"It would be destruction to us quite now. There is no resource upon this spot but to take the regular roads, Dick. I know ever one of them intimately."

"Then you go in advance, Jack, and push on as hard as you can; I will follow you easily, you may be assured. Time is everything with us now, for by the clatter those who are on the road are making, it seems to me as if they had a very special object."

"Not a doubt of it. This way."

Dick let Jack get about a dozen strides of the horse in advance of him, and then followed. Jack led the way right along the regular road until he got past the locality which is now called the Vale of Health, and then he turned to the right, taking a much narrower path, that led under the shadow of a row of trees.

At the rate they were travelling, they now made less noise than even if they had kept at a trot; and after going on about half a mile, Jack paused, and said, in a low tone—

"Let us listen a bit, Dick."

"With all my heart."

They both now drew up, and their horses stood as still as death, while they listened to any noises that might come upon the night air indicative of the fact of their being pursued by those who hunted them from the haunts of civilised men, and who would have shed their blood for gold.

We say this not in defence of Dick Turpin, or of Sixteen-string Jack, but just because we know that at that time the whole of the executive police was in the hands of men who only looked upon it as a business by which money might be made, and who cared nothing for the higher objects that should actuate them.

For example: they would avoid a highwayman who showed symptoms of great boldness and daring until he had committed some robbery of importance, which would induce the authorities to offer a higher reward for him, and then, and not till then, would they seek to apprehend him in earnest.

It is reported of a highwayman, named Robert the Highflyer, that once meeting on Clapham Common with three officers, he was stopped, and in the language of the profession was told that he was "Wanted."

"What!" he said; "you will not be such fools as to take me now, surely?"

"And why not?" said one of the officers.

"Why, there is only a reward of fifty pounds against me now, and if you wait three months longer, I shall do enough to make it three hundred."

"There is reason in that," said the officer. "Be off with you. You are not wanted just yet."

Now, whether or not such an anecdote, in all its details, is strictly true or not, hardly matters. It only shows that there was such a feeling abroad at the time, or it would never have got currency at all as an illustration of the way in which such matters were managed.

We do not mean to say that the police now are all immaculate—it is not in human nature that such should be the case; but certainly the system is to a great extent reformed, and what abuses there are now have no sort of comparison to those which existed in the days when such men as Turpin, Duval, and Sixteen-string Jack sought celebrity upon the road.

But this is a digression, although an *apropos* one, and we are keeping Dick and Jack upon the road while we make it; so we now return to them and their actions.

CHAPTER CCCIV.

A BOLD PLAN FOR THE RESCUE OF DUVAL IS DETERMINED UPON.

"I THINK," said Jack, "that we have given them the go-by, Dick, for I can hear nothing."

"Listen again. Perhaps it is only fancy. But, do you know, I thought I heard a sound far over there upon the heath."

"Some stray donkey, perhaps."

"Possibly enough; but it seemed to me to be associated with voices."

"A current of air might bring a sound to your ears, Dick, and deny it to mine. I should hardly think it possible that they would venture out upon the open heath."

"There is no saying. The thirst for our capture is such that they might adventure anything in the shape of a rough road. Just lay a hand upon the bridle of my steed while I place my ear a little closer to the ground to listen."

Jack did so, and Dick Turpin flung himself right on to the ground, and placed his ear against it. It was astonishing how clearly then he could hear footsteps and voices upon the heath, that before came so very faintly, as hardly to be said to come at all to his senses.

"What is it, Dick?"

"I hear it, Jack. By some means or another it is quite clear to me that they guess the route we have taken, and they are crossing the heath, amid the furze-bushes, with the hope of getting ahead of us, and so interrupting us."

"But they will be down, to a certainty, in some of the holes with which the heath abounds."

"They are leading their cattle."

"Ah, they may do that."

"Yes, Jack, and so, you see, if they happen to have got a really good guide, which they may get from some of the blackguards who almost live upon the heath, passing their time in snaring the rabbits, they may get on very well, indeed."

"That is all true."

"Well, Jack, what do you propose then that we should do, in order to meet this new state of things?"

"Our course is easy, Dick."

"I am glad of it. It is not to go on, I take it."

"Certainly not. Let our foes take their road, and remain in ambush upon it as long as they like. I wish them no better luck than to do so. We will ride through the town, and take the route by the back of the church to the place of meeting with the family."

"Come on, then."

"Let us go as softly as foot can fall, Dick, for we don't know yet but that they may be on the listen."

"Then suppose we try their game, Jack, and dismount and lead our cattle a little way. It will stretch our limbs a little, and we can then keep the animals at such a foot pace that it will be next thing to impossible for them to be heard by any one."

"It is a good thought, Dick."

They now both dismounted and led their horses, and Jack, who was so well acquainted with the environs of Hampstead that it was quite out of the question for him to lose his way by day or by night, led Dick down a very narrow turning that led to Holly-bush Hill, from whence they proceeded right on towards the old church of Hampstead.

Without the least interruption they got down the steep incline which in bad weather it was ever so perilous a thing to ride down, and turning sharply into

Church Row, they got past the churchyard, and so on down the narrow lane that would lead them as directly to West-end as need be.

"This is rather an intricate navigation," said Dick.

"It looks so at night," replied Jack, "but it is all clear enough when once you know it. Indeed, unless you were determined to go out of the way by turning to the right, it would be difficult to do so, and here we are getting on nicely, and I do think we may mount and trot it."

"So do I; and as for those fellows who are in ambush, it is to be hoped by this time, in the lane, the only thing I very sincerely wish them is, patience."

"Yes," laughed Jack, "that will suit us for them to possess for once in a way, although it is not always the quality that I would wish my foes to be possessed of."

They mounted, and rode on, and in the course of about seven or eight minutes more they emerged up West-end, quite close to the wall of the mansion which was their place of destination for the night.

"Here we are," said Jack. "Maggs promised to be upon the look out for us, but I expect that we are a little early."

"But not a bit too soon for all that," said a voice, as a dark figure stepped out from the shadow of the wall.

"Ah, is it you, Maggs?" said Dick.

"That same am I," said Maggs. "Follow me, both of you. Do you know, I have a little suspicion?"

"Of what?"

"Why, that there are some bad characters about the place to-night, so be cautious."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Jack, with a slight laugh, "if there were a good many of that sort, friend Maggs."

"Nay," said Maggs, "I didn't mean it as a joke, in good truth; but I really think the house is watched."

"That is bad news."

"It is; but still there are too many of us to be in much danger; and as this is the last time any of the family will meet at this crib, why, I don't know that it matters very much."

"Is it going to be given up, then?"

"Yes. But come through the gate. That will do. Now, I should say, let your cattle take it easy here, for they can't get away, and there is some nice little fresh picking of young grass under the fruit trees. This is the orchard."

"Very good. But why is the old place to be deserted?"

"For a foolish reason enough. The man who keeps it says, that there have been all night long a couple of ghosts in the kitchen garden. He will have it that they stand upon one particular spot, linked arm in arm, and that their eyes glare like two stars in the darkness. He says they are as plain to be seen as possible, although you can see, at the same time, the trees and the bushes through them."

"How absurd," said Dick.

"If he thinks it," said Jack, "why, to him it is true, and so it must be a horrible truth."

"No doubt of that," said Maggs; "fancy or not fancy, it is all the same to him; so he goes with us to-night, for he says he wouldn't be an hour in the place when we are gone for a thousand pounds."

"Well—well; be it so."

"Follow me closely."

"Stop," said Jack. "I should like to go round by the kitchen garden, and see if there is really anything to lead to the delusion that the man speaks of. It will not delay us a minute."

"No—nor half a minute. Come this way, and I will take you to the spot where a certain grave holds two bodies that you wot of."

"Yes," said Dick, "and the least that any one says about that affair the better it may be for the family in the long run. He will be no friend to himself, or to his brethren, who first preaches about that little transaction."

Maggs led the way along a narrow path that was so much overgrown by wild plants, and so obstructed by the long shoots of ivy that spread out from the wall to the right hand, which was covered with that green mantle, that it was anything but an easy thing to get along.

That path was short, however, and they struggled through it in the course of two or three minutes.

"Stop!" said Maggs.

"Yes—yes. Is this the place?"

"Look right along by those palings. There is the spot. By Heavens! what is that?"

"I see something white," said Dick.

"And so do I," cried Jack. "Something moves, too."

"Hush! oh, hush!" said Maggs. "Don't speak in that tone, Jack. Why—why, what on earth can it be? It is exactly over the grave of the two officers, too. There is, or there was to be, a gooseberry bush or two planted there."

"Stay where you are, both of you," said Dick. "I am not going to stand any nonsense—I will advance up to it."

"Oh, no, Dick, don't."

"Why not?"

"If it were a mortal foe, Dick, I should be the last person to say, 'Hold,' to you."

"Oh, stuff."

"But it is not, you know, and you talk of advancing upon a creature, or an existence, of the powers of which you know nothing! Let me beg of you to pause."

"No, Jack, for my own sake, as well as for yours, I will test the unknown powers of the being who keeps such silent watch over that spot. I never yet gave way to terrors of this description, and I am not going to begin now."

"Stop him, Maggs."

"Not I," said Maggs. "Let him go. Those who have the courage to face these things are the proper persons to do so, and they should not be stopped."

'That's it," said Dick.

As he spoke he cocked one of his pistols, and while Jack looked after him with eyes of terror, and even Maggs, shading his vision with his hand, tried to keep him well in sight. Dick strode on at an even pace, neither very quick nor very slow, towards the white object.

"He has nerve," said Maggs.

"He has indeed," answered Jack. "He does not pause either, nor draw back as he nears it."

"True—true. There, he reaches the spot."

"Yes, he is there."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Dick Turpin, "Come on. This is too good. Come on both of you, and be introduced to the ghost, if you will be so good as to allow me to have the honour of performing that ceremony."

These words from Dick were quite sufficient to convince both Maggs and Jack that there was nothing supernatural in the object to which he had advanced with so much real courage. If they were not sufficient for that object, they most certainly ought to have been so.

"I think," said Maggs, "that Turpin will have the laugh at us both, Jack. But come on."

"Are you coming?" said Dick.

"Yes—yes."

They both reached the spot in a moment or two, and then Dick said, with all the gravity imaginable—

"Allow me, gentlemen, to introduce to you a flannel petticoat, as the object of a supernatural character, upon the gooseberry bush, and to a pea-stick, with a piece of rag at the end of it, to frighten the birds from, I suppose, an onion plantation, as the supernatural face that kept moving about with such horrible and strange significance as we looked at it from yonder."

"Is that the fact?" said Maggs.

"You don't say so?" said Jack.

"Yes, it is a fact, and I am very happy to say so; and I may add, that I strongly suspect most supernatural appearances to be composed of about as simple elements."

"The deuce take it!" muttered Jack. "How glad I am, Dick, that you had more courage than I in this matter."

"And than I," said Maggs.

"Now," said Dick, "I know what you both suspect, and that is, that I am very far sighted, and saw that something of this sort composed the ghost."

"No—no!" they both said.

"Well, then," added Dick, with a laugh, "I say yes, for I am very long-sighted, indeed, and able to see extremely well in the dark, and the moment I looked upon the object here, I thought that it was something like what it turns out to be. Now, you see, how the merit and the chivalry of my courage fades away. The probability is, that if I really thought it had been anything supernatural, I might have been as loth as either of you to have thrown myself in the way of it so recklessly."

"Well," said Maggs, "that will do. Let us come now to the great room, for I think we shall find our friends there. My mission on the outside of the house, by the bridle road, was specially to look for you two."

They now made their way into the large apartment in which the thieves had met upon that eventful night, when the two officers had with such singular imprudence sacrificed their lives to the vengeance of the "family." There were assembled nearly every one who had been at the meeting on the former occasion.

The entrance of Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack was the signal for a cheer, which Maggs, however, as soon as possible, repressed, reminding them of the danger of any unusual noise, situated as they were in a house that, in all likelihood, was suspected by the police.

"I don't speak to delay business, or to give anything like an alarm to any one here," said Maggs; "but I say it honestly, that I do think the house is watched."

"It's more than likely," said a voice.

"Well, so say I. And now let us to business, and make up our minds what we mean to do, and then let us all get away as quickly as we possibly can."

"Yes—yes, that's it," said several.

"Allow me, then," said Jack, as he took off his hat, and stood upon a chair so as to make himself plainly visible to all present—"allow me to thank every one here for the kind interest shown in the fate of Claude Duval. I am his oldest and most constant friend, I believe I may say, and I thank you all from my heart, both in my own name and in his."

"Bravo, Jack!"

"And I, too," said Dick Turpin, lifting his hat, and exhibiting that nearly completely bald head, by which he was so well known, and which, when he took off his hat, made him look at the least fifteen years older than when he had it on—"I, too, have to thank you all; and I only hope that if anything is determined upon to-night in favour of Duval, that you will let me take the post of danger, be it what it may, in the enterprise."



CLAUDE DUVAL'S DREAM IN NEWGATE.

CHAPTER CCCV.

THE DISPERSION OF THE THIEVES, AND THE DEATH OF THE SCOUT IN THE LANE.

This declaration from Dick Turpin, spoken as it was with a sincerity of which here could be no possible doubt, was pleasing enough to those who were assembled in that large apartment.

A murmur of satisfaction arose from them at the statement of his wishes, and one then cried out—

"We will all do what we can for Duval; but Maggs is the man who will tell us what to do."

"Yes—yes!" cried the others, "Maggs is the man—Maggs is the man! He will say what must be done."

"Well," said Maggs, rising, "if you will have it so, all of you, I will say what I think it ought to be; but as regards the doing part of it or not, that will b for all you to decide, you know, not me."

"Go on, Maggs."

"We shall all," said Jack, "I am sure, listen to Maggs with that attention that any suggestion from him merits, and I, for one, have no doubt in the world but that what he recomends will be found to be the very best course we can all of us pursue."

"No doubt of that at all," said Dick.

Maggs was now hoisted up upon one of the tables, so that by a light that hung from a rusty chain fastened to the ceiling, he was plainly visible to all present. There was a bandage still round his face where he had been wounded by one of the officers, who now lay in the garden so calm and so still, and through the folds of that bandage a few drops of blood had oozed.

This gave him the appearance of ferocity, which was very far, in deed, from being in accordance with Maggs' real character, for he was anything but a man of violent passions.

"Hear him! Hear Maggs!" cried one.

"Won't you take a drop of ale before you begin?" said another.

"Silence!" cried a third.

"Thank you all," said Maggs, "I will take the ale when I have done; but not now."

"All's right. Go on."

"You all know," said Maggs, "that I speak nothing more than the truth when I say, that by the situation I have held in the old stone-jug in the Bailey, I have been able to do some good to the family."

"Lots of good!" cried half-a-dozen voices.

"Well, I don't mention that in any way to make a boast of it, mind you."

"We know that, Maggs."

"I only say it, you see, because it is a fact that there is no need to dispute, and because it brings me to the first part of what I am going to say to-night, and that first part is, that I rather think something may be done for Claude Duval; but that something will have the effect of preventing me showing my face in Newgate again; so I shall be of no more use."

The thieves were silent at this, and looked ruefully at each other.

"Mind you," added Maggs, "I don't mean to say that it will positively have that effect, but it may. I will try and manage that it shall not, if we carry out the plan at all; but still, you know what my opinion is; and that is, that it will."

"A bad job that for the family," said a voice.

"Very," said several others.

"Before our friend Maggs goes any further, then," said Jack, "allow me to say that, upon the part of Claude Duval, I should refuse to sanction any enterprise that brought Maggs into trouble, or injured so much as the hair of his head."

"And I," cried Dick.

"Bravo! Bravo!" shouted the others.

"Silence!" said Maggs. "Do you forget where you are? You are not in one of the old kens in the city underground, and so well shut in that you may make as much noise as you like, and no chance of any one hearing you."

"All's right, Maggs; go on."

"Well, there's no chance, as far as I can see, of any harm coming to me by the job. All I think is, that the sheriffs may be rather suspicious that I had sold them, and so they might think it would be just as well to dispense with my services as odd man at Newgate, you see."

"Let's know the plan, Maggs."

"It is a bold one."

"Of course," said Dick.

"That was to be expected," said Jack, "and in that lies the principal chance of its success."

"You are right," added Maggs. "What I know of the position of Claude Duval enables me to say that, by hook or by crook, the authorities have made up their minds to hang him, and he will be tried upon indictment after indictment, till they get a verdict of guilty, and then they will take good care to put him out of this world, you may depend."

"Shame—shame!"

"Well, it is a shame, when, in the name of justice, there is anything that looks like persecution, for, after all, there is many a worse fellow than Claude Duval who has escaped scot-free. But that's not our look out. We want to save him, right or wrong, I take it."

"Yes, Maggs, that's it."

"Then this is the plan. I expect to-morrow night to be on duty by Claude's cell, you see, and when that is the case, the regular turnkeys don't give themselves a great deal of trouble. Mind you, I shall be outside his cell, but that won't make any difficulty."

"But you don't mean to say, Maggs," said Dick, "that you can walk him out of Newgate?"

"No—not exactly; but if half a dozen courageous men will take possession of the lobby, I can bring him there, I rather think, and then the thing will be done."

"That is bold, indeed."

"Let me explain to you how the affair will stand. In the lobby you will find three men, one on the lock, as it is called, and two officers on night duty. Well, between Claude's cell and the lobby there are two turnkeys to pass, who are well armed, so that there are five men to conquer in all."

"That's easy," said a voice.

"Stop a bit—not so easy. First of all, it is necessary that they should be conquered without noise or the discharge of fire-arms of any kind. If an alarm is given, the whole force of the establishment will hasten to the spot, and we are lost."

"But still," said Jack, "I can conceive how it may be done."

"Yes," added Maggs. "In this wise I think it may. Exactly at half-past two o'clock I will come into the lobby, and then I would have some one of you come to the wicket-gate with a letter in your hand, and say in a voice as of one in authority—'A letter from the Under-Secretary of State to the Governor.' Well, upon that, the man on the lock will open the door and let you in, but the moment you get in, another of you must come and tap at the wicket, and say—'The Lord Mayor will be here in five minutes. He has sent me to request that the governor will rise at once.' Well, they will let him in, likewise, for nothing throws such men so much off their guard as the use of high names and dignities."

"I see," said Dick.

"Then there will be two of you in the lobby, and you must fall upon the officer who remains and the man on the lock, for one of them will be gone with the mock letter to the governor, you understand."

"Precisely."

"The moment you have gagged and bound them, and, of course, you will take care to have everything handy for such a purpose, you can open the wicket and let in half a dozen more, and then you will affect to have seized me, likewise, and to threaten me with instant death, if I do not show you the way to Claude Duval's cell."

"It will do, I think," said Dick.

"Yes," said Jack, "but it is a ticklish affair."

"I cannot conceal from myself that it is so," said Maggs, "but I have a pretty good idea that there will be success. Of course the two men in the passage must be treated the same as those in the lobby, and I will take you direct to Claude's cell, and open the door for you pretty quickly, and in two minutes, out he ought to be. His horse, or one as good, shall be in the Old Bailey, and off you all go."

"Hurrah!"

"Silence, for the love of safety. You, Jack, the old and kind friend and associate of Claude Duval, you tell us first what you think of this scheme for his preservation?"

All eyes were now turned upon Jack, who, without one moment's hesitation, replied in a firm, clear voice—

"I say, yes, to the plan, and I like it for its very boldness."

"You, Dick—what say you?"

"I echo Jack's sentiments, and he and I will disguise ourselves, and carry out the first part of the enterprise, if some half dozen of those here present will volunteer to aid us."

"I will—I will—I—I!" cried some dozen of voices.

"Six will be ample," said Maggs; "and I hope, that without any offence to those who would go and do the thing well, I may be permitted to pick out the six I should like to head it."

"To be sure, Maggs."

"Then may we," said Jack, in a voice full of hopefulness, "may we consider that as settled?"

"Quite settled," cried the thieves, "We will do it."

"There is now one thing to look to," said Maggs. "Money will be wanted. Every one must be well disguised, well armed, and well mounted, and the person who is supposed to come from the secretary of state must have a handsome private carriage, as that will materially help in the delusion."

"Make yourself easy upon that score," said Dick Turpin. "Jack and I have it in our power to furnish every guinea that will be wanted in the affair, and if you, Maggs, will superintend the arrangements, all will be well."

"It will be a five hundred pound job, if a bit," said Maggs; "for everything must be bought, you see, coach and all."

"I don't think," said Dick, "that we have made a bad night's work of it to-night, however, Jack."

"Well, we have a mahogany-box that feels heavy; but I don't know what's in it."

"Where is it, Jack?"

"Here, Dick. I brought it off the horse's back when we dismounted, and kept it in my hand till now. Shall we open it?"

"To be sure."

"Where did it come from?" said Maggs.

"I think they called the conveyance the Barnet fly," said Dick; "and this box we took from a Jew who was a passenger, and who seemed to set no small store by it."

The thieves gathered closely round Jack as he tried, for some few moments, in vain to open the desk.

"Let me try it," said a voice.

"Ah, let the game cracksman have a try at it," said the thieves. "He will open it."

"I will try," said a small, active-looking man, stepping forward, and taking a glance at the lock.

Rummaging, then, in his pocket for a moment or two, the cracksman took out a small pick-lock, and casting his eyes up to the ceiling as if in deep thought, he inserted it into the keyhole.

Click went the lock.

"It's a good one," he said, "and one of the newest patents; but I know all about it."

"Can you open it, though?"

"It is open."

Jack placed his hand upon the lid of the Jew's box, and it opened in a moment. The practised hand of the cracksman had made short work of the last new patent lock, which was to defy all attempts to pick it.

The brief delay that had taken place in opening the Jew's box, had had the effect of wonderfully arousing the curiosity that actuated all the thieves concerning it, and there was some inconvenient pressure around Jack as it was at length fairly opened.

"Nothing," said Jack.

"Nothing?" replied everybody.

"No; only papers, as you all see."

Jack laughed as he spoke, and turned out a lot of letters and memoranda that reached apparently to the bottom of the mahogany-box, and then he said—

"I wonder if any one here has a chisel or a small jemmy?"

"Here," said the cracksman, "is the sort of thing you want. That box has a false bottom to it."

"Well, so I suppose, and here it goes."

There was a slight crash, and then the false bottom of the box came out, disclosing a space of about four inches in depth beneath it, in which there was a quantity of small packs of something.

"What is it?" said Dick.

"Money and jewellery, all done up closely so as not to rattle in the coach. Ah, I see how it has been managed: every article of jewellery that has been sold has left room for the price of it in the little box of wool that had contained it."

"Then we are all right."

"I hope so. We will see what there is here."

Jack counted the money and found somewhere about two hundred guineas in gold, and then there was some silver, and some jewellery that looked very good.

"I tell you what it is, Maggs," said Dick, "you had better take the box with its contents and do the best you can with it. It came from a Jew, and, no doubt, another of the children of Israel will buy it."

"Of ceurse, there is no difficulty in that at all. But what's that? I heard a shot or something very like one."

CHAPTER CCCVI.

THE THIEVES ESCAPE, AND DICK AND JACK GET BACK TO THE PUBLIC-HOUSE.

THERE could be no possible mistake concerning the fact that a pistol shot had been fired somewhere outside ths mansion, but no one could say whether it was a signal from the scout that they had in the lane, or some accidental shot from some one else, which might not in any way or manner concern them.

Not for long, however, were they left in suspense upon that part of the subject.

Suddenly there came into the room a man covered with blood, and fell half fainting to the floor, as he gasped out in frightful accents—

"The traps—the traps! They have done for me."

"Why, it's Downy Ned," said Maggs, "who was keeping watch in the lane."

"What has happened, Ned?" cried everybody.

"Don't you see, they have done my business for me."

"Yes, but who and what are they?"

"I'll tell you—if—I can—water—water!"

They hurriedly brought some water and placed it to his lips. It was as much as he could do, for a spasm that seized him, to drink any of it, but he did contrive to take a little, and it had evidently the effect of reviving him, so that in a few moments he could speak a little more easily.

"I was in the lane, when I saw a couple of dozen of them coming—coming——"

"A couple of dozen?"

"Quite—quite. They were mounted, and they came creeping on as though they knew the crib they meant to be at well enough, so I started to get into the garden through the small door in the wall, but one of them saw me and had a crack at me, and hit me."

"But not badly, I hope, Ned?" said Maggs.

"Badly—not badly?"

"Well, Ned, you don't seem to be bleeding."

"Inwards—inwards!" gasped the scout, and his head fell back.

"He is dead," said one.

"As mutton," said another. Poor Ned!"

A violent ring at the bell of the garden gate at this moment came upon the ears of the thieves.

"My horse?" said Dick, "I forgot him."

"And mine?" said Jack.

"All's right," said Maggs, "all's right. I have been over this place, and I know how to take you all out in such an emergency as this. Follow me."

"Won't we! Only you keep to that, Maggs, and we will follow you fast enough, old fellow."

"Listen first, and don't be in a state of trepidation any of you. The officers can't get in for some time, and if we have ten minutes to spare it is all right. This house, you know, has its back against West-end Lane, and there's nothing but a clear wall there, and no such thing as even a window, so that's where we must get out by."

"A queer way of getting out," said one.

"Not at all. Come on. You, Dick and Jack, will find your cattle as we go along, no doubt. It is a good thing, now, that Bill sent his wife and kids away from here before now."

"Yes," said Bill, "the place would have been a good deal too hot to hold me, I take it, if I hadn't."

"No doubt."

The thieves numbered about twenty two persons, but it was quite surprising how noiselessly they managed to follow Maggs into the garden. The officers were still ringing at the gate-bell, no doubt with the intention of shooting the first one who should make an appearance at it, or, perhaps, they rung there in order to cloak some attack of a more insidious character that they were intent upon making at another part of the building.

Be that how it might, however, one thing was quite evident, and that was, that the family, as they called themselves, had no time to lose.

By good luck, both Dick and Jack lit upon their cattle close to the door through which they had emerged into the garden, and they were about to mount, but Maggs advised that they should not, so they led the animals.

After going half round the house, Maggs paused at the door of a little out-house, and spoke.

"This is the tool-house," he said. "Who can use a pick-axe well among you?"

"I, and I," said several.

"Take, then, what you want out of them, for I believe it is pretty well stocked with rough tools."

They lit a match inside the tool-house for a few moments, so that they might see what they were about, and in the course of a few moments they were well enough provided with tools to work with.

"Now," said Maggs, "this is the way we must go into the house again."

The way he led them was through a little scullery, and then across a kitchen, and so on to a room, in which there had been a billiard-table, and in which there was only a borrowed light. The wall of that room was hung with fancy drapery, and Maggs, as he pointed to it, said—

"Now, my family men, that is the only road to the open air, that I should say it will be safe for any of us to take to-night. Through that wall is West-end Lane. There is a hedge just on the other side, and a water-course, but these are not impediments that will stop us, I daresay."

The thieves now perfectly understood, if they had only guessed before, what it was that they had to do, and those who were armed with the pick-axes at once began operations upon the wall with right good will.

"Work as silently as you can," said Maggs.

Dick and Jack had had some difficulty in getting their horses through the scullery and kitchen into the billiard-room, but they did at last succeed in so doing; and as the mortar began to fly about, they each tied a pocket-handkerchief over the eyes of his steed.

The door of the room was a strong one, and as a measure of precaution against a sudden rush of the officers at the last moment, Maggs locked it and bolted it, but they heard nothing more as yet of the strong force which had been by the scout reported as close at hand.

In the course of five minutes an opening was made in the wall, and when that was once the case, the rest of the work proceeded with much greater speed, so that a practicable breach through which a man might make his way was soon established.

"I will go and have a look out," said Maggs.

In a moment he pushed himself through the opening, and they heard him fall with a splash into the water course that was under the hedge. Dick Turpin looked anxiously through the opening, but all was darkness as well as silence.

"Come on," said Maggs, in a whisper.

The thieves began to drop through the hole in the wall as fast as possible; but Jack was still hard at work enlarging it, for he saw that it was not near extensive enough to let the horses through, and he had no idea of leaving them behind him.

Dick, when he saw him thus occupied, helped him, and they in the course of a few minutes more got down a large portion of the wall.

"Come—come," said Maggs.

"All's right—here we are—go on, Jack."

"After you, Dick."

"D——n it, there is no time to stand upon ceremony," said Dick, as he walked his horse over the rubbish through the orifice in the wall at once. There was some little difficulty in getting over the ditch, and through the hedge, but by going backwards himself, and elbowing his way, Dick, although at the expense of some scratches, made a path for the horse.

Jack's progress was all the more easy upon that account, and they were both in the lane uninjured.

The thieves were all crouching down under the hedge, but Maggs spoke to them in a low voice.

"Disperse," he said, "if you would save yourselves. Get into the fields, so that the horsemen may be puzzled by the hedges and gates. My only wonder is, where the devil they all are."

"And mine, too," said Dick, as he placed his foot in the stirrup in the act to mount.

"Fire!" said a loud, clear voice.

In a moment a volley of fire-arms swept over the spot, and if Jack and Dick

had been mounted, it would have been the next thing to an impossibility for either of them to have escaped from being hit.

The position of the thieves, under the hedge, was so far favourable that most of the bullets went over them; still some few were hit, but the remainder at once set off across the fields in such a panic, that it lent them double speed.

"Are you hit, Jack?" said Dick.

"No. Nor you?"

"All's right," said Maggs. "Be off with you, before they give us another taste of their quality."

"But you?"

"Never mind me."

"Nay—but we do, though," said Jack. "I know that Dick's Bess won't carry double, but my horse can, and will for a mile or two. Get up at once, Maggs, behind me."

"That's about it," said Maggs, as he vaulted up to the back of the horse. "Now let us be off as if the devil himself were behind us, for it is the only chance, I think."

Dick took the lead, and Jack followed him, and so along West-end Lane they went like the wind.

The moment they started, they heard a voice cry out—

"There they go. After them, my lads."

"Try it," said Jack, as he clinched his teeth, and made his steed, notwithstanding the double burthen he bore, get over the ground at a terrific pace.

The state of the road was far from being favourable, for there had been considerable rain within the last seven or eight days, so that there was much mud; but, still, that was a disadvantage that attached to the pursuers as well as to the pursued; therefore, it was not of material moment.

"On—on," Dick kept saying, and it was quite clear that, if he had liked, after the first half-mile, he could have gone far a-head of Jack and Maggs; but he generously kept by them.

The pace of Jack's horse began to slacken, and they could hear the sounds of pursuit still upon the night air.

"This won't do," said Maggs.

"Yes—yes. Hold on."

"No, I won't. I shall only involve you in destruction with me, Jack. I say, it won't do."

"Oh, yes, we shall be on a harder road in a few more minutes, for we are close to the end of the lane."

"Draw up close to the hedge, Jack, if you don't wish me to break my neck."

"How so?"

"Do it, I beg of you."

"Well, well; but every moment is a life, for all we know."

Jack drew up quite close to the hedge, and then in an instant, with amazing agility, Maggs drew up his feet, and stood upon the back of the horse.

"Good night, Jack."

With one spring he cleared the hedge, and alighted in the field on the other side of it.

"On—on!" he cried.

"Safe?" said Jack.

"Quite. On—on!"

"Good God, Jack! where are you?" said Dick, riding back.

"Here. Push on."

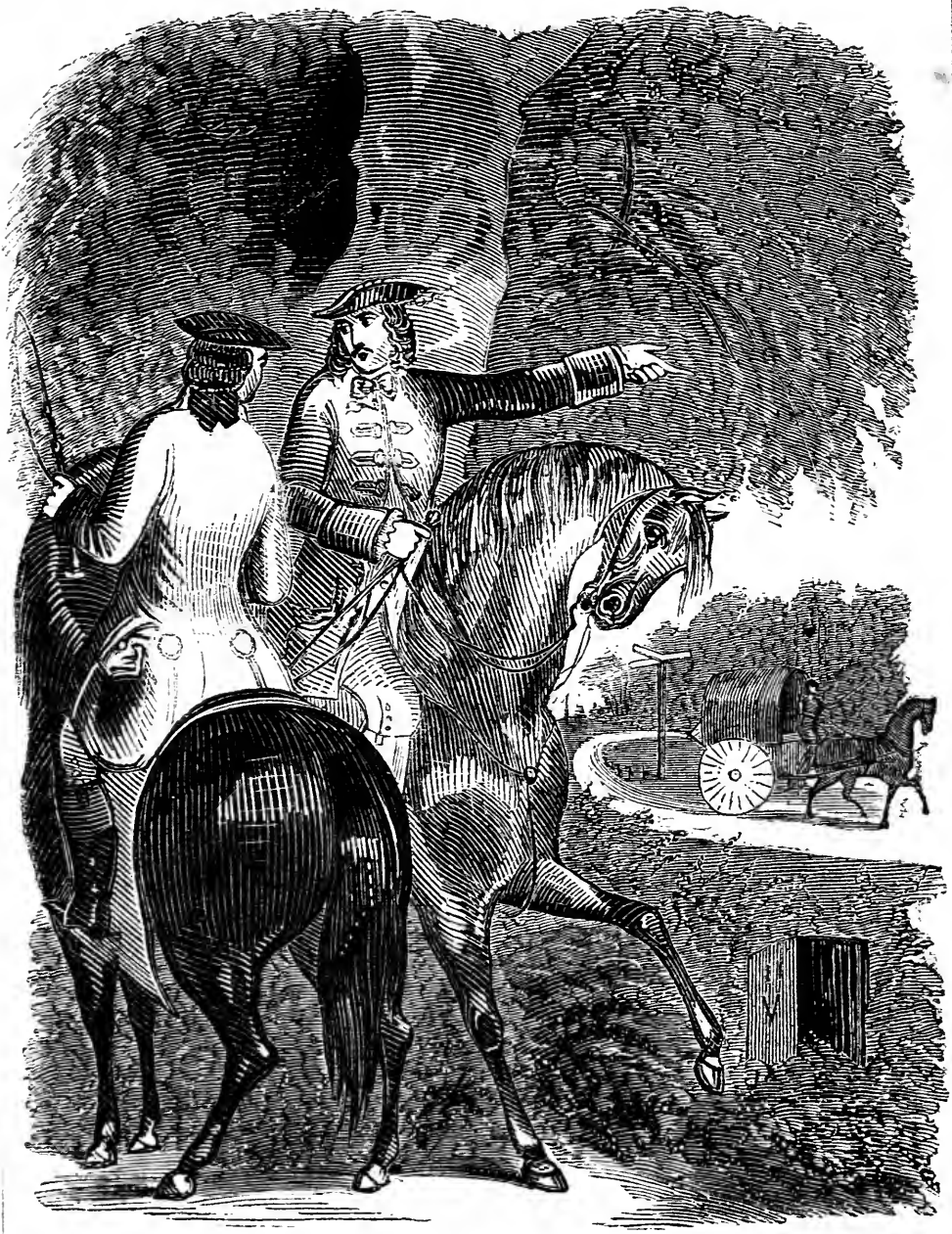
The horse that Jack rode, now that he was released from the weight of Maggs upon his hind-quarters, seemed not to feel Jack at all, for he bounded on like a deer, and kept neck and neck with Turpin's beautiful mare, Bess, which was now fairly upon its mettle.

Some straggling shots now told that the officers were getting desperate and vicious with the idea that, after all, their prey was escaping them.

"Go it!" cried Dick. "Blaze away! How are you, Maggs?"

"Far enough off, and safe, I hope," said Jack.

"What, not with you?"



DICK AND JACK PLANNING THE ROBBERY OF THE BARNET NIGHT-FLY.

"Do you think this creature could carry double at such a pace as this, Dick, and so far?"

"No—no. I ought to have thought of that. But where is he?"

"I dropped him over the hedge, and the traps have passed him a good half mile now, and here we are in Kilburn. Which way is it to be?"

"Right on up Wilsden Lane."

"So be it."

Crossing diagonally the Kilburn-road, they darted up the circuitous lane that leads to Wilsden; but it was no part of Dick's policy to go there. After taking the first turn in the lane, he cried out—

"Follow me, Jack," and then spurred his horse at a low fence to the left of the road, and went over beautifully. Jack did the same, and in two minutes more they were on the other side of a hay-stack, and the horses quite quiet, and only just a little shaken by the hard pelt that they had had from West-end.

"But the traps," said Jack—"Where are they?"

"You are answered, Jack."

Jack was answered by the fact, that in the next moment the officers swept past at a gallop towards Wilsden.

"There you go," said Dick, "and the devil go with you for a parcel of blundering fools, after all. I wonder what we should see in you all to go clattering on to Wilsden with you at our heels, you parcel of curs?"

"Don't be angry, Dick."

"Oh, I am not; only—only——"

"You are a little provoked."

"Well, well, it don't matter. But that volley that they fired at us all was a cowardly thing enough."

"It was."

"Their duty was to take us, not to shoot us. It was time enough when we showed fight for them to do so."

"Never mind it, Dick. I don't think they did much mischief by it, and I am more concerned at the idea of some poor fellow lying at West-end now, wounded, than at the conduct of the officers."

"But we can't help it."

"Not a bit—not a bit. We must get to London now as soon as we can, and put up again at the old public-house. I think, after all, if we are sharp about it, we shall be as safe there as anywhere."

"No doubt about that, and, perhaps, safer. So come on. If we can hit upon a route over the fields this way we shall get into the Harrow-road, I take it, shall we, Dick?"

"Exactly. Bess is indulging herself with a few mouthfuls from the hay-stack. I don't like to baulk her for a few moments."

"All's right. My horse has just made the same discovery; so we may as well let them have a little amusement in that line at the expense of the enemy."

The horses evidently enjoyed the meal of the fresh hay very much, and they put the patience of their masters rather to the test as they kept pulling it out of the stack, and chewing away at it, notwithstanding the bit prevented free mastication.

Dick and Jack both would have been glad, if circumstances would have warranted such a course, to have released the horses from their head-gear, and let them eat at leisure; but that could not be at that present time.

"Now for it," said Dick, as he mounted; "who will lead the way? You or I, Jack?"

"You, if you think you know it, and I will do so if you have any doubt, for I know that I can lead you tolerably correctly."

"Go on, then, in the name of all that is good and lucky."

CHAPTER CCCVII.

MAGGS LETS DUVAL KNOW WHAT HIS FRIENDS ARE ABOUT.

It would appear that the officers had really made their way right to Wilsden for Dick and Jack neither saw nor heard anything further of them.

It was half past three, and a cloudy morning, as the old watchman in Smithfield had it, when the two highwaymen drew rein at the door of the public-house in Barbican. There was a man sauntering up and down by the door-post, and the moment they stopped, he stepped out on the open pavement to meet them.

"Stand, and deliver!" he said.

"Hilloa!" cried Jack. "Who are you?"

Dick laughed.

"I know who it is," he said. "Maggs, if you don't manage to disguise your voice at times better than that, I should say it requires no great amount of cunning to know you by it."

"I was not attempting to disguise it at all," said Maggs, in so very different a tone, that Dick started at the sound of it.

"I beg your pardon, Maggs," he said. "You can do the trick when you like; but in the name of all that is wonderful, how came you here before us, and without any appearance of haste, either?"

"Get your cattle put up first, before I tell you."

"Yes," said Jack, "that is only prudent."

Maggs took from his waistcoat-pocket a small bird-whistle, and blew a peculiar note upon it, and then before the echo of that note had died away, one half of the great gate of the stable was opened, and the landlord, who was just inside, put his head out, saying—

"Here you are."

"Come on, Dick," said Jack, as he rode into the stable, for he was exceedingly anxious to get the horses under cover.

Dick followed him, and Maggs trotted in after Dick. The landlord then closed the gate and put up a long wooden bar across it.

"All's right, I hope," he said.

"Yes," replied Dick, as he dismounted, "but we have had some rather sharp work of one sort and another."

"And some have suffered," said Dick.

"Ah, so Maggs has been telling me. But here you are, both of you, sound in wind and limb by all appearance, and the cattle don't seem much the worse."

"None at all, I hope," said Jack, as he took the stable-lantern from the landlord and glanced about the feet of both the beasts. "All's quite right. Rest, and a good feed, is all they want. And now, Maggs, do tell us by what conjuration you got here so soon from Wilsden Lane?"

"It's soon told, and easy," said Maggs. "You left me on a hedge in Wilsden Lane. I made a clean enough jump of it, and when I alighted on the other side I found myself in a turnip field, and the first thing I did was to hit my head against a very large specimen of that vegetable that half protruded from the ground, but as my head was considerably the hardest, I did more damage to the turnip than it could possibly do to me."

"No doubt," said the landlord.

"Well, after that I sat up a little, and while I was thinking upon things in general, past swept the officers in pursuit of you two, at a slapping pace that looked as if they really meant it."

"And they did," said Jack.

"Not a doubt of that; but as your horse no longer carried double, I had no fear of the result, as I know very well that the police cattle are seldom noted for great speed. Well, then, I thought as they had abandoned the Edgeware-

road, that I might just as well go back to it myself; so I walked to Kilburn again."

"The best thing you could do," said Dick.

"So it turned out, for I got on the outside of a coach that was going to the Flower-pot in Bishopsgate-street, and I got down comfortably at the corner of the Old Bailey, and, crossing Smithfield, arrived here a quarter of an hour ago without any fatigue."

"And you were watching for us?"

"I thought it would be the best thing I could do, for you might have been otherwise delayed at such an hour."

"Many thanks," said Dick. "And now I don't know how Jack may happen to feel, but I can safely say for myself, that something to eat and something to drink would come in very welcomly to me."

"I say the same," said Jack.

"And I," said Maggs; "for I will make this place my home till the morning now."

"Come on then, all of you," said the landlord, "and you will find that the larder is anything but empty. I have had an eye—I may, indeed, go so far as to say, that I have had two eyes to the likelihood that you would come home hungry and thirsty both, so I have made arrangements accordingly; and while you eat, perhaps you can spare time, between whiles, to tell me what has been determined upon for poor Claude Duval."

"That will we," said Dick.

A cold surloin of beef was soon before the party, with every addition to it that could make it a very delightful repast, and they all enjoyed a supper, such as exercise had lent a keen zest to, with an amazing appetite. Dick briefly informed the landlord what had been resolved upon in the case of Duval, and then, at about four in the morning, he and Jack retired to rest.

Maggs took two hours' sleep, and then rising, he left the public-house without disturbing any one, and hastened to Newgate, at the wicket-gate of which he presented himself with that admirable sort of half-foolish smile which made the officers think that he was a very good-natured fellow, but by no means over bright.

In fact, the sort of attachment they had to him, no doubt, arose in a great measure from the feeling, upon their parts, that they were wonderfully sharp fellows in comparison with him; and the jokes they made at his expense always being received with the greatest good nature by him, raised him quite to a position of favouritism in the prison.

"Well, conjurer Maggs," said the man who was 'on the look,' as he opened the wicket to let him in. "How are you to-day?"

"Pretty well, thank you, Mr. Brown; and I can say that you look well, indeed; but you always does."

"Ah, I do rather flatter myself that I'm not the worst looking fellow in the world, Maggs."

"The best, Mr. Brown—the best, I should say."

"Oh, no—no. Hem! Not quite the best."

"Ah, dear, if you had only had the chances, Mr. Brown, as some fellows have, as are no more to be compared to you nor chalk is to cheese, what mightn't you a been?"

"Well—well, Maggs, never mind."

"No; but it is a pity. You ought to have been a sheriff, Mr. Brown, that you ought."

"Well, I'm much obliged to you for your good wishes, however, Maggs. I, perhaps, should have made as good a sheriff as some folks who do come here with their gold chains on, looking as prim as possible; but it ain't to be, so there's an end of it."

"Ah! more's the pity."

"But where have you been all night, Maggs? Several of the fellows have been asking for you to get them their drops of beer, and so on."

"Why, if you'd believe it, Mr. Brown, I haven't been very well; so I took some physic, and that——"

"Recovered you, and here you are."

"No—it made me worse, in course."

"Oh, indeed?"

"Yes, and here I is, not quite the thing, but yet able to do my duty, and to oblige any of my friends as will be so good as to want me to do anything for 'em."

"Well, you are a good-natured fellow, if ever there was one, that's quite clear. Can you come on duty to-night?"

"Yes, if so be as I'm wanted to."

"You will, and no mistake. There's been a precious row, I can tell you. Some fifteen of the best men on the Bow Street establishment went out last night on an expedition, and two of 'em has come off second best."

"Oh, lor! How, Mr. Brown?"

"Why, they caught nobody, and got thrown from their horses, that's a fact; and, indeed, I heard the governor say that they had one way and another made a pretty kettle of fish of it."

"Oh, dear! I is so sorry."

In this way did Maggs, by a well acted simplicity, most completely get the better of the folks at the Old Bailey, and at Newgate. It was by successfully flattering the vanity of all with whom he came into contact, from the governor down to the humblest officer of the prison, that he became so great a favourite, and that he threw really sharp, clever men off their guard.

It was about two o'clock in the day before Maggs was placed for an hour upon temporary duty inside the prison, and entrusted with the keys that opened Claude Duval's cell, as well as some others. He knew that the hour would be a long one before any of the officers thought of relieving him; so he dared not hesitate at once to seek Duval, and make him clearly understand what would be attempted to be done for him by his friends Dick and Jack, and by the thieves, upon that night which was now fast approaching.

Upon opening the door of the cell, Maggs found that Claude was sleeping; but the noise of the lock made him move uneasily, and he muttered—

"No—no, not dead. They could not kill her!"

"Poor fellow," said Maggs; "he is thinking of her whom he loved better than all the world—of Cicely."

"I tell you she lives—she lives!" murmured Claude.

Maggs stood in the doorway of the cell gazing upon the poor prisoner with compassionate eyes.

"There!" said Claude—"there they come, now, through the old churchyard, and the red-coats are with them. Oh, if you were but safe, Cicely! Will not even the sanctity of this old cathedral be respected?"

It was evident that the dreams of Duval were carrying him back to Winchester Cathedral, where Cicely had been in so much peril.

CHAPTER CCCVIII.

THE PLAN OF ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE IS CONNIVED BRAVELY.

"DUVAL!" said Maggs, as he stooped down over the pallet-bed upon which Claude lay—"Duval, I say!"

"Save her!—oh, save her!"

"Duval, awake. It is I."

Claude only dashed his arms to and fro, and muttered indistinctly the name of Cicely.

"This won't do," said Maggs, as he laid his hand upon Duval's arm. Awake, Claude Duval; but speak low."

The touch, light as it was, sufficed to arouse Duval in a moment, and he sprang to his feet, his fetters rattling as he did so, and making much more noise than Maggs thought at all prudent to be made upon that occasion.

"Silence!" he said. "Would you bring danger upon me, and destroy your own hopes of deliverance? Peace, I say!"

"Ah, who speaks to me?"

"Don't you know me?"

Duval sunk back upon the miserable couch, as he said, in a faint voice—

"Oh, yes, surely, yes, I know you now. I think, that is, I am sure that you once before said some kind things to me. I know you now. How did they let you get to this place?"

"Plague take it, Duval, you are only half awake now, I think. Rouse yourself, man."

"This is Newgate!"

"Newgate? To be sure it is. I suppose there can be very little doubt of that now. Don't you know me? I am Maggs. Come, take a drink of water, and open your eyes a little wider. How do you feel now?"

"Cooler!"

"I should think you did, for you have upset half the pitcher of water over you. But are you wide awake now?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. I have been dreaming, that's all, as a man is apt enough to do in this place, I fancy. Well, Maggs, what have you in the shape of news for me?"

"Listen to me attentively Duval to what I am going to say to you, for I don't know how long they may leave me to say it in, and it is important that you should know all about it; you can ask me any questions afterwards."

"Go on—go on."

Maggs then rapidly detailed to him all that had taken place at the meeting at West-end, and of the determination that Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack had made to attempt his rescue upon that very night that was now coming; and he concluded his communication by saying—

"Now, Duval, of course everything will depend upon your absolute coolness and discretion at the time I hope that we may depend upon you in those particulars."

"My dear fellow, ask Dick and Jack if ever I was wanting in such qualities when they are requisite."

"That will do quite well. I have no need to ask them, because I am quite sure myself that you will be all right. And now take this key."

"A key?"

"Yes; and to you it is the most important one that ever you had in your hand. It unlocks the fetters that you have on. They might have put you on a rivetted set, and if they had, you would have had to leave Newgate with them."

"They are rivetted."

"You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do. About three or four hours ago, I think it was, they came in with the prison blacksmith and the governor's clerk, and took off the fetters I had on, and rivetted these in their place. I don't know what motive they had for so doing, as I never once opened my lips to them, or they to me."

"I don't at all understand it," said Maggs, as he paced the cell several times with rather a distracted mien. "I can't make out what they mean by it. You gave them money, Claude?"

"They have had twenty pounds of me."

"Then you are entitled to every indulgence; but I suppose it was some whim of the governor's. I cannot account for it in any other way; and the truth of it

is, that I am quite unprovided with the tools to enable you to get rid of the fetters you now wear."

"It is awkward enough."

"Never mind, they will carry you out with them, even if the worst comes to the worst; but if I can bring you in a file or two between this time and two o'clock, I will."

"Thank you, Maggs. I only feel half a man while this cold iron is about my limbs,"

"I don't wonder at it. But it is now quite understood that you will be prepared for action?"

"Oh, yes. And Cicely, she is better, no doubt?"

Maggs was confused, but Claude said immediately, in a higher and more excited voice—

"It is in vain for you to try to deceive me. I know that she has been badly wounded, and I have reason to believe that she is lying very ill somewhere; but if I thought she were dead, I tell you, Maggs, notwithstanding all your good feeling towards me, and notwithstanding all my wishes to hold my dear friend Jack by the hand again, I would not leave this cell alive."

"Nay, now, Claude——"

"Do not try to contend this affair with me. It is my fixed resolution. But I know she is not dead. I shall meet her again, I feel quite assured of it."

"Not a doubt of it. In another world, perhaps," added Maggs, to himself, "but not in this."

"Well—well, that is settled," added Duval. "I will be ready, and you can accept for yourself better thanks than words can give you, and tell all my friends that I have no means of letting them know how much I appreciate their generous kindness and devotion to me."

"I will—I will."

"Do so; and yet—yet——"

"Yet what, Duval?"

"If I thought that it was at all likely they would fall in this attempt to rescue me, I would rather die a thousand deaths than permit them to engage in such an enterprise."

"They know all that as well as you can tell it to them," replied Maggs, "and I don't think that any hesitation upon your part would have the effect of stopping them in their attempt to do something for you. They have pledged themselves to it; and upon the aid which you personally give to them will depend, I assure you, in a great measure, the success or the failure of the plan."

"Say no more. I will do all that man can do."

"That is right. If I can get out of the prison and procure you a good file or two, by the aid of which you may manage to rid yourself of your fetters, well and good; but if I cannot do that, Duval, you must not despair."

"Indeed, I will not."

Maggs now felt that he had had quite a long enough conference with Claude, considering the circumstances; and feeling that if the least suspicion should be awakened, the whole plan might fail, he left the cell, and kept watch and ward in the narrow gloomy passage adjoining it which was his proper place, considering that he was playing the part of turnkey on very special duty.

It was as well that Maggs had left the cell of Duval so quickly as he did, for he had not been five minutes out of it when he met the governor of Newgate and one of the sheriffs of London, evidently proceeding to the cell.

"Hilloa!" said the governor. "Who is on duty there?"

"I you please, sir," said Maggs, assuming the simple air and manner by which he was so well known in Newgate. "If you please, sir, I am."

"Oh, Maggs?"

"Yes, noble sir; I is Maggs, if you please."

"All's right," said the governor. "I believe, Maggs, although you are not

so overburthened with cunning as some folks that I could name, you are more to be depended upon. You are a faithful fellow."

"Oh, sir, I hopes as how I is."

The sheriff wanted to be very condescending to Maggs, so, nodding his little round, sleek head, he said—

"Go on, my good Maggs—go on in doing your duty to those placed above you. Always look up with proper reverence to your superiors, Maggs, and you will do right you know. Be humble, Maggs, that's the way for common people to get on."

Common people! Oh, dear! That sheriff was a cheesemonger.

"Thank you kindly, gentlemen," said Maggs; "it makes the tears come into the eyes of a poor fellow to be spoke to by such great gentlemen as you."

"A very civil man," said the sheriff, as he walked on.

"Oh, very," said the governor.

"And knows his place."

"That's what I like him for. He never presumes, you see, sir, and as you say, he knows his place. That is a great quality in a poor person, you know, sir."

"Oh, very great. Oh, dear me, I had a clerk to keep my books—they say he was the son of a decayed gentleman, or something of that sort; but, would you believe it, Mr. Governor, I only called him a vagabond in a quiet sort of way, because he didn't make out a bill I wanted, and what do you think he did?"

"Apologised."

"No—no! Guess again."

"Cried, and begged pardon."

"No. He actually pulled my nose!"

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, he did, and then taking his hat, out he walked, after giving me a kick behind that sent me nearly under the fire-grate, and from that day to this he has never been near my counting-house again, I assure you, or else I would have given him into custody, of course."

"Well, sir, that is truly shocking—ungrateful, too. But here we are, sir, at Claude Duval's cell, and I have my master-key with me, which will open it."

"Ah," said the sheriff, as the key rattled in the lock of the cell-door, "we will now inform him that he will be tried on Friday, and it is now Wednesday, so he will be comfortably enough hanged out of hand on Monday next."

"Walk in, Mr. Sheriff," said the governor, as he flung the cell-door wide open. "Walk in, sir; you will find the prisoner here, sir."

CHAPTER CCCIX.

DETAILS WHAT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN TWO AND FOUR IN THE MORNING AT NEWGATE.

Claude Duval was officially informed by the sheriff that his trial upon various charges of highway robbery would take place on the Friday ensuing, to which communication he merely inclined his head in token that he heard it.

"And," said the sheriff, "of course this is told you in order that you may avail yourself of the interval to procure legal advice, if you please so to do."

"Thank you. I will manage without," said Duval.

"Very good."

The sheriff waddled out of the cell, but the governor lingered for a moment, and said—



JACK AND TURPIN WATCHING THE APPROACH OF LAWYER CROKE'S CARRIAGE.

"Allow me to recommend you a very clever solicitor, Duval. You may as well, you know, spend what cash you have still left in that way as in any other."

"Thank you, I'd rather not."

"Oh, very good."

The governor slammed the door of the cell shut with a vehemence that showed he was not at all pleased at the determination of Claude Duval not to employ a solicitor, for the one he wanted to recommend was his son-in-law, a needy rascal, who had married his daughter merely for the purpose of getting a living by the union.

Maggs had kept his post in the passage adjoining to poor Duval's cell for more than an hour, when he was relieved by one of the regular turnkeys of the prison, who nodded to him with a jocose familiarity, as he said—

"All right, old fellow?"

"Oh dear, yes, Mr. Wilkins. All's right, sir."

"That will do. You are a good fellow, Maggs. Get yourself a pint of beer. Here is the money."

"How kind of you, Mr. W."

"Oh, no, not at all; you shall never want a pint of beer while I have the money to spare for it; so now you can go as soon as you like, and we shan't want you till night again."

"Very good, sir."

Maggs wished very much indeed to get out of Newgate, for he had much to do, but he did not let the officers of the prison see that he had any anxiety of that kind, and, indeed, he stopped in the lobby and gossiped for about five minutes, and then he fetched a pot of beer for the gentleman who was on the lock; but at last he was free, and he strolled up the Old Bailey at a slow pace, till he reached Newgate Street, and then he quickened his pace and went so fast that he was in Aldersgate Street in a few minutes.

Crossing to the other side of the way, then, Maggs dived down one of the small turnings which were upon the site of the present post-office, and he did not pause till he reached a tall, miserable-looking house, the lower part of which seemed to be completely boarded up.

At this house Maggs applied for admittance, by ringing a bell that was attainable by rather a narrow examination of the begrimed door post.

In the course of a few minutes the door was opened a little way, but a chain was up, so that it was quite safe.

"Who is there?" asked a female voice.

"Maggs," was the reply. "Is Dickson at home?"

"Oh, yes, he is. Come in."

The lady, for such we may in very great courtesy call her, took down the chain, and admitted Maggs to the passage of the house.

"Come arter me," she said. "He's up stairs."

Maggs followed the interesting female—who was attired in a flannel dressing-gown, that certainly did not look as if it had been made acquainted with soap and water for some years—up the old dilapidated staircase, and into a room where a man, who was about as cleanly as the lady in his attire, was eating very fat bacon, and drinking raw spirits to aid in its digestion.

"Hilloa, old boy," cried the man, "how are you?"

"Pretty well, and you?"

"Charming. I am rather weak, though, in the stomach, so, you see, I am delicate as to what I take."

"Humph! Under-done fat bacon, and raw brandy. Do you think they are light, pleasant, nutritious things?"

"Eh?"

Maggs smiled. Mr. Dickson did not quite understand him when he spoke of nutritious substances; but he knew the real object of his visit would be easier comprehended. So, taking a pocket-book from his pocket, he opened it at a place where a leaf was turned down, and handing it to the man, he said—

"What do you suppose all that will come to?"

"I'll tell you in a minute, Maggs. Let me see: six horses—one coach, private, with all complete—two suits of livery. Ah, well, it depends on whether you buy 'em or hire 'em."

"The latter, if it can be done."

"That depends on the service, you see; and yet, I don't know, if the value is forthcoming."

"It can be deposited, if that is any object," said Maggs, "so if any danger or

damage should come to the traps, whoever lends them will be on the right side of the hedge, after all, you see."

"Good. Then as far as I think, mind you, Maggs—but I can't say on the moment to within twenty pounds, or so—but as far as I think, mind you, on the moment, I should say four hundred pounds."

"Very good."

Dickson looked at Maggs for a moment or two in silence, and then he said, in a tone of more interest than he had before shown in the transaction—

"Will that do?"

"Yes, if you will undertake it."

Dickson rose at once, and took off the dressing-gown in which he was enveloped, and which, like the flannel garment of the lady, certainly had collected the dust and the grease of many a long year.

"How about time?" he said.

"All must be ready by midnight here."

"That will do."

Maggs dived his hand into a secret pocket in the lining of his coat, and got out a small and very flat tin box, from which he extracted four one-hundred notes, and, handing them to Dickson, he said—

"There is the deposit; and now I know, old friend, that I may thoroughly and entirely depend upon you in this affair. It is one that I have set my heart upon, although it is not one that I feel disposed to say any more about just now, even to you."

"Did I ask any questions?"

"No—no—you never do."

"Very good."

"But still, if this affair was only a secret of my own, I should ask you to be so good as to listen to it; but it belongs to others, and so I let it remain as it is."

"All's right, old fellow. At twelve o'clock you will find under the archway close at hand here, all the traps that you have asked for; and let you be going upon what lay you may, I wish you all the luck in the world, and a little more to the back of that."

"Thanks. I am authorised to say that if everybody comes back here again safe, it is a hundred pound job to you, Dickson."

"Very well, that's agreed then. Poll—Poll, I say!"

"What now?" said the woman, appearing at the door of the room.

"My togs—quick, and tell Jarvis I want the brown cob saddled and at the door in a crack. Good morning, Maggs. It's all as right as it can be, and that's all I can say."

"I know it. Good morning."

Maggs left the place and hastened to the public-house, but as he passed through Aldersgate Street he bought half a dozen very fine small files that would cut anything, and then he proceeded to inform Dick and Jack of what progress he had made in the affair of Claude Duval's rescue, and in what manner Claude himself had received the project.

The two friends were anxiously enough expecting his appearance, and they were well satisfied with the explanation that he had ready for them, and with the arrangements he had made.

"Now mind you," said Maggs, "we must all of us perfectly comprehend what we have to do. There must be nothing left to chance. I will be here at a quarter to twelve to-night, and those six of the family that are to go with us will be here at that hour likewise. We shall want two people, or I should say three, to hold our horses at the corner of Newgate Street, though."

"I can furnish you with those," said the landlord, "and, indeed, as I shall be very anxious to know how the affair comes off, I will make one of the three myself. Then there is my boy, Sam, he will come, and I will manage to get

some one else that can be depended upon, so that you may consider it to be all settled."

"It is off my mind, then," said Maggs; "and now all you have to do, Dick and Jack, is to be as particular as possible in your disguises, and take care how you play your parts."

"The letter, too, from the Secretary of State, must be well got up," said Jack. "Who will do it?"

"I," said Maggs. "I have seen such documents come to the old prison, and I know the style and look of them quite well, and if our host here will send out for a sheet of blue foolscap paper and some red wax, I will show you how a despatch from the Home Office, as far as the outside goes, may be manufactured in a few minutes."

The materials mentioned by Maggs were soon provided for him, and he manufactured a long, official-looking enclosure, with a great coat of arms upon the seal, which he had procured from an old lapidary's shop in Long-lane, Smithfield.

"Now," he said, "I don't mean to say that this would deceive the governor, or any very official eye, but it will do very well indeed for a turnkey of Newgate."

"Especially at two o'clock in the morning," said Jack.

"Just so."

Everything was now duly arranged, and Maggs spent about an hour with Jack and Dick talking over all the little chances of the plan, and all its probabilites and possibilities, one way or the other, so that they left nothing to be considered at a late hour, when action of the most prompt and decisive character would be everything.

"We shall do it," said Dick. "I do believe we shall do it; and if so, it will be about the most daring thing that has been done yet in connexion with Newgate."

CHAPTER CCCX.

THE ESCAPE OF DUVAL PROMISES WELL, AND THINGS TURN OUT FORTUNATELY.

NOTWITHSTANDING all his confidence in the arrangements that had been made for the escape of Duval from Newgate, Maggs could not help trembling a little for the result, when he knew that it depended so completely and entirely upon the accidental circumstance of his being required to take the place of one of the turnkeys of Newgate.

That some alteration might take place in that arrangement, and so destroy the whole plan, he well knew; and, however his experience of the internal economy of the prison told him that nothing was more improbable than that such an alteration of intention should ensue, yet its possibility was a scource of great anxiety.

Maggs had not thought proper to make any mention to Dick or to Jack of the doubt that was upon his mind.

"I shall only dispirit them if I do," he thought to himself, "and the best thing I can possibly do to ensure them success is, to let them come full of confidence that they will have it. Nothing will be easier than for me to meet them, even at the last moment, in the Old Bailey and let them know that the attempt must be put off until another night, if such a thing should turn out to be absolutely necessary."

That it should not be necessary, however, was the fervent hope and wish of Maggs, for he knew how much of the spirit of enterprise was lost when such an affair as that which was in progress was not duly carried out at the time, and in the manner it had been projected.

At all events, Maggs left Dick and Jack full of hope, after duly arranging everything for the evening, as he, of course, would be in the prison, and unable to take an active part in bringing them to the spot for action at the requisite hour.

It was after ten at night that—tolerably fatigued by all the bustle and the excitement of the day, and with his mind intensely occupied by the many speculations that the coming events of the night gave rise to—Maggs arrived at the wicket gate of Newgate.

"Hilloa, old boy!" said the man on the "lock," "is that you?"

"Yes, sir, it's me—poor Maggs."

"Ah, well—come in. The governor has been asking for you."

"Has he, indeed?"

"Why, you don't suppose I should say so if he hadn't?"

"Oh, dear—no. But what can such a great man as the governor want to say to a poor fellow like me, I wonder?"

"Well, I don't know. The sheriff has been with him, and after a long talk they sent here to the lobby to know if you were here."

Maggs felt his heart beat quickly as he heard this, for he dreaded, after all, that some suspicion of the design he had on hand might have crept out. If it had, all was lost. Notwithstanding his agitation and his anxiety, though, he felt the vast importance of appearing quite calm and collected to the turnkey, and he said—

"Well, here I am if they want me now, you know."

"To be sure, it was some time ago, and I don't know whether to send to let them know you are here or not."

"Is the worshipful and honourable sheriff, then, still here?" said Maggs,

"Oh, yes; didn't you see his coach at the corner by Ludgate?"

"No; I came the other way, and so I missed that great pleasure, for I likes to see a sheriff's coach, and I likes to see the fine footman; and I often thinks to myself—Oh, dear, why didn't fortune make me a sheriff's footman?"

"Why, what a simpleton you are, Maggs."

"Well, I'm that, I know; but only think, Mr. Jones, what calves they have got. Only think of that—Oh, dear me!"

"Why, you goose, you don't suppose that being a sheriff's footman gives a man great calves to his legs, do you?"

"Yes, it does," said a turnkey, who had been sitting on the bench at the far end of the lobby. "Maggs is right. It does do so. They are cork, you see. My dear fellow, Maggs—bless your innocence, they are nothing but cork."

"Cork, sir? What! a cork out of a bottle?"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the turnkey. "Well, you are a goose, to be sure, Maggs, and the great good of you is, that you are a faithful and a good-tempered one. But I do think, Jones, that now he has come, it would be better to let the governor know, as he was asked for."

"Well, perhaps it will. I'm on the lock, and can't go. Suppose you go, and say, that Maggs is here? or stay—why shouldn't he go himself? He knows the way. Be off with you, Maggs, and report yourself to the governor, old boy; you know his room door, don't you?"

"Oh, yes; but you really arn't now ajoking with me?"

"No—no, upon my soul, I am not. I wouldn't do it, Maggs; and, besides, it would be as much as my place is worth to play off any jokes when the governor and the sheriff are concerned; so you may go in perfect safety, old fellow."

"Thank you. I will."

Maggs was as anxious as he could possibly be to know what the governor and the sheriff could want to say to him; and although he kept up his rather silly look, which he knew so well how to assume, and although he dawdled along the passages towards the governor's room, if he had consulted the feeling of impatience that really beset him, he would have flown at his utmost speed.

Maggs, however, had set himself a part to perform, and he was not going to

spoil it by any foolish precipitancy; so he reached the door of the governor's rooms as calmly and as quietly, to all outward show, as it was possible for any man to be, and tapped very humbly and gently on the panel.

"Come in," cried the governor.

Maggs just ventured to put his head inside the door, and said, in his usual weak voice—that voice which he always spoke in when within the walls of old Newgate, and which all the officials of the prison knew so well—

"Did your worshipful honours want to see me? It was Mr. James as is on the lock as said as your worshipful honours wanted to see me; so here I is."

"Oh, yes, Maggs. Come in."

"Thank you, sir."

"Shut the door, Maggs," said the sheriff. "We want to speak to you, my man, and we think you may really do some good; and if you do, of course, we will not forget you, you may depend."

"Oh, worshipful sir, the idea of being thought of for a moment by such a great person as a sheriff and a governor is enough all for to take away a poor fellow's breath, that it is—Oh, dear!"

"Well, well, Maggs, you are a good, honest sort of man. Take a seat, Maggs—you are agitated."

"A little, worshipful sirs. It is such an honour."

"Well, sit down."

"Oh, dear no. I wouldn't—I wouldn't, indeed. What! sit down afore a sheriff and a governor? Oh, no—don't ask me to do it, gentlemen. Only think if I should get proud in consequence, and lose my wits. I ain't over bright, they say, at the best; but I might be worser."

The sheriff laughed; so did the governor. How gratified they both were at the great superiority, as they considered of their intellects, over the poor humble Maggs, whom they thought looked upon them as the two greatest men in all the world!

"Well, Maggs," said the governor, "since you object to sit down, you can do as you like; but mind you attend to what the sheriff is about now to say to you, for it is very important."

"Oh, dear, yes, sir, I will—I will."

"Maggs," said the sheriff, "you are a poor simple sort of fellow, you know, and nobody minds much what you say or what you do, so upon those grounds you really can be more useful than a brighter sort of man."

"Yes, noble sir."

"Don't interrupt me, but just listen to me patiently, and try to fully comprehend what I say to you. If I use any words you don't understand, you can ask me the meaning of them."

"Thank you, worshipful sir."

How kind it was of the sheriff to speak so to a man who, both in intellect and education, was vastly his superior! But he did not know it, so we must hold him excused.

With a self-satisfied smile, the sheriff continued—

"It is possible enough, Maggs, that you may be able to accomplish what clever men would fail in, and, therefore, the governor and I have hit upon you to carry out a little plan that we have connected with Claude Duval."

Maggs never changed colour in the least as this name was pronounced by the sheriff, although the fact that it was so pronounced had excited his liveliest fears that by some means the adventure that he had so fully intended should come off that night with success, would miscarry.

"Yes," added the sheriff, "we really think that your simplicity—your appearance of utter want of design—your poverty—all may be found serviceable to the ends of the law."

"The law, sir? Oh, dear, I don't know nothing about the law."

"But you will."

"Oh, I hope not, worshipful sirs. I assure you I never was took up by the law in all my life."

They both smiled.

"Nor will you ever, so long as you do your duty to us as a good and faithful servant. And now for what you are to do, and which, notwithstanding your good sense and modesty in denying all notion of extra reward, you shall be munificently paid for doing."

"Yes," put in the governor; "you shall be most munificently paid. Did you ever, now, in all your life possess five guineas?"

"Five guineas, sir?"

"Yes. No doubt to you, who are a poor fellow, it seems to be a very large sum; but never mind that: you shall have as much for yourself if you succeed in carrying out the little project we are about to set you upon the execution of."

"Five guineas?—It's quite a fabulous sum of money, gentlemen."

The sheriff laughed at him, and rattled the money that was in his pocket, as a well-to-do, fat, easy-pursy, swindling citizen of London may well do, and then he said—

"In plain language, then, Maggs, what we want you to do is to go to the cell of Claude Duval, and pretend to have great sympathy with him, and tell him how sorry you are that he is taken up, and that you hear he will be hanged, and all that sort of thing."

"I will, sir," said Maggs, much relieved that the duty he was set upon would not take him out of the prison.

"Then you must ask him if there's anything you can possibly do for him; and if he don't mention it himself, you can hint that it would give you great pleasure to take any message for him to any friend; do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, noble sir."

"Well, then, from all this, what we wish is, that you should get from him where Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack, the two notorious highwaymen with whom he used to go about, and be the terror of the road, are to be found. You understand me now?"

"Yes, your worshipful worship, I do. I am to find out, by pretending to be his friend, enough to enable me to be his worst foe?"

"Why, a—yes—well, that's it."

"I am to pretend to sympathise with a man in prison, while I play the spy all the while, and worm his secrets out of him through the medium of his best feelings?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"He! he!" laughed Maggs with a silly kind of laugh that he could put on capitally at pleasure. "He! he! I'll do it wonderful. Oh, won't I do it for five golden guineas. I do think, do you know, gentlemen, that he will take me for such a fool, that he will tell me everything"

"Very likely."

"Yes," added the governor; "these fellows, when they get into prison, would give anything in the world for somebody to talk to."

"And I ain't half such a fool as I look," said Maggs.

"I don't think you are," said the sheriff, "to tell the truth."

"I'm sure he isn't," said the governor; "at all events, he is quite wise enough to be able to do what we wish upon the present occasion; are you not, Maggs?"

"I believe you, sir, I am."

"Very good; now go at once, and you will have every facility for seeing the prisoner; and we beg that you will lose no time in speaking to him upon the subject, for if we could only find out where Turpin and Jack are to be found, we would pounce upon them, and it should go hard but what we would hang the whole three of them on the same morning, which would be a capital piece of work."

"Capital it would," said Maggs. "Good night, worshipful sirs. I'll do my very best to-night, you may depend."

CHAPTER CCCXI.

THE SHERIFF FINDS THAT MAGGS IS TRULY ANYTHING BUT SUCH A FOOL AS HE LOOKS.

Maggs, to tell the truth, was rather delighted at his interview with the sheriff and the governor. If any weak hold upon his sense of honour as being employed by them had retained itself faintly upon the heart of Maggs, it was now dissipated.

They had passed upon him, certainly, the most grievous insult that they possibly could—that is to say, they had thought him to be capable of committing a very base act of treachery; and after that they could hardly feel either surprised or angry at the fact of his betraying them as he was about to do.

But yet Maggs felt that his vocation or mission, call it which you will, was at Newgate. He felt that there he was inestimably useful to the fraternity of thieves, and that it was only by staying there that he could continue to be very useful.

Hence, then, was it that Maggs hoped, notwithstanding all that might happen that night, to escape any blame on its account; but if he should really find it to be impossible to carry on the affair without compromising himself, he was quite prepared to do so.

At the same time that he would, if he could, retain his old standing at Newgate, he told himself that if upon any occasion it was to be sacrificed, there could not be a better nor a more important one than that which was about to ensue.

"I will succeed," said Maggs, "at all risks. I will save Duval, or I will be thoroughly convinced that it is quite impossible at any sacrifice, or through any danger to do so."

When a man makes such a resolve as that, he is very likely indeed to succeed in what he undertakes, and hence Maggs had the best of hopes. When he reached the lobby again the turnkeys rather eagerly questioned him as to what the governor and the sheriff wanted with him, but Maggs was not going to tell them.

"Oh, you'd hardly believe it," he said, "that they wanted to give me a regular situation in the prison."

"I'll be hanged," said Jones, "if I didn't think so, and then one of us will be packed off, as sure as a gun."

"No, you won't," said Maggs, "for I wouldn't have it."

"You wouldn't?"

"Sartainly not."

"You don't mean that now, really, Maggs?"

"Oh, yes, they offered to make me what they call a super—super—a something beginning with super."

"Supernumerary, I suppose?"

"Yes, that was it, a supernumerary turnkey, and to give me a matter of thirty-five shillings a week; but I said, 'No—give me what you pleases, and let me go out and in as I like, and when I like, and make myself as useless as I can.'"

"As useful, you mean."

"To be sure I does; so there's the end of it. Why, who would get you your drops of beer and your bits of tobacco, and go a hundred little messages for you all, of one sort or another, if I had any regular duty to do?"

"That's it, Maggs, that's it."

"To be sure it is; so I declined it, and there's a end of it. I won't be a regular turnkey, but I like to go about the old stone-jug, and be as useless——"

"Useful, my boy."

"Yes—useful as possible to you all; so here I am, just as usual. Lord bless you, Mr. Jones, if they had offered to make me the lord mayor, I wouldn't have had it, that I wouldn't."

"You are a trump, Maggs."



TURPIN LISTENS FOR HIS PURSUERS AFTER ROBBING THE NIGHT-FLY.

"He is a trump," said the two officers, whose duty it was to be on guard in the lobby. "He is a trump, and no sort of mistake in this here world. Give us your fist, old fellow. That's right. We respect you, Maggs."

"And I suspect all of you."

"Respect, you mean."

"To be sure I do. Oh, dear, what a poor head I have got, to be sure!"

The turnkeys were quite delighted with this conduct upon the part of Maggs, and never had he been in such high favour with them all as he was upon that special occasion. It was now not far from eleven o'clock, and at twelve he was to go on duty, to give the officers who ought to have remained till two time to go home.

We have before said that this substitution of Maggs for the regular officers at any time was winked at by the governor, as Maggs was considered quite competent and trustworthy; and in so easy a way it was thought no evil to let the regular officers of the prison have a little relaxtion at odd times and seasons, when their absence was of no moment.

And now Maggs took care to show no uneasiness or haste to get to Claude Duval's cell; but he let the hour slip away as quietly as possible; and when it was twelve, and the officer who was going home gave him a tap on the back, and said, "Now, Maggs, my boy, keep a good watch," he merely replied—

"Won't I, that's all."

"I know you will. Good night. I shall be back about three, I hope, and, perhaps, before it. Good night."

"Good night," said Maggs; "and mind, Mr. Brown, you needn't at all hurry yourself, for I shan't miss you, you may depend upon it."

"All's right—all's right."

The officer was gone, and Maggs fastened the huge bunch of keys that had been left to him to his waist, as he said—

"Well, I'll have a look at Claude Duval, and see whether he is all safe, afore I sits down in Brown's chair."

"Do so, Maggs," said Jones. "It's only proper you should. Brown ought to have done so before he went."

"Oh, he knew I would, at leastways he guessed as much, no doubt," said Maggs, as he took a lamp, and went along the long, narrow, gloomy passage that led to Claude Duval's cell.

If the sheriff and the governor had only seen the remarkable change that came over the face of Maggs as he neared the cell in which was the prisoner in whom both he and they, only in different ways, felt so deeply interested, they would hardly have believed the evidence of their own eyes.

Once he turned and listened. He could faintly hear the murmured tones of the turnkeys in the lobby conversing.

"They have no suspicion," he said. "All is well."

Then, when he reached the door of Duval's cell, he paused again, and listened attentively—all was profoundly still, for he was then out of ear-shot of the turnkeys in the lobby.

"All is well," he said again.

Maggs took these precautions, notwithstanding by the request of the sheriff, and with the knowledge of the turnkeys, he was seeking the cell of the prisoner, but he felt that he could not be too cautious, and that everything would depend upon his own and Claude Duval's presence of mind.

Maggs unlocked the cell door, and left the key in the lock. It grated harshly upon it hinges as he opened it.

"Who's there?" cried Duval.

"Hush! It is I."

"You are most welcome, Maggs. I——"

"Speak low. Your tones are very sad, Duval; what has happened to you now? You are not ill, I hope?"

"Oh, no, Maggs; but, to tell the truth, I have been foolish enough to allow my nerves to be a little shaken by a dream."

"Oh, you will soon shake that feeling off."

"Yes, I hope so. But I thought that in this cell I saw a coffin with the dead body of a female in it, and that a figure of death, armed with a spear, suddenly appeared, and said—

"'Look! Claude Duval—look!—yes, look at the face of her whom you loved, before the worms so deface her beauty, that even to you she would be a loathsome spectacle.' It was at that moment, Maggs, that I heard the rattle of your key in the lock of the door."

"I am glad I came to put to flight such uncomfortable visions, Claude; you should laugh at them."

"Alas! I cannot."

"Well—well, perhaps not; but you will soon forget them. I bring you the best and most cheering news."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes. Speak low, and listen to me. By-the-bv, I will keep the door of the cell open, and stand close to it, and then it will be impossible for any one to come down the passages without me knowing it. I do not think, mind you, Duval, that there is the slightest breath of suspicion abroad, but it is as well to be on the safe side."

"You are right, Maggs. Oh, how much I owe you!"

"Nothing—nothing."

"Yes, but I do, though, Maggs, and I will take good care if I do, through your means, obtain my freedom, that I will make the attempt to show you that I can be grateful."

"You will oblige me by saying no more on that head. At all events, wait till we can shake hands on Ealing Common, or Hounslow Heath."

"Ah, that will be glorious."

"Well, I hope that that time will come to-morrow, for at two o'clock—the two o'clock that is now fast coming—your friends will be here to try to drag you from Newgate."

"Will they, indeed, persevere in such a bold and admirable plan?"

"They will. But you shake! you are agitated."

If we were to say that Claude Duval at this time felt quite cool and collected, we should be giving currency to an idea that could not be in any way sanctioned by the fact, which was, that he was much more agitated than he had ever known himself to be upon any occasion of his eventful career.

He was himself both annoyed and surprised to find that such was the fact.

We can probably account for it better than Claude Duval could himself.

The fact was, that the want of air and exercise, to which he had been so accustomed, that they were more essential in their abundance to his health than to those of most persons, had had the effect of very much depressing him.

This was the precise reason why Claude Duval did not feel in his usual condition.

"Oh, Maggs," he said, "how can I be otherwise than agitated at the idea that I shall soon, perhaps—nay, I will not entertain any doubt, so I will say for certain, breathe the fresh air of liberty, and be able to rush to the arms of Cicely?"

"Oh, yes—yes."

"Maggs!"

"Well, Duval?"

"You will now, like a man and a dear friend to me, as you are, tell me how she is. Is she suffering from a wound? In a word, is she well, Maggs? Come, tell me now, distinctly."

"She is suffering from no wound, Claude—she is well."

"Thank Heaven, then, all is well, and I ask no more."

"It is well. Dick and Jack can tell you every particular that you may wish to know, and I refer you to them. But how do you get on about your fetters?"

"Oh, bravely. They are in such a state, Maggs, that I feel I have but to make an effort, which even my weakened powers are equal to, and I can cast them from me. Do I look very pale?"

"Oh, no. But the air of Newgate soon robs a man of his colour. It would

pale the cheek of a ploughboy in a week. There is something dead and pestiferous in it. Oh, that two o'clock were come, Claude."

"I echo that sentiment, Maggs."

How long that two hours seemed from twelve till two!

A thousand times over did Claude Duval think that the hour must have passed, and that, although listening for it most intently, it had, in its sound from the old church clock of St. Sepulchre's, escaped his ears, and he said as much to Maggs.

At length, faintly came the sound of the chimes from that clock, the sound of which had heralded so many a poor shrinking soul into eternity.

As the cell of Duval was situated, it was just possible by close attention to hear the hours struck by that clock, and now, at the sound, Duval sprang to his feet.

"It is time, Maggs!" he said—"it is time."

"Hush! Now, of all times, then, let me pray you to be still and calm. Claude Duval, upon that depends all else."

"I will—I will!"

"Leave all to me, and to your friends."

"But, Maggs, you will give me a weapon—you will not, if all should go wrong, suffer me to be dragged back to this cell again without a struggle? I must and will have arms."

"You terrify me by your vehemence."

"Oh, no—no! But you hear me—you understand me? You, if you were situated as I am, would do as I do—you would feel as I feel, and you would say as I say. Arms—I want arms!"

"Hush! There are a pair of pistols, the fellows of which you would find it difficult to match in London."

"Loaded?"

"Yes, carefully. But now, knowing, Claude Duval, that you have the lives of two men in your hands, let me implore you to do nothing rash. All noise must be avoided. One ill-directed shot would bring upon us the whole force of the prison."

"I know it—I know it. I will justify all that you might expect of me, Maggs. But the time has come, and I hear nothing. Ah! the sound of carriage wheels outside—they pause at the door of Newgate. They come, they come, Maggs."

"Hush!—hush!"

"Ah! there is a voise from the lobby. Listen—listen. I hear it now."

Yes, there was a sound from the lobby of the prison, and the heart of Claude Duval beat fast and thick.

Another sound—he knew not whether it was strife or merely commotion; but he felt that it was time for Maggs to go.

Maggs felt this, too.

"I go," he said—"I go. Now, Duval, keep by the door of your cell, and when you hear a whistle, it will be from me, and it will be then time for you to come into the lobby. Mind, I will let you pass me, and you will meet Dick and Jack."

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"Now, be calm, and good-by for a few moments only, I hope and expect."

Claude Duval was alone. Oh, how terrible was the suspense of the few moments only that ensued, for they were but moments, after all. To his perception, all his imprisonment had not been so long as the period that elapsed between the absence of Maggs and the sound that was to signify to him that it was his cue to advance along the passages towards the lobby.

At length, just as he was getting quite maddened by the delay, he heard a faint, but long-continued whistle.

"Time—time!" said Duval, and he bounded along the vaulted passage with the speed of the wind. "It is time—it is time!"

Let us now see what Jack and Dick, with their six friends, are really doing, and how far they have progressed in the affair, the success of which they had so deeply at heart.

CHAPTER CCCXII.

THE CONTEST WITH THE TURNKEYS ENDS SUCCESSFULLY FOR CLAUDE DUVAL.

If the space of time that intervened between dark and the hour when the onterprise in which Jack and Dick Turpin felt themselves so deeply interested felt long and tedious to Maggs and to Claude Duval, it was likewise so to all concerned in the daring attempt that was about to be made to take from Newgate its most important prisoner.

A thousand doubts and surmises beset Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack. They thought at one time that, after all, the man who had been engaged by Maggs to procure all the necessary materials for the conduction of the enterprise might suspect what it meant, and so might think it better worth his while to make good terms with the authorities than to keep his word with the thieves; but reflection always put an end to such a doubt, by showing that the interest of that man must be much more in keeping than in breaking faith with his employers.

But, still, some chance accident might at the last moment knock the whole affair upon the head, or Maggs might be suspected, and in that case they would only be running upon certain destructiou by going to Newgate.

But, still, they never for a moment wavered in the fixed determination to go, so intent were they upon carrying out the plan, although they incessantly vexed themselves with so many suppositions regarding the possibility of failure.

We may add, too, that their doubts did not tend to make them a whit less exact or careful in making all the preparations in their power for the successful carrying out of the plan; they determined, unless they heard something positive as a stay to it from Maggs, to stand or fall by it.

But the longest looked-for day and hour will come at last, and so Dick and Jack found that it was time for them to leave the public house in Barbican, and proceed to the street at the back of St. Martin's-le-Grand, to meet those who were to go with them on the enterprise to Newgate.

As Jack and Dick were to present themselves as emissaries from the secretary of state's office, they had got themselves up in theatrical fashion accordingly, and very well they did it.

They both wore powdered wigs, which at that time were very much the fashion at the court, and Dick had on a suit of grey velvet, which looked very neat. Jack arrayed himself in a dark brown suit, and they both had paid great attention to the richness of their cravats and ruffles.

When they looked at each other they could not help smiling at the great metamorphosis which an alteration of costume so completely had effected in them both.

"I should not have known you, Jack," said Dick.

"Nor I you, Dick."

"Well, if we could have deceived each other, it will go hard but we deceive those who, at the best, have but a very superficial and slight knowledge of either of us."

"It will; and now that I see both of us in our disguises, a feeling of greater hopefulness comes over me. I seem as if I were assured we should succeed."

"That is a good feeling. You ought to encourage it. But come, now, it is time."

It was truly an expedition of life or death that they went upon, and they were well armed for the occasion. They had not made such an understanding dis-

tinctly in words; but it was a kind of tacit resolution between them that they would not be taken alive, and that, therefore, there were but three things that could happen to them on that night.

First, they might get away with Claude safely; secondly, they might fail in rescuing him, but yet escape themselves; and, thirdly, they might die in Newgate, or on the outside of it, fighting against an overwhelming force.

Such a state of things as this may not make men sad, but it cannot lead to much positive cheerfulness; so we can hardly be surprised that Jack and Dick were more than usually grave upon that eventful night.

The man who had been employed by Maggs to get ready all the materials for the enterprise was to the full as good as his word, and all anxiety upon that score was soon at an end.

Near the corner of Monkwell-street, at the back of St. Martin's-le-Grand, Jack and Dick found the chariot which had been bargained for, and at a little distance they saw the six mounted men who were to take part in the affair.

"All's right, Turpin," said a voice from the carriage, as Dick reached the door of it.

"Ah! who speaks to me?" said Turpin.

"It's all right," added the voice; and then the chariot door was opened, and the man of whom Maggs had hired the things stepped out. "I thought," he added, "that in case of any mistake, I had better be here on the spot myself, you see."

"And you know me?"

"To be sure I do."

"Well, I am rather sorry to hear that, for I had flattered myself that my disguise was perfect; but now you have taken that conceit out of me."

"Not at all. I heard your friend there, whom I don't know at all, call you Dick; and putting this and that together, and having a precocious idea upon the subject, though, of course, I didn't ask Maggs any questions, why, I said to myself, 'This is Turpin, and he is going to make a bold dash to get Duval out of the stone-jug.'"

"You are right."

"I thought I was; and now, as Maggs knows me well, and as you have heard of me, and, perhaps, have a pretty good idea that I may be trusted, I have one request to make to you."

"What is it?—our time is short."

"It is, that you will let me come with you. I am not the worst hand in the world at a tussel if it should come to one, and I am well armed, and will do you all the service I can,"

"Come on, then; you will, no doubt, be a great help to us. What say you to it, Jack?"

"I agree, with all my heart."

"Which Jack is that?" said the man.

"That I will tell you after this night's business is over," said Jack. "It is a long story, and there is no time now. Let us come on. Get into the coach again, Mr. a—a——"

"Nabbs," said the man. "That's what I call myself for shortness; but I ain't going to get into the coach—one of the most troublesome things in the world is to find one who can drive well, and who will fight well at the same time; so, if you will let me be your coachman, I can do you more good, I think, than in any other way."

"We are much beholden to you," said Dick.

"All's right," said Nabbs; and he attired himself in a huge livery great coat, with about twenty capes, and which effectually hid all his other clothing. In fact, all that could be seen of him was his top-boots beneath the coat, and his head above it. He then put on a regular coachman's wig, and a three-cornered hat, and he looked just the beau-ideal of a State-coachman in undress.

"That is famous," said Jack.

"The very thing," said Dick; "and now off we go at once, I hope?"

"Yes—all's right."

The six mounted men approached the carriage, and one of them said to Dick—

"It is all right now; we have all the horses with us, that is to say, one a-piece for ourselves and one for Claude. Where are your cattle, Turpin? They ought to be handy."

"They are at the crib in Barbican; but we can easily get them in good time. Remember what you have to do."

"Yes. Everything is right. The horses will be taken care of at the corner of Newgate-street."

The lamps were lit in the chariot, and then, indeed, Dick and Jack saw that it was quite a stylish set out, and much they wondered where Mr. Nabbs had been able to procure such a vehicle.

"All's right," said Nabbs.

Off they set at a dashing pace for Newgate, and as Dick and Jack rested upon the soft, cushioned seat of the chariot, they could not help looking at each other and asking themselves if it were not all a dream.

It did seem so strange that they should be in such a vehicle, and wear such costumes, and driving to Newgate. But there they were, sure enough, and as the carriage turned into Newgate-street, they felt that the time for thought had gone past, and that for action had arrived.

"You can depend upon your arms, Dick?"

"Oh, yes, Jack; and you?"

"Yes—I have been particularly careful. What an hour the next will be, Dick, to all of us!"

"Ay, it will. But its result will depend upon ourselves. Be cool, cautious, and firm, Jack. You do not feel in any way flurried?"

"Oh, no. I am going to try to save Claude, and that feeling nerves me. You will not find me fail. Here we are."

"Yes—here we are."

With a dash and a rattle the chariot stopped at the gate of Newgate—that little wicket gate at the top of the three or four stone steps, up and down which so many beating hearts have been carried by unwilling feet. Oh, if those old grey stones could only speak, what recollections might they not impart of the numerous personages who had passed them!

The lights at the sides of the chariot flashed upon the rugged wall of the prison, and a man, dressed very nicely as a footman, opened the door, and stood with it in his hand respectfully for Dick and Jack to alight.

Now, in stopping the chariot, in opening the door, and in letting down the steps, all the noise that could be made was made, so as to impress upon the minds of the turnkeys that it was somebody of importance who had arrived; for noise and insolence go a long way with the vulgar. Hence the assumption of both, by those who wish to exert a sway over weak and ignorant minds.

Dick stepped out of the chariot first, and then Jack followed him. By the light of the carriage lamps, Dick took one glance at Jack's face; but he saw that it was quite firm, and betrayed no anxiety or tremour.

"He will not fail," said Dick, to himself; and ascending the steps, he kicked at the low half-door of Newgate.

"Hilloa!" said the turnkey, in a half-sleepy tone.

"Open the door, fellow!" said Dick.

"Eh?—Oh, I beg your pardon, sir—yes, sir—Walk in."

The turnkey had caught sight of the chariot—the lights—the coachman, with his coat of many capes, and the footman with his shoulder-knot of gold lace. The gate was flung open, and Dick entered the lobby of Newgate, followed by Jack.

There was an awful pause for a moment, only broken by the sharp click of the lock, as the turnkey closed the wicket again. The two other officers of the

prison, whose duty it was to remain in the lobby, rose from the bench upon which they had been sitting, and stared at the visitors.

"The governor is within, of course," said Dick, in the same sharp tone of command that he had previously spoken in.

"Yes, sir."

"Your lordship is sure to find him at this hour," said Jack.

"Very true, your grace," said Dick.

At these, words the turnkeys all made a low salaam to the spirit of nobility, that worshiped genius of Englishmen. The idea that one of the visitors was a lord and the other a grace was quite sufficient to induce the turnkeys to place, their necks under their feet if they demanded it.

"Take this despatch from the Secretary of State," said Dick, as he produced the long official-looking letter that Maggs had prepared, "and give it to the governor, and say, that two gentlemen are waiting. That will do, your grace I think?"

"Certainly, my lord," said Jack.

One of the turnkeys on duty darted forward, and with a low bow and a look of great reverence took the letter.

"I will call upon the governor at once, if you please," he said.

"The gentlemen will, perhaps, step into the chaplain's private-room?" said the other officer.

"Oh, no, we prefer remaining here," said Dick. "I believe we do, your grace?"

"Certainly, my lord," said Jack. "It amuses us."

"It does—it does. The novelty of the thing is something. You can take the letter, but there is no particular hurry, my man. Don't alarm the governor by awakening him too rapidly."

"No, sir—my lord—your highness, I mean."

The officer was so impressed by the dignity of the visitors, that he fairly backed out of their presence.

"And so," said Dick, as he only waited to allow the turnkey time to get out of hearing, "this is the lobby of Newgate?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Ah! To be sure. A singular place, your grace."

"Oh, very," said Jack. "I think it will do now."

"Yes, so do I. You take that one, and I will take this."

Before the astonished officers could come to any conclusion as to what these singular words from the two distinguished noblemen could possibly mean, Dick sprang upon the man on the lock like a tiger, and grappling him by the throat, he said in a low voice—

"One word—one cry—one movement indicative of alarm, and by Heaven I will break your neck."

Jack made a dart at the other officer, and with such force that they both fell on to the floor together, and the back of the turnkey's head came with such a ringing blow against the stone floor that he lay nearly insensible. Jack was sorry to have to do it, but too much was at stake in the whole adventure for him or any one to stand upon ceremony, so he seized the officer by the cravat, and lifting his head about six inches from the floor, he brought it down again with another blow that effectually stunned him.

That officer never spoke again.

It would be difficult to say what condition of mind the officer's, whose duty it was to keep watch and ward in the lobby of Newgate were thrown into by this most unexpected attack. Certainly, if the roof of the prison had fallen in and buried all beneath it in one common ruin, they could not have been more utterly astounded.

But no time was given them for reflection.

As for the turnkey that Dick had hold of, he began tot urn black in the face from the pressure on his throat, and Jack, coming toward, them, said—

"I have disposed of my man, and will gag this fellow. I have a gag made with a cork and a piece of string, that will just do it."

"That's right, Jack."



THE APPAPITIONS IN THE GARDEN OF HAWTHORN-HOUSE.

In another moment the man was past all power of speech; and so exhausted was he by the choking process that had been going on, that, when Dick let go of him, he fell as if dead to the floor.

All this happened, inasmuch as it happened simultaneously, in much less time than it has necessarily taken us to relate it. Indeed, one minute had not

elapsed altogether from the commencement of the attack before Jack and Dick were undoubted masters of the lobby of Newgate.

So well arranged was everything, that they knew what to do next without any bother. Jack turned the key in the lock of the wicket, and opened it, stretching out his arm as a signal.

From behind the coach, then, whither they had crept, the six members of the family who were to assist in the affair emerged, and rushed up the steps of Newgate and into the lobby.

At the same moment, Maggs appeared from the narrow passage leading to the cells.

CHAPTER CCCXIII.

THE ESCAPE AND THE PURSUIT—AN EXCITING SCENE.

So far, then, the enterprise had been eminently successful, and it owed all its success to the daring nature of it.

If there had been the least tampering with the difficulties that presented themselves—if there had been the smallest amount of shrinking from what there was to do, a total failure must have been the result; but all was done, on the contrary, with calmness and absolute decision.

The turnkeys and officers in the lobby could scarcely believe their senses. They looked about them like men in a dream.

Maggs was pale, but firm.

"Ah! what is this?" he said, for he was intent upon keeping up the character of being as much surprised at the attack as the turnkeys were.

"We will show you," said Turpin; and he took hold of Maggs by the arm with his left hand, and clapped a pistol at his head with the other. "Show me the way to the cell of Claude Duval, or you are a dead man. Which is it to be?"

"I am cowed," said Maggs. "I can't help it. This way," he added, in a whisper to Turpin.

They both passed out of the lobby down the narrow passage leading to Claude's cell, and were met by a turnkey, who had a newspaper in his hand, and who said—

"What's the matter in the lobby, Maggs?"

With a blow from the butt-end of a pistol, Turpin stretched that man insensible on the stone floor. At the instant, then, Claude Duval sprang forward, and grasping the hand of Turpin, he cried—

"My dear friend, is it, indeed, you? Have you placed yourself in this frightful peril for me?"

"Quick," said Maggs, "on every moment hangs a life!"

"That's true," said Turpin. "Come on."

They were in the lobby again in a moment, and just as they reached it, the man who had gone with the letter to the governor came back, and said—

"The governor says he——"

Sixteen-string Jack had the man by the throat before he could say another word, and thrusting the barrel of a pistol into his mouth he whispered—

"One cry, and your brains spatter that wall."

"All's right," said Turpin.

"One moment," said a voice; "now all's right."

The members of the family, who had been admitted by the wicket, had been busy tying the turnkeys, both by their ankles and wrists, to each other, so that they were completely helpless.

"Open the door," said Jack.

"It is."

Ding—dong! went a bell, and then furiously it pealed forth an alarm. They looked at each other aghast.

"The alarm bell," said Jack. "I have heard it once before. Fly!"

"But who has rung it?"

"Don't stop to ask that. All we have to do is to get out of reach of it."

The wicket was flung open, and the members of the family only hung back a moment or two to allow Claude Duval and his particular friends to pass.

It was then that Dick Turpin turned upon the threshold of Newgate and addressing the turnkeys, he said—

"Now, my men, I know that you will have to put the blame of this affair upon somebody, and it is as well that the saddle should be placed upon the right horse. I will, therefore, tell you that it is my doing, and I am Richard Turpin."

The turnkeys uttered various groans, and in another moment Claude and his friends were in the open street.

The coach was gone. It had done all that it could do, and the instruction to those who had charge of it was to drive off at once as soon as the *melee* fairly began in the lobby of Newgate. This looked like desertion; but it was not such in fact, for the coach, after the affair had made that progress, could not possibly answer any good purpose.

It would have been absurd to try to escape by its aid, as such a vehicle would have stood no chance against the most ordinary pursuit, putting out of the question the fact that it could have been so very readily overtaken.

"Now for the horses, Claude," said Turpin; "they are, as they should be, at the corner of Newgate-street."

"It seems like a dream," said Duval.

"No—no," said Jack, in a voice of great emotion; "it is no dream, it is all true, and you are saved."

Claude pressed Jack's hand, and they all went up the street in a throng. They had not got above half-way, though, between the wicket of the prison and the corner of Newgate-street, when they heard some sounds of strife in advance of them.

"Dick," said Jack, "forward."

"Push on," cried Claude. "There is no time for hesitation, now. Push on, I beg of you."

"We have no need," said Dick. "Those of our friends who have charge of the horses are coming back to us here."

The noise assumed a more serious character, and in a few moments it was quite evident that something was amiss. What that something was, then explained itself, as one of them who had charge of the cattle came running towards Claude and his friends, saying—

"The watch—the watch! Where are you all?"

"Here," said Turpin. "What is it?"

"A strong party of the City watch came upon us, and tried to take us into custody with the horses."

"Ah, indeed! Forward, friends—forward!"

The flash of the lanterns of the watch, and the rattle of their staves, now came quite plainly upon the ears of the confederates, and those noises, joined to the incessant clanging of the prison bell, made up a species of alarm that in a little time must be productive of serious consequences to the fugitives, if they could not rapidly escape from so dangerous a vicinity.

The sudden charge of Claude and his friends, with the members of the family with them, had the effect of routing the watch.

Dick got hold of one of the iron short staves then in use by the night-watch, and laid about him with such effect, that half-a-dozen of the foe were prostrated in a few moments.

There was one watchman who was a tall, powerful man; and, while he fought with his stick, he continued with his other hand to spring his rattle, so that he engaged the enemy and gave an alarm at the same time.

Maddened by excitement and the dread of being dragged back to his cell at Newgate, Claude Duval, with a cry of rage, sprang upon the man, and they both fell together. To wrest his rattle from him, and give him a blow on the head with it, that put an end to his mortal career, was then, to Claude, the work of a moment; and he rose, flushed and heated, to his feet.

The watch were dispersed.

"Now, Claude, off with you," said Dick. "Don't stop another moment. Mount—mount at once!"

"D—n that prison bell," said Jack.

"Is it one?" said a voice.

"Yes," said Dick. "Disperse now."

Upon this, the members of the family who had done such good service, and who, up to that time, had kept by Claude and his friends, with one accord scampered away in different directions. Some took their course up Giltspur-street into Smithfield—some ran down Skinner-street, and found shelter in the rookery to the right of Holborn Hill, and others again made their way into the city, and some to the district at the back of the Royal Exchange.

In the course of half-a-minute they were all gone.

The only persons that remained then upon the spot of the encounter with the City watch were Claude Duval, Dick Turpin, Jack, and the landlord of the public-house in Barbican.

"Where is Maggs?" said the landlord.

"He stays. He is not suspected," said Dick. "Come on."

They were all on horseback in a moment, now; and, for the first time, then, since he had left the lobby of Newgate, Claude Duval felt as if he might draw a long breath. The effect of feeling that they were on horseback once again, was very great upon Dick and Jack. They both felt as though, at that moment, all danger had ceased, and the daring enterprise had thoroughly succeeded in every possible way.

"Off with you all," said the landlord; "and as there is no pursuit, I will go home at once. If there had been, I should have ridden a few miles into the country with you; for an extra hand might be of great service to you all, just now."

"It might be everything," said Claude; "but, thank Heaven, it is not wanted, I live—I breathe again."

They had just put the horses in motion, when they heard a shout behind them, and the clatter of horses' feet, and they all looked round, and directed their glances towards Newgate. The sight that then met their gaze was quite sufficient to show them that all was not over quite yet, and that, probably, the danger of the enterprise was only then in earnest about to begin.

It was well known that at an inn-yard, immediately opposite to the door of the common entrance to Newgate, some half dozen horses were always kept, night and day, ready for the road, in case of any emergency requiring their use. The spectacle that met the eye of Claude and his friends, then, consisted of these horses being brought out, and of a throng of men waiting to mount them, and eagerly putting themselves ready for a chase after the fugitives.

"Ah," said Dick, "we shall have some rough work, yet."

"We shall, indeed," said Jack.

Claude's eyes flashed with excitement as he glanced at the officers, and the colour deepened upon his cheek as he spoke.

"Let them come," he said. "This puts one in mind of old times. Don't it you, Jack? Let them come."

"It does, Claude."

"Which is to be our way?" said Dick Turpin.

"North," said Jack.

"So be it," said Claude. "On—on."

"I go with you," said the landlord. "Four can make a better fight than three can."

Without more ado, they all four now trotted down Skinner-street, for they felt that their cattle might have to do hard work, and they did not wish to put them to any speed at once. The valley of Holborn-hill lay before them, and then there was the ascent of the hill—which was much worse than it is now—so that they prudently saved the speed and the courage of their horses.

Any one, now, to see the four men trotting so quietly and so comfortably down the hill, would little have suspected that they knew they would be followed by those who were armed for their destruction, and that, in reality, it was a matter of life or death with them.

As regarded the pursuit of the officers, though, one of two things must take place at its outset.

In their eagerness of the pursuit, the officers might put their horses to all the speed they could muster at once, and so incapacitate them for any long-continued exertion, or they must imitate the more prudent conduct of the highwaymen, and trot gently and easily until they came to a level, when, after the horses had got warmed to their work, they would be able to act much more efficiently.

In either of these cases, the fugitives would be able fully to maintain the advantage with which they started, for they would be upon the level before the officers could reach them either way, and the probability was, that they were very much better mounted than the police could possibly, upon the spur of the occasion, be.

"Take it easy," said Dick, as they passed the end of Fleet Market—"take it easy. I don't see anything of them yet."

"It's all right, if we once get the rise of the hill between us and them," said Jack. "If they blow their horses in galloping up it, or walk them to save their breath, it will be equally good for us."

"There they are," said the landlord of the public-house.

CHAPTER CCCXIV.

THE CHASE FOR THE FUGITIVES CONTINUES INTO THE OPEN COUNTRY.—AN ENCOUNTER.

Even as the landlord spoke, the mounted officers, to the number of nine men, well armed, and eager for the recapture of the prisoner, for whom they were offered at once five hundred pounds amongst them, appeared upon the brow of Snow-hill, a few paces from St. Sepulchre's Church.

Under ordinary circumstances, the proximity of the officers to Claude and his friends, would have been rather alarmingly close; but, considering the nature of the ground, the distance was in reality great.

The officers only paused a moment to catch sight of their prey, as they fully believed Claude and his party must soon become, and then, with loud cries, they dashed onwards.

It was quite evident that they thought their numbers would suffice to put an end to all opposition, and to take prisoners of the small mounted party at once, and hence they disregarded the hill, but went down it at a pace that alarmed their cattle.

By good luck, rather than any good management, they all reached the hollow of Fleet Market in safety, for nothing alarms a horse more than to hurry him from a stable, and ride him recklessly in the dark down a hill. If they had had two or three falls among them, it would only have been in the natural order of things.

But, as we say, luck befriended them, and they reached the hollow in safety; but by that time Duval and his friends were at Holborn Bars.

Without the slightest pause, then, the officers spurred their already frightened cattle up Holborn-hill, which was the most foolish thing they could possibly do;

for when they reached the top, it was not possible to get a good clear gallop out of the horses.

Claude and his party had reached St. Giles's by that time, and the horses were in as fresh a condition as when they started—in fact, they were in a better condition for work, for they were just getting warm and comfortable.

The officers, then, began to find out the mistake they had made in going off with such a burst, and they patted their horses, and only walked them between Ely-place and Holborn Bars.

Thus they lost more time than as if they had taken things easily at first, which is generally the case in all concerns of life, as well as in horse-riding.

Now, the highwaymen began to show the great advantage of the judicious manner in which they had managed their steeds, for they started up Tottenham-court-road at such a pace, that it was a doubtful thing if the officers' horses could come near it under any circumstances; and yet it was an easy pace, too, and by the time they emerged into the Hampstead-road, they were all four abreast, and going at a steady gallop, which the horses kept up without the use of whip or spur.

The officers, however, had done all they could to repair the error they at first committed at starting, and having, in some measure, allowed their horses to get breath enough, they, too, fairly began the chase, and the retreating party could hear the clatter of the horses' feet as they came on at all the speed they could make after them.

"Do we beat them?" said the landlord.

"Yes," said Jack; "three setps to two."

"That will do."

Camden Town was passed, and then came the district of Pancras Vale, during which the highwaymen allowed their horses to moderate their pace a little, as the road was very heavy in that place, as, in fact, it generally is, from taking so much of the surface drainage of the high land to the north of it.

Jack now pushed on a few paces to advance, for no one could be better acquainted with the North-road than he was. He knew every house and every tree upon it; and so was a most efficient guide, indeed, to the others.

Dick now and then looked back, but he could see nothing of the officers, and the sound of their horset' feet was no longer to be heard, either; but that might be owing to the fact that they were off the stones, and were on soft country road.

"We distance them," said Claude, "I think."

"And I know it," said Jack. "Follow me, and keep to this side of the hill, here, and we shall be able to get up it at a better pace."

The hill they had reached, now, was that which constitutes the great evil of the Hampstead road for horses and carriages. Haverstock-hill was at that time completely destitute of houses on either side.

With the exception of the old inn, the Load of Hay, and Steele's Cottage, as the little white cottage to the left of the road just on the summit of the hill was called, owing to its having been the residence of Steele, the essayist, there were no houses after leaving the centre of Pancras Vale.

Up Haverstock-hill they went at a walk; and when upon the summit of it, just by Steele's cottage, they all turned, as if by one accord, to look back from that eminence at their pursuers, and at the great city they had left behind them.

In the middle of Pancras Vale they saw the officers coming on at full speed.

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine of them," counted Dick Turpin. "That's rather long odds, don't you think, Claude Duval?"

"It's no matter," said Claude. "Nine horses make no greater speed than one, and we must never let them get near us."

"But yet," added Dick, "what say you to having a shot at them for this pursuit?"

"Better not," said Jack. "Push on, I say. They must walk up this hill—that is as clear as fate; and by the time they stand upon this spot, we may be on Hampstead Heath, if we like."

"On—on, then!" said Claude.

"Follow!" cried Jack. "I can take you easily up the next hill, and I think we had better go right through the village."

"Be it so."

Jack was well mounted, and he now put the horses of his friends to their metal, for he got over the bit of hard ground at a tremendous rate. It is but a mile, after all, although, after traversing the hill, it looks a long one; but the mounted highwaymen were over it, and walking their steeds again up Red Lion Hill, in an incredibly short space of time, indeed.

They could now see nothing of the officers, as they were hidden by the brow of Haverstock-hill.

"Is it that we are so high in the world," said Dick, "that makes the place look so bright?"

"No," laughed the landlord; "but the morning is coming. We shall have broad daylight about us in another hour, or hour and a half at the outside. Don't you see how the white fog down there on the low heath is coiling about, and beginning to think of dispersing for the day?"

"Oh, yes; I see it—I see it,"

"It is a sweet sight," said Claude Duval, "after a time spent in a cell in Newgate."

"On—on!" said Jack.

They followed him up Red Lion Hill, and keeping to the side of the road to the left, they avoided some of the steeper bits, and so they rode through Hampstead without meeting a living soul, for no one was yet up; and just as they turned Heath-street into the open heath, the officers in pursuit were trotting up Red Lion Hill, and beginning to have some serious doubts with regard to the success of their enterprise.

"Confound him!" muttered one of them; "I know what Claude Duval is; and that Turpin, too; they would think nothing of going right on for a couple of hundred miles, for the fun of the thing."

"But their cattle would fail them," said another.

"Hang them, I don't know that. Those fellows know how to manage a horse, so as to get just about double the work out of him that any one else can at about half the distress."

"Is it true," said another, "that Turpin rode to York with hardly a stop by the way?"

"Yes, it is; and some said that he killed his Black Bess by so doing; but he didn't; for if my eyes don't deceive me, she is now on the road, for he rides her at this present time."

"The pursuit is hopeless."

"Who says that?" cried the chief officer. "Who says pursuit is hopeless, I should like to know?"

"I did, Mr. Godfrey."

"Oh, it's you Maggs, is it? Well, I certainly should not have thought you were the sort of man to flinch."

"I ain't flinching, Mr. Godfrey; but I say that, if Dick Turpin is on his black mare, Bess, as her calls her, we may go after him to the borders of England before we catch him."

"Never mind about how Turpin is mounted," said the chief officer. "He won't, after all he has done, and after all that has happened, desert the others, and you should recollect they have not all of them a devil in the shape of a black mare to carry them about."

"That's true," said Maggs.

"Then it's not much consequence what Turpin could do, if he don't do it;

so come on. We will, and we must have them. Recollect that there is a price upon Turpin's head, as well as upon Duval's."

"That's all right enough. But who are the other two, Mr. Godfrey, do you think? Who can they be?"

"Nobody, you may depend; and very likely, if it came to a brush, they would be off, and leave Turpin and Duval in the lurch. Then I don't myself see how nine men are not to take two."

"I don't know that," muttered one of the officers. "That Duval is a brave devil for fighting, and so is Turpin. It will be the death of a few of us, I reckon; but come on—I'm willing."

"So am I," said Maggs.

"That's right, comrades," said the chief officer. "Willingness does anything and everything in this world."

It will be seen, by this brief conversation that had taken place among the officers, that they had not, after all, a very great hope of being able to capture Duval and his friends, although they felt that it was their duty to continue to endeavour so to do, let the peril they would have to encounter in so doing be what it might; so on they went up the hill.

In the meantime, Claude Duval and his friends had fairly emerged on to the open heath, and the first living things they saw, were a couple of men, well mounted, and in scarlet hunting-coats.

It appeared. too, that the two huntsmen, who, no doubt, were going across the country to the meeting of somebody's hounds, saw Claude Duval and his party at the same time, for they stopped and looked at each other a little incredulously.

"What the deuce do they mean?" said Dick. "Surely two men are not going to stop us all four on suspicion?"

"Hardly," laughed the landlord.

After a few words with each other, the two gentlemen in the scarlet coats trotted gently on towards the party that was advancing, and when they got near enough to speak, one of them said—

"Are you officers?"

"No," said Dick.

"It's them! Come on—come on!"

As he spoke he turned his horse's head on one side, and was about to gallop off, but Claude caught his horse by the bridle, saying—

"Sir, what made you ask that question of us?"

"Hands off, rascal, or I will knock you down! What is it to you why I asked it? I don't know but I ought to detain you all, for you may be the very man who escaped from Newgate a few hours ago."

Claude and his friends looked at each other in amazement, for they could not imagine by what process this man had found out the fact that they had escaped, when they had ridden at tolerable speed all the way, and the news could hardly have got to Hampstead Heath before them.

Turpin had laid hold of the bridle of the other mounted man, and for a few moments there was silence on both sides.

"You have done it, Mr. Mills," said he who had not before spoken.

"Done what?" said Claude.

"I will say no more," said Mr. Mills, as his friend called him. "Hands off, fellow. I am armed, I tell you, and you will best consult your own safety by letting me pass you, and riding on."



THE WOUNDED SPY INFORMS THE "FAMILY" OF THE PLACE BEING BESIEGED.

CHAPTER CCCXV.

DETAILS VARIOUS ADVENTURES ON THE GREAT NORTH ROAD.

CLAUDE DUVAL was so surprised at the fact of a person leisurely riding up Hampstead Heath having a knowledge that there had been an escape from Newgate only a few hours before, that he was not at all disposed to let him go until he explained the mystery.

"Hark, you, sir," said Claude. "It's a bad thing to be too curious, but in one's own affairs we may be pardoned the feeling. If you don't tell me this

moment, for we have no time to spare, how you came to be aware that there had been an escape from Newgate, I will blow your brains out."

As he spoke, Claude took a pistol from his saddle, and placed the muzzle of it in rather uncomfortable proximity to the eye of the gentleman in the scarlet coat.

"Would you murder me?"

"Yes. One—two—three—four——"

"Stop! What are you counting for?"

"I am going to pull the trigger at twelve. Five—six—seven—eight—nine."

"Stop! I will tell you. The governor of Newgate sent a man on a fleet hunter across the country to let all the magistracy know of the fact of the escape of Claude Duval from prison, and it was only ten minutes ago that he called at my house, yonder, and told me, and then he galloped on."

"You are a magistrate, then?"

"I am."

"And your friend?"

"Oh, he is only a visitor of mine."

"And where, gentlemen, were you going?"

"To Edgeware, to meet the hounds."

"Will you give me your word of honour that you will go on your way, and take no notice of having met us?"

"No."

"Very well. I don't blame you for saying no to such a proposition. I think if I were in your case I should say as much; but we shall be under the necessity of stopping your sport for to-day. Dick, we will leave these two gentlemen on foot, and take their horses with us for a few miles; then we will let them go, and, no doubt, their owners will get them easily again."

"I resist such treatment," said the gentleman who was with the magistrate, and he aimed a blow at Dick Turpin with his riding-whip, which was very heavily loaded. The blow missed, and Dick said, quite calmly—

"Don't try that again, sir. I have patience, but I don't know the moment when it may leave me."

Making a dart at this person, Dick got hold of him by the collar, and had him off his horse in a moment, and threw him on the heath.

The magistrate very quickly dismounted.

"One man," he said, "can do but little against four, and I don't think I can do any good at all by throwing my life away. Here is my watch, and here is my purse."

"Keep them, sir. As for your friend, he is fair game."

"I have him all right," said Jack, who had dismounted, and got a handsome gold watch, and a well-filled purse, and rather bulky pocket-book from the unhorsed man, who had been so roughly placed on the heath by Dick Turpin.

"Who are you?" said the magistrate to Claude.

"Guess," said Duval, with a smile.

"You are Claude Duval?"

"I am, sir. Good morning."

"Stop a moment—stop. Yet, no—I ought not—yes, I will. Don't go through North-end."

"Thank you, sir. Here is your horse again. Allow me to return him to you as fresh as I took him. You can go now, and enjoy your day's sport, and I hope it will be a good one."

"On—on!" cried Jack. "Look behind you, Claude."

Claude did look behind him, and he saw, just coming on to the heath, the officers, who had made their way up Holly-bush Hill, and so emerged a little to the westward of where Claude and his friends had come on to the heath.

"Hilloa! Help!—help!" shouted the gentleman who had been laid upon the ground by Turpin—"help!"

"You had better be quiet, sir," said Duval. "This is rather bad conduct of you."

"Murder!—murder!"

"On—on!" said Jack. "We have not a minute to lose."

They just paused to try to count the number of the officers who were now in pursuit, but they could not do so at once, so they would not delay time, and off they went along the heath road at a great pace.

"Recollect," cried Claude, "not to go by North-end."

"By Jove! we can't help it, now, for we are in the direct road for it," said Turpin. "Duval, you know we should have taken the right-hand road across the heath, if we meant to avoid North-end, and, instead of that, we have taken the left."

"It can't be helped now," said Claude. "Get your pistols ready."

They could hear the shouts of the officers, now, quite plainly as they came along the heath; but they very imprudently made a pause at the point where the encounter had taken place with the two huntsmen; for he who had been unhorsed by Dick Turpin was still calling out for help in such a way; that the officers fully expected he had been murdered, or was in some terrible extremity.

Every moment, now, was so precious to the fugitives, that in the little time that the officers paused around the gentleman in the scarlet coat, they increased their distance by double the space from their pursuers.

The real fact was, that some of the officers had not their hearts in the job that they were put upon at all. Well they knew that if they should succeed in coming to close quarters with those whom they were pursuing, it would be anything but an easy conquest they would make of them, if they made a conquest at all, which was an exceedingly doubtful proposition, as they well knew.

There were, as they saw, four desperate, determined men. They knew that one was Claude Duval, of whose courage the most fabulous stories were told, and passed current.

Another they knew was Dick Turpin, of whose prowess they likewise had had pretty good grounds to judge of. Then they could not doubt but that whoever the other two were that were to be found upon such an occasion in such company, they had been well chosen by Claude and Turpin.

It was no wonder, then, that, under such circumstances, the ardour of the officers should cool down a little as they proceeded.

That some four or five of them would probably be killed in the encounter with Duval's party, if such should take place, was a contingency that bore such an impress of truth, that it was difficult to doubt it; and, although the officers had no great tenderness for each other, yet the doubt as to which of them would fall for the benefit of the survivors was one of the most uncomfortable ideas in the world, and infected all the party with

"The pale cast of fear."

Hence, probably, it was that they were not very angry to find an excuse in the balling of the scarlet-coated gentleman on the ground to pause awhile, and to let the pursued get to a more respectable distance in advance of them.

Certainly, if one or two stopped, the others were sure to do so; for if they thought their force hardly strong as it was in its entire integrality, they would hardly think of dividing their force.

Indeed, if it had not been for the determined man who had the command of the party, the probability is, that the pursuit would never have lasted so far as Hampstead Heath at all; but he was a prudent man, and had a reputation to lose, as well as much to gain, by the affair.

"Now, sir," he said, to the scarlet-coated individual, "if you are dying, say at once who struck the blow, or fired the shot, for our time is valuable."

"Dying?"

"Yes. You are mortally wounded, I suppose?"

"No, thank God! Beyond a bruise, I fancy, owing to being rather roughly made to fall on the heath, I am not aware that anything is particularly the matter with me."

"Then why, in the name of all that is abominable, did you bawl out in that way so for?"

"To help to capture the rascals."

"Oh, bother take you. You have hindered us five minutes, and that's a mile. Come on, comrades, we will have them yet—come on."

"Yes—yes," said the others. "On—on!"

They said "On—on!" but if they could only have found some direct excuse for going down Hampstead-hill again, instead of turning along its heath, how much happier they would really have been—for the greater part of them, at all events.

In the meantime Claude Duval was not at all unmindful of the warning he had had not to pass through North-end, and he called out to his companions—

"There is danger at North-end; but our best plan is to dash through it, I think."

"So do I," said Dick Turpin.

"No doubt of that," said the landlord. "What is the danger, Claude Duval, do you know?"

"No."

"Never mind," said Dick. "On—on! is the word."

The reader who is at all familiar with the beautiful and picturesque Heath of Hampsted, is, no doubt, well aware that across it, going northward, there are two roads.

The road to the right leads to Highgate, if pursued for a distance of about one mile and a half.

The road to the left leads through North-end, towards Golden Green and Hounslow, one of the most country-like and picturesque portions of the environs of London even to the present day.

It was the road to the left that Claude Duval and his three friends took.

That road was, at the time of our story, exceedingly steep and percipitous, although it was partially lowered by a cutting being made through a high portion of the hill. That cutting is now very considerably lowered, so that as you proceed along that bit of road, you have a bank upon each side of you at some parts of thirty feet or more in height, covered to the right hand with luxuriant wild vegetation.

It was through this cutting, then, which terminates immediately upon the little cluster of houses called North-end, Hampstead, that Duval and his friends galloped at a good pace.

The idea that there was danger at North-end had induced them all to prepare for it as best they might.

Claude had pushed on a pace or two in advance, and had loosened his pistols in the holsters, so that they were ready for immediate use. The others had likewise seen that their arms were in order.

For a moment or two Claude was of opinion that the danger had not arrived, inasmuch as the place looked as peaceable and quiet as it possibly could; but it was only for a few fleeting moments that he had that opinion.

There is rather a steep descent just at the other side of North-end, known by the name of Golden-hill, and on one side of that—the left—was a garden wall, extending some distance along the road, and then branching at a right angle into a meadow.

Just as Duval reaced the brow of the hill there emerged from the corner of this wall ten or twelve mounted men, headed by one dressed like a gentleman, who immediately called out, in a loud voice—

"I summon you to surrender, in the name of the law."

"Oh, indeed," said Claude. "Charge!"

On they swept, but before they got up to the assemblage a rattling discharge of fire-arms came among them.

"Fire!" cried Claude.

Four well-directed pistol-shots in a moment were sent into the throng, and from the confusion that ensued it was pretty evident some mischief had been done among them.

"On—on!" cried Claude.

In an instant they swept past the officers, and in their progess Turpin knocked one man off his saddle by a well-directed blow from the handle of a heavy riding-whip that he had with him, and so they cleared the danger at North-end.

A slight attempt was made to pursue them, but soon given up; and when Claude Duval saw that, he drew rein at Golden Green, and said, anxiously—

"Is anybody hit?"

"No," cried Dick and the landlord both in a breath.

"Nothing of consequence," said Jack.

"Ah, they have touched you, Jack."

"In the arm, Claude, but really I don't think it is anything. I can bend my arm well enough, so the bone is not touched, and I think the bullet went right through and is gone, so that will be all the better."

"Confound them," muttered Claude, as he bound a handkerchief round Jack's arm, "they came out to hunt me with all the gusto that they would bring to the hunting of a fox."

"More of it, Claude," said Dick.

"Do not wait here," said Jack. "Never mind me, Claude, Lut us push on. It will not do to let the officers get up to us, you know."

"I don't know that," said Dick.

"You don't know it?"

"No, Jack. The fact is, my opinion of the officers is such that they will not, if they can help it, come to close quarters with us. They are pursuing a policy which is at once as cowardly as it will be effectual."

"What is that you say, Dick?" said Claude. "You have an idea, I see, about the conduct of the officers that we should all know. What is it?"

"I know his idea," said the landlord, as he patted his cheek with his handkerchief.

"Ah, you are hit, too," said Claude.

"You can't call it a hit. The fact is, one of the bullets just scraped the skin off my cheek, but it has begun bleeding now at a great rate. It is nothing, though."

"Narrow escapes both," said Claude, glancing at Jack and the landlord. "A little nearer and that straggling volley would have been fatal to us."

"Oh, do ride on," said Jack. "Why do we wait here?"

"On, then," cried Dick, "and I can tell you what my idea of the policy of the officers is, as we go along."

"Do so, Dick."

"Well, it is just this. They don't want to come up with us, but they want to hunt us, you see, always hoping that we may be constantly meeting other foes in front of us, who will have a shy at us and knock some of us over; and if that sort of fun goes on long, you know, why, in the natural order of things, we must at last be done for."

"That's about it," said the landlord. "You see, they know if they come to close quarters it will just be a brush for a few minutes, at the end of which some three or four of them will be put out of their troubles in this world, even although they should succeed in bringing us all down, and your officers don't like that way of doing business."

"Do you hear that, Jack?" said Claude.

"I do."

"And you agree with it?"

"It is, I am sorry to say, too sensible, and too much in accordance with my own experience, to doubt. It is quite clear that we must force them to close quarters, and take the chances of the fight. Just fancy our running the gauntlet through fifty miles of country in this sort of way. To be sure, if we could find a hiding-place, or play the double upon them, it would be better."

"They are too close upon our track for that," said Dick.

"Well, I'm rather afraid they are, Dick."

"And all this is on my account," moaned Claude.

"Don't you flatter yourself it is any such thing," said Dick. "That's not it at all."

"Oh, yes—yes, it is; and now I beg of you all three to ride on, and leave me at the first narrow part of the road, where I can make a good defence for some time, and so block up the passage until you can attain a place of safety."

"It's of no use your speaking in that way, Claude," said Dick; "we don't mean to do it, so there's an end of that. What now, Jack, in your experience and knowledge of the road, do you advise?"

"It is quite clear," said Jack, "that if we are to get into any hiding-place, or to double upon the officers across the country in any way, we must beat them off first, so that they shall, for a time, lose sight of us."

"True enough that, Jack."

"Then, the only way to do that is to make a bold stand somewhere that we can pick out for ourselves as favourable, and let them come up to us, and so give them a taste of our quality. The head of some well-wooded lane would be just the thing; and if we ride on a little further, we shall find plenty of such places."

"Agreed," said Dick. "Come, Claude, what do you say to that?"

"I say agreed, likewise, if you will not leave me."

"That we will not. Why, what could put such a thing into your head? Come on, now. We can get a little more speed out of our cattle; and as they will have a little rest, now is the time to do so."

Jack, by common consent, was permitted to take the lead, as his acquaintance with that road was an exceedingly intimate one, since it was for many years the scene of his early exploits. It might fairly be said of him, that upon that road—

"There was not a tree, a house, or stone,
To that bold rider there unknown;"

and at that time of day, changes did not take place so rapidly in the suburbs of London as they do now.

And yet, probably, as regards the natural scenery northward of the metropolis, after getting some six or seven miles off, we have less to lament in that way than we could possibly imagine.

In the surface of country lying between the road from Hampstead to Mill-hill on the one side, and the Edgeware-road on the other, there are some of the finest green lanes that any part of England can possibly exhibit.

There will be found real country vegetation; and although really so near to the great city, the silence and the country-look seem so natural, that we could place any one there, and make him believe that he was hundreds of miles away from London.

We trust that some of our readers will take an exploring walk to that locality.

The party now passed a little miserable road-side public-house, which looked as if the roof had crushed it; for it was all on one side, and conveyed the evident idea to any one that a tolerable kick would send the whole edifice over.

A couple of men at the door of the little hotel took a good stare at Claude's party as it flitted rapidly past; but no other notice was bestowed upon it.

They now got to rather a narrow bit of road, beyond which was a steep hill, to the foot of which a cart laden with a quantity of young timber had just arrived.

Jack drew up.

"Claude," he said, "there is only a boy with that cart of timber, and there is a lane close by here that will suit us very well; but it will suit us a great deal better if some of that timber were thrown across the entrance of it."

"Capital," said Claude. "Suppose we take possession?"

"Might must be might," said Dick, as he rode at once up to the boy, and called out to him.

"Hilloa, my lad! would you like a guinea or a knock on the head?"

"A guinea," said the boy.

"Very well, you shall have it; but you must obey our directions, and if you don't, you will get the knock on the head first, and then have to obey them after all."

"Eh?" said the boy, with such a stupid look, that it was pretty evident some parts of Dick's speech were completely lost upon him.

"Don't you understand me?"

"Anan!"

"Oh, well, I suppose you don't. Jack, where is the lane?"

"Just yonder, by the chestnut trees."

"Very well. Hold my horse a moment, some of you."

"I will," said Claude.

Dick Turpin at once dismounted; and laying hold of the leading horse of the two that drew the cart, he began to lead it to the corner of the lane.

"Stop!" said the boy. "I mustn't——'

"Get out of the way!"

"Oh, but—Murder!"

Claude had laid the lash of his whip over the boy's shoulders with an efficacy that rather startled him; and after putting himself into all sorts of grotesque attitudes to get rid of the pain, he called out—

"I'll go and tell maister."

And then off he set up the hill.

"A good riddance," said Dick.

A few moments sufficed to get the cart to the end of the lane, and then Dick unyoked both the horses, and let them go where they liked. The landlord dismounted, and helped Dick, so that they soon had out of the cart a lot of timber, and had formed a pretty good barricade at the end of the lane, and then they, by dint of great exertion, turned the cart over on its side likewise, so that the lane was completely stopped up for horsemen or carriages.

Of course, they had taken care not to shut themselves out.

All this working, with the good will that they set about it, did not take above five minutes to do, and then they all four dismounted, and looked carefully to their arms.

They found they could fire three volleys easily, without waiting to re-charge their weapons, so they considered they were pretty well provided against the contingencies of the combat.

Claude now looked more carefully than before to Jack's arm, and he had the satisfaction to find that it had ceased bleeding, although it was more painful than it had been some short time before.

"Don't attempt to move it, Jack," he said.

"I will not if I can help it," replied Jack. "Do you hear the officers, any of you?"

"No," was the general answer; and then Duval asked Jack if he knew where the lane led to.

"Yes," he replied; "it goes right away to Edgeware; but it takes many a turn and wind before you can get there by it, and in some places it is so narrow that the branches of the bushes on each side would touch even a foot passenger. Our object, though, will not be to pursue the lane above a mile or so, at all events. We can do better, I think, by then taking to the meadows, and keeping all snug till nightfall."

"Yes," said Claude. "When the sun of to-day sets I shall begin to think that all is right. We can give our horses a rest till midnight, and then I should say let us get westward of London, for in this direction there will be a hue and cry for a week to come."

"There will, Claude," said Dick. "But now I hear them. Keep close, all of you, and let the horses be as close to the trees as possible."

CHAPTER CCCXVI.

THE OFFICERS ATTACK CLAUDE AND HIS PARTY, AND GET THE WORST OF IT.

THE greatest possible care was taken now by Dick Turpin to put his own steed out of danger of chance shots, as well as those of his friends.

By tying the creatures by the bridles to some of the low branches of the trees that were in the hedgerow, they were pretty well protected from any mischief the officers could do them. Besides, it was not to be supposed that the officers would waste a shot upon a horse when they had a man to fire at.

The clatter of the horses' hoofs of the pursuing party cou ld now plainly enough be heard upon the road, and it was quite clear that in a few minutes they would reach the spot where Claude and his friends were, as it were, barricaded.

"They may pass us," said Jack.

"Well, it is possible," said Claude.

"But not very likely," said the landlord, as he still patted his cheek. "They keep rather too good a look out for that. If it were twilight now, such a thing might happen easily enough."

"Yes. But if it had been twilight," said Dick, "I think we could have done better than we are now doing."

"Hush!" said Claude. "Here they are."

Claude was right. The officers had reached the corner of the lane, and they all but passed it in their hurry; and if one of them had not uttered an exclamation, from which his companions conjectured him to be in danger, the chief of the party would have ridden on, without being aware that he was passing the very people he was so anxious to come up to.

"Hillioa!" cried that vigilant officer, who could not hold his tongue. "What's this?"

"What?" said the chief. "Ha, I see! Here they are. Halt!"

The officers reined in their prancing steeds.

"Nine of them," said Jack.

"Yes—only nine!" said Claude.

"Take care of yourselves," said Dick. "They have their pistols. What do you say, Claude, to giving them a taste of our quality?"

"I don't like to fire first upon these occasions," said Duval; "but in this case I feel that I am completely in your hands, and will do as you do."

"Well—well, let them have the first fire, then, if they like it."

"Look about, my men," said the chief officer. "The rascals are here, and we are sure to have them; but it is our duty to do so with as little loss as possible."

"Certainly," said all the officers.

The chief officer was a man of much courage, and heedless of the pistols of the highwaymen, which he could see plainly in their hands, he rode up close to the barricade they had erected at the corner of the lane, and spoke to them.

"Resistance is little short of madness," he said. "You know as well as I do that we must have you."

"Go back, sir!" said Claude.

"I know you, Claude Duval," added the officer; "and it is quite out of the question for you to keep at large. The whole country will be armed against you."

"Hark you, sir," said Dick Turpin, "I can inform you that we are determined



MAGGS VISITS CLAUDE TO TELL HIM OF THE PROJECTED ESCAPE.

to defend ourselves to the last extremity. If there should come any loss of life or any grievous hurts upon this occasion, they will lie at your door, inasmuch as if you leave us alone we will leave you alone."

"Oh, this is nonsense!" said the officer. "I know you, too. You are Richard Turpin, for whose apprehension rewards the reach the sum of eight hundred pounds."

"I don't see," said Dick, "that the amount of the reward for me holds out any inducement to me to give myself up. I am not aware that I should get any of it."

"Perhaps you know me," said Jack.

"No, I don't—nor do I know your other companion; but Jack Ketch is not very particular."

"If we were angry now, and wished to take offence," said Turpin, "that speech would be your last."

"Oh, nonsense! you are not all out of your senses, I suppose? There can be no good in resistance."

"We are not convinced of that."

"Then convince yourselves. Here we are, more than two to one, and as well armed as you can possibly be, so what can you expect as the issue of a struggle?"

"We shall see."

"And, likewise, we are now doing our duty, while you are but criminals waiting justice."

"Don't it strike you that the preservation of our lives is about as strong a stimulus to exertion as your wish to get hold of the reward you speak of, my friend?"

The officer bit his lip at this; for, in his heart, he knew that he could not depend upon the men he had with him. Hence was it that he was so exceedingly anxious to make terms if he could with the foe.

"Now, listen to me," he said. "I dare not hold out any hopes to you, Claude Duval, nor to you, Richard Turpin, for you have both committed so many crimes that the law won't be interfered with; but I put it to you, now, whether it is not better quietly to give yourselves up without any more ado, than to be taken with the addition of another murder or two to answer for?"

"Cool, that," said Dick.

"Come, now, your answer."

"It is just this; that if I am attacked, and I defend myself, I think killing no murder."

"I am much of the same opinion," said Claude, "and so we mean to let you commence the strife; but woe be to you if you do; for I tell you, Mr. Officer, that, notwithstanding all your bother, not a man of you shall leave this spot alive. I am Claude Duval, and it is pretty well known that I ever do my best to keep my word."

"Well," said the officer, "you will see that—that—"

The officer, who was a little way off, looked dreadfully fidgety as Claude spoke the words we have recorded in his cool, calm, determined manner.

"I appeal to you two, who I do not know," added the officer. "Up to the present your only offence that I know of is, that you have ridden a few miles in the company of two notorious felons; but I warn you, if you lift a hand against the officers of justice you are with them equally guilty; so I ask you both to save your lives."

"Well, Jack," said Dick, "you hear him."

"It requires no answer," said Jack.

"Do you hear me?"

"Yes—yes. Go your way, man, and don't be making a fool of yourself by prating here such nonsense. You have had your answer. We are four to nine, it seems; but we mean to fight—That is all you require to know."

"Take that," said the officer, as he fired a pistol at Jack's head, "and that puts you at your ease, my fine fellow, whoever you are."

"Treacherous rascal!" said Claude, and on the instant, as the officer turned to fly, he fired at him.

The officer uttered a yell and fell back off his horse.

"Help! help!" he cried. "I—oh, help—dark—night—Fire! Oh mercy!"

The bullet had entered the back of his head, and with the utterance of that last word, "Mercy," he was a dead man.

"Jack, did he hit you?" said Claude.

"No."

"Thank God! Ah! what is this?"

The landlord of the public-house lay upon the ground, and his death-like pale face told the tale of where the officer's bullet had gone.

"You are hit, then?" said Claude.

"Rather. It passed Jack and found me, you see, that's all—that's all. I'm done for, now!"

"It was a foul and treacherous shot."

"Look out!" cried Dick Turpin.

The officers suddenly advanced and fired a volley, which was as promptly returned by Claude's party, although, now, they could only fire three shots at a time.

"At them again!" cried one of the officers, "one of 'em is done. At them again—fire away!"

Another volley came shattering among the trees, and Claude's hat flew off with a couple of bullets in it.

"Blaze away," said Dick, as calmly as possible, and he fired again. Claude and Jack did the same, and then again.

This continuous fire seemed rather to astonish the officers, and Jack, who was by the landlord, possessed himself of his pistols, and kept on firing at them.

Three of the officers had fallen from their horses to the ground, and another having his horse wounded, was ran away with at a mad gallop by the infuriated animal. Dick Turpin had received a slight wound, but Claude was unhurt. There were still five officers, however, to three of the highwaymen, and for a moment or two they ceased.

"Fire!" cried Claude.

They heard him, and in a moment one shouted out—"We shall all be killed!" and turned and fled. The others immediately followed his example, and they tore off at a much greater speed than they had ever exerted in pursuing the highwaymen.

"Load again," said Claude, "they may be back upon us."

Not a word was now spoken till all their pistols were loaded, and then Duval sprang upon the side of the cart and took a long look down the road.

"Do you see them?" said Turpin.

"Only just—now they are gone."

"We have won the fight, then!"

"Yes, but at such a loss," said Jack. "Look here, both of you. He is going fast now."

Claude jumped off the cart, and hastily approached the dying man. Dick, too, was in a moment by his side.

The landlord lay upon his back, and the expression of his face was quite sufficient to show that death had set his seal upon him. One of his hands was busily employed in plucking at the grass that was in great luxuriousness around the spot on which he lay.

"This is sad," said Claude.

"It is, indeed," sighed Jack. "It would have been better if the bullet had done the errand it was sent upon, and hit me."

"Poor fellow," said Turpin. "In his day he was a bold hand, and now he has come to the end that we would have said he had fairly escaped by retiring from the road."

"Can nothing be done for him?" said Claude, who was deeply affected at the death of that man who had done so much for him, and who may be said to have come by his melancholy end in his service.

"Nothing," said Jack.

Dick, too, shook his head.

"I feared as much," said Claude.

"Hush!" said Jack; "he speaks."

"Hold that one!" said the dying man—"Now, Claude—brave Claude—open the wicket—the court—no—no—gone! Listen how the bell tolls. Somebody is going—going——"

There was a horrible rattling sound in his throat, and they all three shrank back for a moment.

"This is horrible," said Claude. "How much better if the shot had at once been mortal!"

"He don't suffer," said Jack. "The mind is too far gone to take cognizance of suffering now."

"Help!—murder!" shrieked the dying man. "This is—death!"

He had half risen; but the effort was his last, and he fell back again like a lump of lead.

"Gone!" said Jack, with a shudder. "Peace be to you, old friend, and may your crimes find pardon where we must all sue for it, and let us hope not in vain—not in vain!"

CHAPTER CCCXVII.

THE GRAVE BY THE OLD OAK.—MORE ALARMS.

As Jack uttered the words with which we concluded our last chapter, he lifted his hat from his head. Dick did the same, and Claude, who was bare-headed, bowed low, in acknowledgment of the presence of the dead, and of the sentiment that had come from the lips of his friend Jack.

For the space of about three minutes none of them spoke; and then Jack broke the silence, by saying—

"We must provide a grave for him."

"Surely," said Claude.

Dick nodded.

"It shall be done," he said. "If all the officers in England were gathering in one sanguinary host to attack us, I would bury this poor piece of inanimation now. This is a lonely spot."

"It feels more loney now," said Jack. "The presence of the dead, I think, has the effect of making a shuddering solitude of such a spot as this."

"There is one thing that we ought to do," said Claude Duval, "in the cause of common humanity."

"What is that?"

"Look to our foes, who lie in the road. If any of them be not dead, let us do for them what we can."

"Agreed!" said both Jack and Dick Turpin, and they immediately followed Claude Duval over the logs of wood and the cart into the roadway, where lay the officers who had fallen.

A very few minutes sufficed to bring the three friends to the spot of the encounter, and the first body they came to was to that of the chief officer who had fired so treacherously at Jack, and killed the landlord of the public-house.

"Quite dead," said Dick.

"And he deserved his death," said Claude. "I cannot regret that shot. This one tried to commit what must be called an assassination, for it was nothing better."

"He did so."

They then went to the others, and in o y one was a spark of life discernible. He, when they tried to support him, just breathed one sigh, and then expired.

"All over," said Dick.

"What shall we do with them?" said Jack.

"They have many friends who will take charge of them," said Claude; "and, indeed, if we had both the means and the inclination to bury them all, it would be better not. All we need do with them is to draw them to the road-side, and there leave them."

"Be it so," said Jack. "Our own comrade we may inter; but these must go through all the ordeal of coroners' inquests, and all that sort of thing."

They now drew the four dead bodies to the grassy slope by the side of the road, and there they let them lie side by side, without making the least attempt to take anything from them. After that, Claude and his two friends went across the obstruction into the lane again, and then Claude saw that Jack had brought with him a couple of the broad cutlasses that the mounted police had worn.

"What are these for, Jack? We don't want them."

"Yes, we do, now. They are the only weapons we have with which to dig a grave for our poor friend here."

"True—true, Jack."

"You and Dick must do it; for, although I have all the will in the world to turn a sod for such a purpose, my arm, I fear, will not permit me to do so."

"Don't attempt it, Jack."

Dick Turpin and Claude Duval now looked out for a quiet spot, beneath which they could place the dead body of their friend, and finally they settled upon a patch of grassy ground, not far from a tree that grew standing by the side of a little stream that was close at hand.

The soil was of a loose and loamy texture, so that there was no great difficulty in displacing it. At first they took off the turfs very carefully and laid them aside, and then as they dug they cast some of the loose mould into the water, where it was washed away, and other portions of it they piled up by the side of the grave; and so, in the course of a quarter of an hour, they had a hollow of about four feet in depth.

The labour to dig so much as that, with the inefficient implements they had, was very great, and Dick and Claude were both glad enough when Jack said that they had gone deep enough.

"No one will disturb him, poor fellow," said Jack, "and if any one should hit upon the spot and feel inclined to do so, it is not with twelve miles in the depth of his grave that will save him."

They then carried the body carefully to the spot and placed it in the grave. Dick laid the hat of the deceased over his face, so that it should be not actually exposed to the pressure of the mould, and then Jack threw the first handful of mould upon the body.

"I don't know any funeral service," said Jack, "or I would say it over him, so he must do without.'

"It don't matter," said Dick, "for, of course, he can't help it whether a funeral service is said over him or not, one way or the other."

"To be sure not," said Claude, "so it can't make any difference to him. I'm afraid there would be no funeral service at all but for the fee to the parson."

"Very likely," said Jack.

In this primitive way, then—although certainly the opinions of the highwaymen regarding parsons was rather shocking, as if such pious people could ever care about fees, and tithes, and all that sort of thing! Pah! It is too bad!—Well, they covered up the poor dead landlord, and when they got the ground nearly level they laid the turfs carefully on the top in their proper places again, and made the surface all as smooth and as level as they could, so that by the time they had scattered some decayed leaves upon it, and then some water from the ditch to revive the grass again, nobody would have thought that so near the surface there lay so melancholy a victim of the affray that had taken place at the end of the lane.

"That's over," said Dick.

"Yes," said Claude; "and, now, the sooner we leave this place the better, I think. Don't you, Jack?"

"Yes; but what are we to do, now, with our spare horse?"

"Let him go."

"Very good. A horse cannot be long without a owner in England. He will pick up plenty to eat, too, in the meadows."

Jack, assisted by Turpin, made a gap in the hedge of sufficient width for the horse to go through; and then, divesting the creature of its saddle and bridle, they set it at liberty, and it bounded and frolicked in the meadows, to the great annoyance, no doubt, of the other horses.

"Now, it's off we are," said Dick. "Mount, Claude, and ride quick. We shall soon shake off the depression which the late event has cast upon us."

Claude mounted, and they all three went down the lane at a trot, which did not prevent them from conversing; so Claude, turning to Jack, said—

"Now, I think, you will admit, Jack, that I have shown very great forbearance?"

"In what?"

"In not pestering you with questions about Cicely."

Jack changed colour, and Dick Turpin touched his horse with the spur, and rode on a little in advance.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Claude. "Why do you both appear so disturbed at the question? All I want is to know where she is. That is simple."

"I will tell you, Claude."

"Do so."

"In the grave!"

Duval almost fell from his horse as Jack said this, and, in shrieking accents, he cried—

"Oh, no—no! Tell me that you have this information upon insufficient evidence—tell me that it is mere hearsay—tell me that you do not believe it—tell me anything in the world but that it is true!"

"Claude," said Jack, in a mournful tone of voice, "you never would believe it, although it was hinted to you, and Dick and I made up our minds to say nothing to you about it until you forced us by your questions. I now tell you that it is not mere hearsay—not a mere report—but a truth."

"Oh, Heaven!"

"She is no more."

"Kill me, Jack."

"No, Claude. This is a great shock to you, no doubt, but you must get over it as people do get over great shocks. You must not allow it to knock you down completely. That you should grieve is one of the most natural things in the world, but that you should grieve immoderately is one of the most unnatural things in the world; and you will recollect that Cicely suffers nothing now, and that when she drew her last breath she got to the end of all suffering."

"Jack you may have all the amazement, but I have all the feeling."

"Not all, Claude. I am sure that Dick and I both feel for you very much, but we both know that the misfortune that has happened is one that is not remediable, and we both know, too, that we must all die, and that

'Come it slow, or come it fast,
It is but death that comes at last.'

Come, be calm and composed."

"I will try—I will try!"

Claude hardly spoke during the remainder of that day, and he left it to his companions to choose a halting place for the night, which they did in a very sweet romantic dell at the foot of an eminence covered with young trees of beautiful growth.

In his vallise Dick Turpin had some provisions, and he unfastened it and

made Claude partake of some; but they could not get him to shake off the gloom that hung upon his spirits.

Poor Jack was very much afraid that he meditated some wild and mad action, but Dick was of a different opinion, as such a crime would be contrary to Duval's usual mode of thought.

The night was now creeping on, and all about the secret spot where the three highwaymen had taken up their abode temporarily was enveloped in shadow. The low, soft notes of a few of the latest-roosting forest birds alone disturbed the stillness of the scene, and such sounds could scarcely be said to disturb it, since they rather added to its tranquil repose, and its calm beauty.

Claude Duval had thrown himself upon the ground, and placed his arm over his face, so that his companions could not see the expression of it; but well they knew that he was brooding over the death of Cicely.

Gladly—most gladly would Jack or Dick have said something to him to stem the current of his grief; but what could they say? Nothing but telling him that she yet lived could possibly rouse him, and to tell him that would be to assert what they knew to be untrue. No; there was no help for it but to let the grief of Claude Duval have its sway.

Jack and Dick left him to himself, and conversed together in low tones at some distance apart from him.

They knew that the time of his recovery from the depression that was upon his spirits would come; but they suspected it would be further distant from the cause of it than is usually the case even with the severest of mental shocks.

And Claude Duval was grateful to his two attached friends that they left him for a time alone with his sorrow, as he knew how incapable he was of conversing with them, and how totally inadequate all ordinary powers of consolation would be in his case.

Jack had already said all that could be said upon the subject.

CHAPTER CCCXVIII.

DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS STOP THE PRINCESS SOPHIA ON WORMHOLT SCRUBS.

The night stole on, and a white mist rose up from the earth, and the stars, when the few rain clouds that had hovered in the sky about the hour of sunset had blown over, shone out sweetly and serenely.

At length midnight came.

Jack then whispered to Dick Turpin that it was time for them to move from that spot, and that, as Claude Duval had not yet spoken to them, it would be surely better to interrupt him in his gloomy meditations upon the past.

"Yes," said Dick, "I think so, too. You are by far his oldest friend, Jack, and I beg that you will go and speak to him."

"I will said Jack.

The place upon which Claude lay was protected by the overhanging boughs of a large tree, and Jack approached lightly.

"Claude," he said, "do you sleep?"

"No, Jack."

"Ah, you are better. You speak, now, more calmly and assuredly. You are better, are you not?"

"I am, Jack—much better."

"Thank Heaven! It gives me great pleasure to hear you say so, Claude. I suppose you have been thinking?"

"That is it, Jack. I have been thinking deeply; and although there will ever be a void in my heart by the death of Cicely—you hear that I can now

speak calmly of that event—yet the result of my thought is, that she is far happier as she is than as if she still lived."

"To be sure, she is."

"I knew you would agree with me in that, Jack."

"Yes, of course, I will and do. I urged much the same thing upon you when first you got the sad news."

"Did you?"

"Yes; but you were, of course, too much engrossed by the fact itself, no doubt, to know exactly what it was I said to you."

"No doubt—no doubt. Where is Dick?"

"Close at hand, and he will be well pleased to hear that you think so properly of the past. Dick? Dick?"

"Yes," said Turpin, stepping towards them. "I am here."

"Claude has thought over his loss, and, like a wise man, he feels that it is inevitable, and that Cicely is happier far as she is than as if she had still to struggle with the world, and all its dangers and deep anxieties; and so, for the future, he will be himself again."

"Bravo!" said Dick. "That is right, Claude. It shows that you have sense as well as feeling."

"We will say no more about her," said Claude, wih a deep sigh. "She is gone, and may she be happy. Now, my friends, I am the same man whom you always knew; and, first and foremost, let me say that I know not how in the world I shall ever be able to express to you what a sense I have of all that you have both done for me in this matter of my escape from Newgate."

"Oh, pho!" said Dick; "it is nothing."

"Nothing at all," said Jack, "because, you see, in the first place, it was easily done; and in the second place, we knew that you would be quite willing to do as much for us at any time."

"In truth, I would."

"Very well, then, there is an end of that," said Dick Turpin. "You know, Claude, that such affairs are either tolerably easy, or impossible; and in this case, with all the arrangements we had been able to make beforehand, the affair was tolerably easy, and, as it turned out, was done quite nicely; and now here we are, all three on the road again, and ready, I presume, for any gift that fortune may throw in our path. Is it not so?"

"It is," said Jack.

"It is," said Claude. "Action will be my only course. I must strive to forget the past now, in the bustle and the changes of the present."

"That is the thing. All you have got to do is to prevent your mind from stagnating for want of something to do!" cried Dick; "and now let us at once put our former resolve into execution. It was to leave this part of the country, and to go westward, so if we are to do so to-night, let us start, or else in two hours time we shall have a young moon peeping up above the horizon, and if the sky keeps as clear as it is now, there will not be shadows enough to hide us as we go across the meadows."

"Be it so. I am ready."

"The horses have had a good rest, and as much food, in the shape of hay and grass," said Jack, "as they can eat."

"Hay, have they had?"

"Oh, bless you, yes, Claude. In the next meadow to this there are a couple of excellent stacks of prime meadow hay, so I have borrowed a few armsful of it for our steeds, and they have enjoyed it amazingly."

"Not a doubt—not a doubt."

The horses had had a rest of upwards of four hours, so that they were in capital condition for active service, and Jack undertook to lead the party across the country to the Edgeware Road, from which they could easily make their way westward.

By the dim, yet beautiful light of the stars, then, they all three set out, and



MAGGS RECEIVES INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE SHERIFF AND GOVEROR OF NEWGATE.

Jack went with great accuracy across the meadows. To be sure, now and then they came to rather a serious obstacle in the shape of a fence, which they found it impossible to get over, so they had either to make a gap in it, or go along it till they came to some gate which they could open; but this state of things was not very frequent, and by about half past one o'clock they all emerged into the Edgeware Road, about a couple of miles from Cucklewood.

They then held a consultation as to whether they should go on through the meadows instead, as before, by the high-roads; and as it was a time of night when they were not likely to meet any enemies, and they had got a considerable distance from the part of the country in which it would be believed they were,

they decided upon keeping the road; so, at a trot which got over the ground pretty quickly, although without any appearance of hurry, they went on in the direction of Kilburn, which they soon reached.

The man at the turnpike came out in his nightcap to let them through the bar, and as he did so, he said—

"Gentlemen, you had better keep a good look-out, for there's a highwayman upon the road, they say."

"Ah, indeed?" said Dick. "Who is it?"

"That I can't tell you, sir; but they call him the Skeleton Horseman!"

"The Skeleton Horseman, do you say?"

"Yes, sir; that's what they call him."

"A strange title."

"Ah, sir, it is; but, for my part, I thinks as it is all gammon. I saw him once, and only once, and then he had a large cloak over him; so he just, to my thinking, looked, you see, sir, like any other christian."

"To be sure; thank you. Good-night."

"Here's your change, sir. It was half-a-crown you gave me, if you please, sir."

"Never mind: keep it."

"Well," said the turnpike man, as he went into his little house again, "that's a real gemman, now. How you may know a real gemman in a minute from one as isn't! Ah, it's a comfort to think as there is some real gemmen in the world yet as don't want the change out of half-a-crown from a poor fellow."

So much for gentility!

"This is an odd idea," said Jack, when they had got a little further on down the road, "to warn us of a highwayman, is it not, Dick?"

"Rather so."

"It is all nonsense, I daresay," said Claude; "but if we should chance to meet the fellow, I will put him to the test."

"Yes; and find out whether he belongs to this world or to another," said Dick, "for if—Hilloa!"

This exclamation of Dick's arose from the fact that, at that moment, the sharp crack of a pistol-shot came upon their ears, and then, right over a hedge, which was of considerable height on the road-side, whatever it was on the other, there came a man on horseback.

The leap was deep, and the horse went right upon his haunches for a moment after alighting in the road.

"Damnation!" said the horseman; but in another moment the horse was on his feet again, and he added—"Right—all right," and off he went, like the wind, country-ways.

"This is an odd start," said Dick Turpin. "Who the deuce is that, I wonder? Here comes some others, though."

"Stop him—stop him!" cried a voice from the other side of the hedge. "Stop thief—stop him, I say!"

"Hilloa!" cried Claude Duval. "What's the matter?"

"There he is—there he is!" shouted the voice again. "Over with you all, gentlemen, and we will have him."

With various degrees of success, now, four persons on horseback jumped over the hedge, and alighted in the road close to Claude Duval and his party, Claude and Dick both thought that their policy was to remain where they were. but Jack was of a different opinion. However, he gave in to the majority that were against him, and he, too, staid.

"What's the matter?" cried Claude again. "What is all this disturbance about?"

"Who are you?" said the voice.

"A magistrate," said Claude.

"Then, sir, you are the very person whom we wanted to get at, of all others, for you can decide what is to be done. We have pursued a highwayman across

the fields for the space of two miles, and very much fear now that he has eluded us at last."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. It seemed to us as if he jumped over the hedge."

"He did do so—or, rather; I should say, that a man on horseback did jump the hedge; but, of course, I have no evidence before me that he was a highwayman. If I had had such evidence, I and my friends would, of course, have at once stopped him."

"Plague take the evidence," said another of the mounted men. "I wish, sir, you had stopped him, and looked for the evidence afterwards."

"That would have been contrary to law, sir."

"Oh, perhaps it would; but if I come within pistol-shot of him I will have another try at his head, whether it is contrary to law or not."

"Of course, sir," said Claude, who kept up the character he had assumed with the most admirable gravity—"of course, sir, you will do what seems to you right, but you commit an act of that description entirely upon your own responsibility, let me tell you."

"I know that, sir."

"Very good. Perhaps you can tell me who this highwayman is?"

"That, indeed, we cannot, except that he is commonly called the Skeleton Horseman. He has only made his appearance during the last fortnight or so, and he has in that space of time succeeded in pretty well terrifying the whole of this neighbourhood. We very nearly caught him to-night."

"But why is he called the Skeleton Horseman?"

"Because they say that under the large cloak he wears, and which wraps him up from head to heel, he is nothing but a skeleton, and that he has shown himself to be such at times to people whom he has stopped upon the highway, and who have nearly fallen dead with fright at the sight of him. These gentlemen and myself were asked, if we could, to put an end to the delusion by catching the rascal; and, I am sorry to say, he has avoided us successfully."

"He went towards the country," said Claude; "but as soon as I get to London, I will send a party of horsemen on this road, with orders to take him, dead or alive."

"Much obliged, sir," said another of the gentlemen. "The rascal stopped my wife and her sister, and nearly frightened them both out of their lives; and my coachman, who was with the carriage, was so terrified, that he absconded from it, and ran off, and has never been heard of since."

"I will do my best to find him, gentlemen," said Claude; "and were it not that I am engaged just now on some very important business for the Secretary of State, I would turn my horse's head in the direction the fellow went, and try to hunt him up at once."

"Thank you, sir. Good-night."

"Good-night, gentlemen."

"Oh, by-the-bye," said one, "has anything been heard of Claude Duval, who escaped from Newgate, they say, last night?"

"He did escape, sir, and in the most audacious manner; and I can inform you that he is not captured yet, nor is there any likelihood that he will be either."

"Well, I don't see much good in Newgate if it can't hold a highwayman when it once gets him. Much obliged, sir, for your kindness; and so, good-night again."

The four gentlemen rode off along the road in the direction that the Skeleton Horseman had taken, and Claude Duval, with his two friends, jogged on in the opposite direction.

"You ought to be a magistrate, Claude," laughed Dick Turpin, "for, I must say, your tone and manner are quite magisterial."

"I hope not," said Claude. "But can either of you give a guess as to

who this can be who is upon the road, in what we may call an opposition to us?"

"Not the least," said Dick.

"It's one of the new hands," said Jack, "I take it; don't you think so, Claude?"

"Probable enough. I cannot call to mind any one who would or who could successfully play such a part as this fellow assumes. It is a curious as well as a bold assumption, the character of death."

"It is; and I should like nothing better than to come across him," said Dick. "We may have that luck some of these days. It would be a good job if he were to stop us, would it not?"

"It would, indeed"

They now trotted on till they emerged at Tyburn Gate. They all three looked askance at the spot which had been the last look that many of their profession had taken of this world, and they did not exchange a word till they got to Shepherd's Bush, and turned down Wood Lane, which, at that time, led to Wormholt Scrubs, and may still, for all we know to the contrary.

It was just as they emerged from the lane on to the regular road that leads right across the Scrubs, that they saw, about half a mile off, a great flashing of lights, and by their movement, and the slight noise that came upon their ears, they felt certain a carriage was rapidly approaching them across the Scrubs.

"Who can that be, so well attended?" said Dick.

"Let's ride on and see," said Claude. "I don't know how you feel, my good friends, but I am rife and ready for any adventure."

CHAPTER CCCXIX.

THE PRINCESS SOPHIA THREATENS CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS.

NEITHER Dick Turpin nor Jack felt that craving for occupation that now beset Claude Duval; but still they were far from being disinclined to follow him.

As regarded Duval, he knew that it was only by filling his mind with more cares and more perils that he could at all hope to banish from it the fearful remembrance of his loss; and therefore was it that, totally heedless of the consequences, he struck across the Scrubs in the direction of the advancing carriage.

Before he had gone far, though, reason came to the aid of Claude, and he began to feel how selfish and unfeeling a thing it was to drag his friends into enterprises that partly they might have declined, just because he fell in a despairing and a desperate frame of mind.

With this idea he drew up.

"Jack and Dick," he said, "pray pardon me."

"For what?"

"I assumed that you are both of you as sick of life as I am, and so off I came to meet the carriage, which seems to be well attended by mounted men. It by no means follows that, because I feel disposed to run myself into great danger, that both of you should feel so, likewise. My griefs make me selfish, but my reason has come to me in time; and so I beg of you both to use your own discretion and feeling in this matter, without consulting me at all."

"Don't speak in that way, Claude," said Jack. "Where you go we are willing to follow."

"But I have no pretensions to lead you"

"You have, if we like to admit them," said Dick Turpin; "but the fact is, there is no question of either leading or following. You feel disposed, Claude Duval, to stop that carriage, and I feel disposed to help you, and Jack feels dis-

posed to help us both; so don't let us say another word about it, but come on to the enterprise at once."

"That's it," said Jack.

"On, then—on!"

"With me," said Jack. "if I might be so bold as to have my way in this matter, it would be anything but on."

"What would you do, Jack?"

"Wait for the carriage just at the corner of the lane, and then pounce upon it at once before it had fairly got into the lane. By that means, as the lane is narrow, one half of the escort will be in the way of the other half; whereas, upon the open Scrubs, if they have any judgment, they would, upon our making the attack, spread themselves around us, and in such a case I wouldn't give much for our chance."

"Jack is right," said Dick.

"He is," said Claude. "My judgment must have forsaken me when I left the secure corner of the lane to come out here into the open country. We will go back at once."

They all three turned, and galloped back to the lane. At the speed they made, it did not take them above three or four minutes to get there; for they had not got far upon the heath when Claude had pulled up to speak to his friends.

The carriage seemed to be coming on now at rather a slower pace than before, or they fancied it, because they were themselves no longer advancing towards it, and they could see that it was surrounded by some half-dozen mounted footmen, who carried links in their hands.

"Somebody of distinction," said Dick.

Jack was gazing earnestly in the direction of the carriage, and then he said, suddenly—

"Why, it's the royal livery!"

"Indeed?" said Dick.

"Surely not the king?" said Claude.

"Oh, no—no. There are no guards."

"But it is one of the royal family, I suppose?"

"Of that there can be no doubt," added Jack, "and it remains now to be decided what you both mean to do."

"Just what we would if it were any one else," said Dick.

"To be sure," said Claude.

"Well, but," interposed Jack, "to stop one of them will so exasperate the government against us, that it may do us more harm than good."

"Never you mind about the exasperation of the government," said Dick, "my dear fellow. We have nothing to hope or expect from the government but a rope when they can put it round our necks. The intense interest and excitement about our capture is so great, that if we were to stop the king himself, and rob him of his very coat, they could not do more than they are doing now."

"That is true," said Claude.

"They might increase the rewards very much," said Jack.

"And if they did," added Dick, "what then? The rewards for us, now, come to somewhere about a thousand pounds we will say. Do you think, Jack, my boy, that that sum is not quite enough to make the officers do their utmost to catch us?"

"Well, perhaps it is."

"And if it is, as we all know well that it is, I would ask you what more can people do than their utmost?"

"True—true."

"And, besides, my own opinion is, that the greater the reward offered for us the safer we are."

"The deuce we are!" said Jack.

"Yes, for this reason. The cupidity of the officers is so strongly awakened

upon the subject that they get quite mad with jealousy at each other about it, and those who can't catch us throw every obstacle in the way of the others who have a little chance. Do you think that the officers are so fond of each other that they will put such a sum as a thousand pounds in each other's way?"

"No—no," said Jack.

Claude smiled.

"Are you converted, Jack," he said, "to the opinion that the higher the reward offered for us, the safer we are?"

"Upon my word, I don't know, but Dick Turpin puts it so clearly, that it sounds like the fact, whether it is or no, and I suppose there is something in it."

"A great deal," said Dick. "But the coach will be here in a few minutes, and so now we can have a good look at it."

The carriage that was rapidly advancing towards Wood-lane, with the evident intention of passing down it, and so emerging into the high-road, was a great lumbering vehicle, such as was considered highly fashionable and exquisite at that period.

It was quite large enough to hold eight people comfortably, and it was drawn by four long-tailed, heavy-looking Flemish horses, such as would not have disgraced a brewer's dray.

Upon the seat in front sat a great red-faced man, in a full wig, and three-cornered hat, and an immense scarlet coat. Two footmen in similar livery held on behind, and six mounted men with links trotted along, three on each side of the carriage.

These six men were in the royal livery; but they were by far too fat and bloated, with idleness and high living, to make any effectual resistance to an attack, although they were armed to the teeth.

Who were in the royal carriage could not, to Claude Duval and his friends, be even a matter of conjecture; for to conjecture at all about anything you must have some data to go upon, however insufficient, and in this case they had none at all.

It may be supposed, that with such cattle, and such a great, swaggering, lumbering load at their backs, the speed of the royal cortege was but slow; and such, indeed, was the fact, while every now and then, as the wheels encountered a rut or a hillock on the road, the vehicle swung about at such a rate, that it more clearly resembled a ship in a gale of wind than a carriage.

The route across Wormholt, or Wormwood Scrubs, as the tract of barren land bearing that name was differently called, was not very often used by people who had anything to lose, particularly at night; but it was a near way to and from a lodge that the royal family used, a mile or two out of town, so that it was well known that at times some members of that illustrious, by courtesy, race of German auxiliaries to the taxation of the country sometimes used the route.

But now, having given this brief description of the carriage and of the road that it was on, we return to the highwaymen, who were waiting its appearance upon the spot they had chosen for the encounter.

It will be observed that the three highwaymen had no less a number than nine men to encounter, including the coachman, and not including any one who might be in the carriage, and who might or might not be inclined to show fight upon the occasion.

This was rather long odds.

"I say, Jack," cried Turpin, "the four horses will give us the most trouble, if they begin kicking, so that let it be your task to release the two leaders, if you can."

"I will do it," said Jack. "A touch of a knife to the harness will soon set them at liberty."

"Good; and now what are we to do first, Claude?"

"I will call upon them to stop, and if they fire at us, we must fire at them;

but I should say fire over their heads first, and if that don't make the fat lackeys fly, I know nothing of such folks."

"Very well—we will try it."

It so happened, that the bit of road exactly at the head of them, emerging into the open heath, was very soft and miry, so that upon reaching that part, the horses had rather a struggle to get the carriage on at all, and its rate of progress was very much decreased.

That was a very favourable circumstance for the attacking party.

As Jack had anticipated, the lane was much too narrow for the carriage and horsemen on each side of it to proceed in, as they had done on the Scrubs. That is to say, it was possible enough, if they had all been able to keep on a straight line, that they might have got along, but in the dark, and with four horses harnessed to the vehicle, and such a vehicle, too, no mortal coachman could have undertaken to say that he would keep the whole affair exactly in the middle of the lane.

The slightest deviation to the right would have pushed the horsemen into a ditch that was there, and the slightest deviation to the left would have jammed them up against a high bank.

It was not likely that the royal escort was going to place itself, for the whol length of Wood-lane, upon the horns of such a dilemma as that, so two o them went on before, and the other four kept behind, and on went the cortege

Claude waited till the horses and the carriage had fairly got into the lane, and so blocked out the four horsemen who were behind it, and then he sprung forward to the two who were in advance, and cried, in a loud voice—

"Hold!"

The horsemen pulled up, and the coachman tugged at the reins till he brought all the four carriage-horses to a stand.

"The slightest opposition," said Claude, "will involve the destruction, within the next five minutes, of every one of you."

A scream from the carriage immediately succeeded this announcement, and the coachman began lashing his horses. The two men in advance hastily fired their carbines, with which they were provided, at Claude, and then set off at full gallop, with a pistol-shot after them, that Claude discharged. Jack sprung upon the two leading horses of the carriage, and by a stroke or two of his knife released them from their harness, and off they went, lumbering along the lane, terrified at the banging of a cross bar against their haunches.

"Hilloa! What is it—what is it?" shouted the men who were behind the carriage.

"Murder!" bellowed the two footmen, and one of them scrambled on to the roof in his fright. The coachman sat with the reins in his hands, and his great red face turning of a purple hue.

"Fire at those fellows behind the coach," cried Claude; and Jack and Dick at once discharged their pistols, which had the effect of so terrifying the four mounted men that they turned round, and galloped across the Scrubs again as nard as they could go.

"Victory," said Claude, as he sprang from his horse, the bridle of which Jack took. "They are all gone now, and we will see who is in the carriage."

"Be careful, Claude," said Jack.

"Oh, yes—yes. It's all right."

Cluade Duval advanced to the door of the carriage, and at once opened it. He lifted his hat, and bowed, for there was no one there but a young woman, who, although fat, and coarse, and vulgar in her appearance, he had no doubt, from her features, and the richness of her dress, was one of the daughters of the king.

In fact, this was no other than the Princess Sophia, who was then in her nineteenth year.

"How dare you?" she cried, speaking with a lisp, as if her tongue were too large for her mouth. "How dare you, you wretch?"

"Madam," said Claude, "I have the honour to ask you who you are?"

"Help—help!" she cried.

"I really am not aware that anybody is meddling with you," said Claude. "Pray what is the matter with you?"

"I will have you hanged."

"Hark you, madam. I am a man of few words, and now I will trouble you for that watch you have just hidden under the cushion of the seat, and for that gold chain which is round your neck—for those rings that are upon your fingers, and which, I assure you, they don't become at all—and those diamond ear-rings, which make you look like some fat savage."

The reply to this, was a rather heavy vinaigrette being flung at Claude's head, and which narrowly missed him.

"Now let me beg of you," added Duval, "not to give way to your odious temper in this manner. If you are not quick in handing to me the articles I require, together with your purse, I shall be under the necessity of taking them."

"Wretch, do you know who I am?"

"No—but I can guess."

"Who, then, monster, am I?"

"Some kitchen wench, in the disguise of a princess, I suppose."

The rage of Her Royal Highness at this was so great, that she took the watch from under the seat of the coach, and flung it at Claude, and so she continued with the other articles he required, pelting him with them, one by one, to his great amusement; but the rings would not come off her fat, swollen fingers, and the ear-rings she did not attempt to remove from her ears.

Among other things, though, she had thrown him a well-filled purse, and a pocket-book; so that Duval was inclined to forego the rings and the ear-rings.

He was mightily amused, too, at the manner in which she had taken the attack upon her property.

CHAPTER CCCXX.

THE HIGHWAYMEN ARE IN GREAT DANGER; BUT SAVE THEMSELVES BY BOLDNESS.

Jack and Dick hearing the racket of the things being flung at Claude Duval, could not, for the life of them, make out what was being done, and Jack called out, at last—

"Claude, what is amiss?"

"Oh, nothing," said Claude. "Her Royal Highness is quite delighted to have fallen into such good company."

"No—I am not!" screamed the princess.

"But I say you are."

"But I am not!"

"Oh, then, if you are not, I shall make you come out of the coach at once, and kiss all my comrades, amounting to twenty-six men. Some of them have not been shaved for a week; but that don't matter."

"Oh, will nobody come and save me from this wretch? I will take care that all the police go after you to-morrow, and you will be hanged; for my father says that everybody ought to be hanged who takes anything that don't belong to them."

"Your father is a king," said Claude Duval; "but that does not prevent him from being an idiot, with strong passions and little mind, and so, as a natural result, vindictive and blood-thirsty."

"Take that!"



MAGGS AND DICK RESCUING CLAUDE FROM HIS CELL IN NEWGATE.

The only thing the princess had left to throw at Claude, was one of the cushions of the coach, and that she flung at him with such a vengeance, that it went right over the hedge.

Duval laughed.

"I assure you," he said, "that I have not been so amused for a very long time. Can you dance?"

"What is that to you, wretch?"

"Not a great deal. But as I feel disposed for a minuet, and as my friend, Sixteen-string Jack, can whistle the tune to perfection, I will trouble you, as I know you are disengaged, to favour me with your hand for a measure."

"I will die first!"

"Oh, no—you will not. I will take care that not only shall you not die, but that no harm comes to you. You are too amusing for that, by a great deal. Now, miss, pray alight, if you please."

"I won't!"

"Very good. Then I must help you to do so."

"Murder—murder! You shan't! Murder!"

Although Claude Duval handed the princess out of the coach in the gentlest manner in the world, she made such a racket, that Dick came up, and said—

"Hilloa, Claude! Can't you let the girl alone?"

"Take that," said the princess, dealing Dick such a box on the ears that his eyes flashed fire again.

"Thank you humbly," said Dick. "It serves me right for interfering. I might have expected it."

"Jack," called out Claude, "come and whistle us a minuet tune, old fellow, will you?"

"Allow me," said Dick; and in an excellent manner he commenced the tune, and Claude Duval, with much grace, began the dance. He took good care that he would not let go the hand of the princess, or, no doubt, she would have ran off; but he made her go through the figure of the dance, whether she would or not. To be sure, every now and then she gave him a cuff on the side of his head, or a blow over the shoulder; but he did not care a straw for such little pains, and, finally, he bestowed upon her lips a hearty kiss, as he said, in a laughing tone—

"You will not say that Claude Duval either lost his temper, or said or did a rude thing to-night, so far as you are concerned."

"Oh, then, you are Claude Duval, the highwayman, that is so much talked about?" said the princess, in a milder tone.

"I am."

"Did you stop the Duchess of Kingstown in the Edgeware-road, once?"

"I did."

"Well, then, I can tell you that she went out on purpose to be stopped by you; and she said you were the handsomest man, and the politest, she had seen for a long time,"

"I am very much beholden to the duchess," said Claude Duval, "and if I could only induce you to think the same I should be perfectly content."

"Oh, go along."

Claude laughed, and as he handed the princess into the carriage he kissed her again, which she seemed as if she had not noticed, for she did not make the slightest opposition or the least remark about it.

"Now," said Claude, "if there be anything among the articles you desire to have returned that you set any particular store by, only say so and it shall be at once returned to you."

"No, there is nothing."

"Then I have the honour of bidding you good evening, and of hoping that this little meeting has been productive, after all, of more amusement than alarm."

"I am not alarmed now, and—and I shall not say anything about it, so you will not be hanged."

"I am infinitely obliged."

Claude kissed her again, and then she added, in a low tone—

"You had better write to me if you get into prison, and they are going to hang you. I will do what I can to save you. You might be rude and you are not, which I feel grateful for."

Claude bowed, and closed the carriage-door. Then calling to the coachman, he said—

"You can go on now, the princess is ready."

"Eh? The Lord deliver us!" cried the coachman.

"Go on, I say."

"Our Father which art in——"

Claude fired a pistol just past the ear of the coachman, and that so startled him that he set his pair of horses that were still in the carriage to a trot, and then to a gollop, and the royal carriage was soon completely out of sight of Claude Duval and his two friends.

It was then that Claude burst into a prolonged fit of laughter, and when he could speak at all, he said—

"They are all alike—all alike—princesses or dairy maids—they are all alike!"

"What do you mean, Claude?" said Dick.

"Why, just this, that a little flattery—a kiss or two—a good figure, and a not so bad face, will do anything with any woman. The princess began with rage, and ended by almost devotion."

"You must not fancy that all are alike, though, Claude," said Jack "This female whom you just let go is probably rather more of an animal in her thoughts and feelings than many."

"Well, it may be so."

After all, what Claude Duval had gained by this adventure was very insignificant, considering the time that it had taken up; but it had had, at all events, the effect of withdrawing his thoughts from more painful subjects of contemplation, and that was much.

They all three went down the lane, now, back to the high road, and shaped their course towards Ealing.

Claude spoke hastily as though some painful thoughts had come across him that he was desirous of driving away, and he said, addressing his two companions—

"Let us make one of our old compacts, that is to say, let us agree to stop and rob the next six passengers, or vehicles, or horsemen, be they which they may, that pass along this road. Will you do so?"

"Willingly," said Dick.

"And you, Jack?"

"I'm agreeable," said Jack, "and after that I should advise that we go to the Old Hats Inn and put up for a little time."

"Agreed."

This was an old kind of agreement which the three had frequently made together, and which had at times been productive of a good deal of amusement if it had failed in the production of all its pecuniary results which they had looked to and hoped to derive from it.

"When they agreed, though, to this sort of thing, they did not exactly anticipate that the first object on the road that they, in accordance with that agreement, were bound to stop would be a mail-coach full of passengers, and well guarded by a man with a blunderbuss on the roof.

Such, however, was the fact.

Jack first heard the low reverberation of the wheels, and the steady tramp of the four horses, and turning to Claude and Dick, he said—

"I don't mean to say that we shall do so, but it is just possible that we may catch a tartar here, don't you think? It's a mail-coach."

"Never mind," said Dick, "they will pull up, and then it's all plain sailing enough. If they wanted to avoid such as we are, they ought to drive slap on at as good a pace as possible, and then we should find it no joke to stop them."

"They always do stop, though."

"Yes, the surprise of the moment makes them do so, and then they feel how hazardous it would be to go on again with a pistol bullet or two about their ears."

The mail-coach now came on at great speed, dashing along the road, and its

lights flashing amid the trees and hedges, while the scarlet coat of the guard was plainly visible.

"Shall we, or shall we not?" said Jack.

"Yes," said Claude.

"Yes," said Dick.

Jack said no more, but prepared himself for action. A few moments sufficed for them to arrange what they should do. To Jack it fell to keep at the horses' heads, and hold the coachman in check—to Dick the task was assigned of holding the passengers generally, and the guard, in a kind of surveillance, while Claude Duval was to request the ladies and gentlemen who were inside the vehicle to give up their property of portable value.

The pace of the coach was rather great, so Claude Duval adopted a course to stop it, and called out, just as it was about to pass them at a swinging pace—

"A passenger! Hilloa! a passenger!"

"Ay, sir, yes!" shouted the coachman. "Wo-a! That's it."

The mail was stopped.

On the moment, then, Jack and Dick dashed forward, and the former, holding a pistol to the head of the coachman, cried out—

"Stir hand or foot, and you are a dead man."

"D——n!" cried the guard.

"Hilloa, you fellow with the blunderbuss there, you had better try to eat it than present it at us. We won't be trifled with!"

"Fire away!" said the guard, as he seized his blunderbuss. "I'm not going to be frightened, at all events, out of doing my duty. Fire away, if you mean to do it."

"No," said Dick, "I don't want bloodshed, if it can be avoided."

"I ain't so particular," said the guard, as he drew the trigger of the blunderbuss, and discharged the whole contents right at Dick Turpin.

"That's enough to blow him to atoms, horse and all," said one of the outside passengers.

"Rather," said the guard.

The report was terrific of the blunderbuss, and it created a complete cloud of smoke; but to the surprise of everybody when the smoke cleared away, there was Dick Turpin in exactly the same position he had before occupied, and he said in a calm tone of voice—

"If I were an angry man now, I should shoot you; but as you are a bold fellow I won't. Only don't be coming a second dose of that infernal machine this way, as it might hurt some one by accident."

"The devil!" said the guard.

"Well, I expected that," said a woman who sat on the top of the coach, "for you were paying so much attention to the young lass by me, when you loaded your blunderbuss, that you quite forgot you put nothing but powder in it."

"How do you know my good woman," said a passenger, "that he put nothing but powder in it? For a lady, you seem to be a wonderful judge of fire-arms."

"I am a soldier's wife," she replied.

"Oh," said the guard, "then that accounts for your knowing all about it. But I only wish you had told me, ma'am, at the time."

"You were otherwise employed."

"Oh, well, perhaps I was; but yet I would have blown that fellow, horse and all to the devil."

By the time this little confabulation had got to the point to which we have brought it, Claude Duval had reached the side of the coach, and placing the barrel of a pistol upon the ledge of the window, he said—

"Ladies and gentlemen, you need not be at all alarmed, as I shall not blow any one's brains out, unless they are provokingly slow in handing me their property."

A general scream from three ladies inside the coach followed this not over-

pleasant command from Claude Duval. There were a few half-suppressed oaths from a gentleman, after which a voice said—

"Who are you?"

"Can you ask, sir?" said Claude. "Really, if you had only half a grain of sense, you might know who I was by my mode of address to you."

"Don't aggravate him," said an old lady.

"Oh, ma," said a young one, "I do think I shall faint right away."

"Let me beg you will not," said Claude, in a soft, low voice. "If you feel, however, a little faint, pray come out into the open air. It will revive you."

"Certainly not," said the old lady. "I don't want my daughter to get out of the coach because a highwayman asks her to do so."

"Money—watches—rings—pocket-books, and brooches!" said Claude Duval, as he rapped the barrel of the pistol against the ledge of the window.

"Oh, don't—don't," said the young lady. "I will not put up with this."

"What is the matter?" said Claude.

"He is trying to hide himself among our feet," she replied.

CHAPTER CCCXXI.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS MEET WITH AN ADVENTURE AT A FUNERAL.

"MURDER!" said a voice; "do you want to sacrifice my life? Oh, have mercy upon me!"

"Who is *he?*" said Claude.

"A young gentleman, Mr. Highwayman, if you please," said a lady's voice. "He has annoyed all the lady passengers of this coach, and now he is actually trying to hide from you under their—Hem!—I mean, about their feet."

"I'll have him out," said Claude.

Opening the coach door, Claude put his hand in, saying—

"Let me only get hold of him. Oh, this is his leg, I do think. Come, sir—come out, if you please."

"Help!—Fire!—Murder!" screamed a voice, as Claude dragged a rather diminutive specimen of humanity by the leg right out into the road.

"Pho!—pho!—pho! sir," said Duval. "I don't see what you need make such an uproar about. I am only showing you to an outside place, that is all."

"Oh—oh! Fire—fire!"

"Be quiet, sir. Who are you?"

"Margetts is my humble name, sir, I assure you. I am a professional man, too."

"What profession?" said Claude.

"He is a lawyer's clerk, Mr. H.," said another lady from the coach.

"Oh, is he? But what makes you call me Mr. H., ma lam?"

"I thought that more polite, sir, than calling you Mr. Highwayman."

Claude could not help laughing at this odd way of showing him respect and politeness; and then turning to the lawyer's clerk, he said—

"Now, sir, I shall trouble you to remain exactly where you are till I come back to you."

"Yes—oh, dear, yes!"

That learned individual was lying on his back in the road; and there, with a wholesome dread of what the vengeance of Duval might be inclined to inflict upon him if he stirred, he remained gazing upwards at the night sky, and fully expecting that the dreadful adventure would be sure to terminate in his melancholy decease.

Claude was at the coach door again in a moment; and then he found that the passengers were prepared to hand to him their valuables.

Duval never instituted any very scrutinising search to find whether they gave him all or not. He was satisfied that he got something worth his while; so he just took what was handed to him.

The young lady was crying, and Claude heard her.

"What is the matter, my dear?" he said. "Don't be frightened, I beg of you. There is no danger."

"It's my little watch, sir," she said. "My pa, who is now no more, gave it to me. I don't like to part with it."

"Keep it, by all means."

"But you have got it."

"Have I? Why didn't you keep it? Stop, though; if I have it, I will soon find it."

Claude hastily dived his hand in his pocket to look for the young lady's watch; and at the moment that he did so, he heard Dick Turpin call out—

"Warehawk!"

"Ah, what is amiss?" said Claude.

Turpin was by his side in a moment.

"Duval," he whispered, "there is a troop of light cavalry coming down the road. I heard the tramp of the horses' feet, and rode on a little, and met a man who told me that the Princess Sophia had been robbed, and they were sent from Bayswater barracks to apprehend three highwaymen who were upon the road, and of whom he begged me to be aware. I thanked him, and came back no quicker than I could to tell you."

"Does Jack know?"

"Yes, I have warned him."

"We must be off at once, then. But wait only a moment. I am looking for something."

"Look afterwards, Claude."

"No—no. Only a moment."

"All's right, Duval. We won't go without you, you may depend; but, still, for your own sake as well as for ours, let me tell you that there is no time to lose."

"I know it. Ah, here it is."

"What is it?"

"A little watch. My dear, here is your watch. I have great pleasure in returning it to you."

"Oh, thank you—thank you, sir. Will you take this little brooch as a gift from me for your kindness?"

"Certainly I will, and wear it, too."

"And take that as a gift from me," said the guard of the coach, as he snapped his blunderbuss again at Claude; but this time it didn't go off at all.

"D—n it," he said. "What is the matter with this confounded wretch of a blunderbuss?"

"Ah," said the soldier's wife, "you are a nice boy for a row, you are. I watched you well, and this time you put in no priming, though you did the loading part of the affair right enough."

"I'm an ass," said the guard.

"That's true," said the soldier's wife.

"What is all that about?" said Turpin. "I thought I heard the click of a gun-lock."

"It's nothing, sir," said the guard. "I was only looking at my blunderbuss, that's all, and feeling quite happy that when I fired it at you there was nothing but powder in it."

"You may congratulate yourself upon that fact," said Dick. "Are you ready now, Claude?"

"Quite."

"Off, then. Jack—Jack!"

"Here you are," cried Jack, as he rode up to them.

"Away!—away! We don't want a bout with the soldiers, if we can help it."

"By Jove, I hear them," said Claude.

They all three set off at full gallop, and as they had certainly the start of the troop of light cavalry that had been despatched with such expedition to lay hold of them, they did not at all despair of distancing them.

A very few minutes, indeed, brought Claude and his friends to Hanwell, through which village they dashed at speed, and then Jack called out—

"Listen, Claude. Your ears are younger than mine. Do you hear anything of these fellows?"

"No, Jack."

"Let's stop a moment," said Dick Turpin. "It is as well to know what we are about; and, for all we know, they may not be upon our track at all."

Upon this, they all three drew up, and for the space of about a minute, any one who could have seen them might have supposed them to be three statues of men on horseback, so perfectly still were both horses and riders during that space of time.

"Nothing," said Claude.

"Hark!" said Dick. "Don't say that."

"Ah, no—I don't say it now. I hear the clank of military accoutrements. Something is amiss."

"They are upon this road; but coming on with great caution. It seems to me that they have divided their force, and, in all probability, they are now in twos and threes, scouring the country all about this place."

"That is it. On—on!"

"Let us leave the high-road," said Jack. "About half-a-mile further on there is a little turning that leads on to the banks of the Brent river. We can jump it at that part, if it is not swollen by rains, and if it be, there will be no difficulty in swimming the horses across it. When we are on the other side we can get across the fields to some other road, and so baffle our pursuers."

"Granted. That we can," said Dick, "provided we cross the Brent, which is not so easy sometimes as it looks. But come on, we can but try."

They now trotted on, but by no means put their cattle to their utmost speed, for they wanted to reserve their power as much as possible; and as it was evident to them the soldiery were not attempting a vigorous pursuit, but were rather attempting to enclose them in a circle of scouts, they did not see any necessity for distressing themselves by hard galloping.

They soon reached the spot which Jack had mentioned as being pretty close to the bank of the Brent; but the sight of the little muddy river showed that it was much more swollen than they had thought it was likely to be.

Their experienced eyes told them in a moment that to attempt to jump it would be madness.

"It cannot be done with a leap," said Turpin. "The effect of such an attempt would only be to come with such force into the water a few feet from the opposite bank that, in all probability, the horse would stick in the mud, and not be able to extricate himself."

"Shall we try it a little higher up?" said Jack.

"If you like."

They pursued the bank of the little stream now for some distance; but just as they were about to make up their minds that if they were to cross it at all it must be by swimming the horses over, they heard the sudden clank of the military accoutrements very close at hand indeed, and a loud voice called out—

"Halt!"

"By Jove, they have stolen a march upon us," said Jack.

"Fire!" said the voice again.

They all three immediately stooped in their saddles till their heads were level with their horses' manes, and a rattling discharge of three or four carbines immediately ensued.

"All's right," cried Claude. "Nobody hit?"

"All's right," cheerfully answered Dick and Jack; and then Claude dashed at once into the water.

The others followed him at the moment, and they all three swam over the Brent, and landed on the other side just as the soldiers, who were three in number, and under the command of a corporal, reached the bank which they had left.

"Fire!" said the corporal again.

"It's our turn next," said Claude.

Simultaneously with the ringing discharge of the soldiers' carbines, Claude and his friends each fired a holster-pistol at their foes; and then, without waiting to see if they had done any damage or no, but quite satisfied with the fact that they were unhurt, they turned, and sped across the fields at a great pace, leaping a ditch and a couple of hedges that they came to in good style.

At the pace they were going at, it was not possible to hold anything like an animated conversation, and they each thought that they had nothing to do but to keep on at such speed and they would soon distance the soldiers, if, indeed, they were upon their track at all.

The best seeming calculation concerning the affairs of man is, however, at the mercy of some little cross accident, which may scatter all the results to the winds; and now it so happened that Claude Duval and his friends were the prey of one of those little accidental circumstances which alter the whole condition of affairs, and necessitate a totally contrary course of action to that which they thought of pursuing.

Jack's horse stepped into a hole in the ground and fell, throwing him partly over its shoulder, and then rolling on to him. The horse struggled to its feet again, and stood still, trembling; but Jack lay apparently dead, or insensible, upon the green turf.

Claude, who was a little in advance of Dick, did not see the accident; but Turpin did, and he called out—

"Duval—Duval!"

"Yes?" said Claude, looking round, at the same time that he slackened his pace. "What is it?"

"Jack is gone!"

"Good God!"

The impression of Claude Duval at that moment was, that Jack was shot; but then he recollected that he had heard no more firing; so he at once guessed the true state of affairs to be that his horse had fallen.

"It's the horse has done it," he said.

"Yes—yes. Poor Jack!"

Claude was soon at the spot, and hastily dismounting, and holding the bridle of his horse on his arm, he said—

"Jack—Jack! speak to me: are you hurt?"

"Where am I now?" said Jack, faintly.

"He is not killed, at all events," said Dick. "We must get him into the saddle again."

"Surely, yes," said Claude. "Hold my horse, Dick, while I do the best I can for him.

Dick Turpin held the horse, and Claude Duval lifted Jack from the ground.

"Come, Jack," he said, "how do you feel now?"

"What is it?" said Jack.

It was quite evident from the fall that his faculties were rather in a state of confusion.



THE FOUR FRIENDS WATCHING THEIR PURSUERS FROM THE HILL.

"Why, don't you recollect, Jack? We are running off from the soldiers. Rouse yourself up, if you can."

"Ah!" said Jack.

With this exclamation, he fell across Claude's arm like a dead weight, and it was evident that he had fainted. Claude was rather in a state of consternation to know what to be at.

CHAPTER CCCXXII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE RUINED MILL IN THE HAUNTED MEADOW.

"Put him on the horse," cried Dick. "You may depend he will be able to ride, and his brains will soon get clear again."

"But he has fainted," cried Claude.

"You don't mean that?"

"Indeed, but I do, though; and it strikes me that we are in a pretty considerable mess, now, Dick."

"We are, indeed. What the deuce is to be done?"

"Anything but desert Jack."

"Certainly. That I never thought of for a moment, I assure you; but it is none the less an awkward accident on that account."

"True—true, Dick. We must get to some place of shelter, and there wait till Jack has recovered. I hope that he is only shaken a little by the fall; but I fear that he is worse hurt than that. Do you know where we are?"

"Not very well. The fact is, Claude, this is not a part of the country that I have been much in, and the fields puzzle me, rather, and it is dark, too."

"Well, then, Dick, all we can do is to go right on. I will ask shelter and help for him at the first farm-house we come to."

"We can do nothing better, I suppose."

It was not a very easy matter to find a mode of carrying Jack, but at last they hit upon one which the docility of the horses only enabled them to carry out.

They placed Jack, insensible as he was, upon the saddle of his own horse, and then they rode one on each side of him and held him up, so that they went all three abreast, and at rather a slow pace, over the large meadow in which they were.

Both Claude and Dick listened with painful interest for any sound that might be indicative of the proximity of their pursuers, but there was none, and certainly, under the circumstances in which they were placed, that was an immense relief.

"If those fellows with their carbines were only at our backs now," said Dick, "they would not find it very difficult to make an end of our career."

"Indeed they would not, Dick. I fancy that just now we are about as helpless as we can very well be."

"We are, indeed."

Probably it was the jolting of the horse and the current of cold air that came across his face which had the effect of partially reviving Jack from the state of stupor into which he had fallen, but he suddenly heaved a deep sigh.

"Ah, Jack," said Claude, "you are coming round again. How are you, now, old friend?"

"Swim the stream," muttered Jack. "There—there—fly—fire!"

"What do you say?"

"Now—now, off again!"

"He is raving," said Dick.

"You may depend, then, the fall has given him a top on the head," said Claude, "for he has not spoken anything very rational since it took place. I'm afraid he is more hurt than is imagined."

Jack did not speak again for some few minutes, and then he said, in a faint voice—

"Claude, where are we now?"

There was something in the tone of his voice, now, which led Duval to think that his senses had really come back to him, and he replied—

"Why, Jack, we are in the fields. Do you recollect what happened to you awhile ago?"

"Oh, yes, I do now. The horse fell."

"All's right; you will do now, Jack. Well, are you hurt much? Can you feel any particular pain?"

"No—no, I—I am only shaken, I think. But I hardly know yet. Where are the soldiers?"

"Far enough off, I hope, by this time. Do you think you could ride without help, Jack, now?"

Even as he spoke to him, Claude felt that Jack swayed heavily against his arm, and as he did not reply it was pretty clear that he had lapsed again into insensibility, which was indeed the case.

"Poor fellow," said Claude, "it's of no use to plague him. He has gone off again."

"He must be seriously injured," said Dick. "But just look ahead, Claude, and tell me what you make of that black-looking object against the sky?"

"It's some building, I suppose."

"Yes, but it is in an odd place rather, in the middle of the field. Surely it can't be a homestead; and yet I don't know what else it ought to be."

"It's too high, and looks more like a tower than a house," said Claude. "It puzzles me, and that's a fact."

"Let us get towards it. We can go as cautiously as we like. I never saw so odd a building in the meadows before."

They now kept the dark-looking object well in view, and went rather carefully in the direction of it. After a little, Claude said, rapidly—

"Why, it's a mill!"

"A mill?" said Dick.

"Yes, to be sure. Look closely at it and you will see that it is. It is some old windmill, without a doubt."

"It is," said Dick. "The idea, now, that so familiar an object as that should not be at once recognised. Of course, it is a dilapidated mill. It is without arms, and that was what made it fail to suggest the idea to us."

"No doubt; but it's a pity Jack is not so far recovered that he might give us some information about it, for, without doubt, intimate as he is with all the suburbs of London, he would be able to tell us something concerning it."

"Call to him," said Dick. "Who knows but he may be able to speak to us again? and he is so used to your voice, that if he will reply at all it would be to such familiar tones."

"Jack! Jack!" said Claude. "Can you answer me, old friend?"

Jack made no reply.

"No, poor fellow, he can't."

"Very well, then let us get to the mill. It will afford us shelter, and him rest. What's that?"

A low muttering sound in the sky attracted their attention; and after continuing for a few moments, it broke into a thunder clap, and the very air seemed stilled and sultry.

"A storm is brewing," said Dick.

"Not a doubt of it. Ah!"

A flash of lightning so bewilderingly vivid at that moment lit up the scene, that Claude and Dick were glad to close their eyes, and the horses reared with fright, and began to plunge so, that it was with the greatest difficulty Dick and Claude together could hold up Jack in his saddle.

While that brilliant flash of light had lasted, though, they had had a capital view of the old mill and the surrounding country beneath its vivid powers.

Jack appeared now, by the lightning and the thunder, to be more thoroughly recovered than he had been, and cried out in a strange voice—

"The storm rages! the storm rages! Death will be the doom of all!"

"Peace, Jack, peace," said Claude, "there is no danger now. Be calm, I beg of you."

"Calm!" said Jack. "Oh, yes, I am very calm, indeed. I am so calm! When people are in the grave they must needs be calm, surely."

"He raves again," said Dick.

Another flash of lightning now lit up the scene. It was certainly not quite so vivid as had been the former one, but still it was of the same blue and forked character, and dazzled the eyes of the three highwaymen, although it did not have the effect of startling the horses quite so much as the former flash had done.

"Let us get to the mill," said Dick. "Better there than out here, exposed to the storm. Hark! That is indeed terribly like what we may call thunder."

"It is awful!" said Claude.

The clap of thunder that had, at the interval of about sixteen seconds only, followed the last flash of lightning, was truly grand. It commenced with a noise such as one might suppose would be made by the simultaneous discharge of a hundred pieces of heavy cannon, and the reverberations of the sound appeared really as though they would never cease.

By the time, however, that the last distant mutterings of the clap of thunder were dying away in the far-off horizon, the party had reached the old mill, and they now saw sufficient of it, even by the inefficient light that there was, to enable them to come to the conclusion that it was quite a ruin, and had been long since deserted, so far as any useful purpose was concerned.

"This is a miserable looking place," said Dick. "It looks as though such a storm as that which has just begun would scatter it to fragments."

"No doubt, Dick," said Claude, "it has weathered many such, though, and will weather many more. Hold Jack, while I dismount, if you please, Dick."

"I am better," said Jack, faintly.

"That's right. Can you sit without help?"

"I fear not."

Dick supported him, while Claude Duval dismounted, and then he helped him to the ground, but Jack was still too ill to stand without assistance, and Claude and Dick saw that any attempt to make him proceed at that time would be perfectly futile, and would most likely have the effect of forcing them in a short time to put up at some place much more inconvenient than the one they were now at.

After a brief consultation, they resolved upon entering the deserted mill; but they first of all looked out for some shelter for the horses, for a heavy drop or two of rain had fallen, and they fully expected that the storm would end in a fearful shower of hail or rain.

After some seeking, they found at a little distance from the old mill a shed, the roof of which was still in a tolerable state of preservation, and to that they led the three horses. After entering the hut, they found that there was a quantity of litter on the floor of it, consisting of straw, hay, dry leaves, and so on, so that it afforded every facility for keeping the horses comfortable for a short time, at all events.

The great object was to litter them in such a manner that if the storm should increase in violence so as to frighten them it might not have the effect of enabling them to escape; and this, with some trouble, Claude thought he had accomplished pretty well.

The result will show that in that expectation he was disappointed.

They had left Jack partially supported against the doorway of the old mill, but when they came back to him they found that he had sunk to the ground, and when they moved him he groaned heavily.

"Jack," said Claude, "I am quite convinced that you are hurt, and that it is something more than a shake that you have had from the fall off your horse."

"I fear so, too," he said.

"Are you in any pain?"

"Yes, great pain in my side. I fancy I have broke a rib or two."

"Not a doubt of it," said Dick, "and it is the pain that the broken ends of the bone give you when you are moved, Jack, that induces the faint feeling that has several times come over you."

"I don't think I have absolutely fainted," said Jack, "for when I felt quite incapable of speech or movement I still had a kind of idea of what was going on."

"There is no help for it, Jack," said Claude, "you must have rest."

"What place is this?"

"Why, it is an old, ruined, broken-down mill."

"A mill?"

"Yes, Jack."

"Is there a tall tree close to it, with a dead branch at the top of it?"

"There is a tall tree; but it is too dark to see the top of it, though the dead branch may be there for all we know to the contrary. Do you know this place, Jack?"

"I do. It is called the haunted meadow, and the old mill is supposed to be the resort of supernatural beings. No one will venture near it at night, and particularly during the prevalence of any storm; it is said to be haunted by the most horrible forms belonging to another world."

"Well," said Claude, laughing, "we have seen nothing in the shape of life, either of this world or another, except ourselves, yet, Jack."

"But you may."

Claude gave Dick a slight nudge with his elbow, as though he would have said—

"Do you hear how his old superstitious feelings cling to poor Jack?"

"Ah," said Dick. "But you don't mean to say, Jack, that you can believe in such stuff?"

"I don't know," said Jack.

Another flash of lightning now lit upon the old mill and the whole surrounding landscape with surpassing brilliancy, and this time the electric fluid appeared to spread itself out and to linger in the air, so that those who were by the entrance to the old mill could see quite clear for a short space of time the building and every object around it as plainly as if the sun of a summer's day had been shining.

"This is terrible," said Jack. "Why, there is a stream here. You did not tell me, Claude, that there was a stream here."

Duval was about to reply to him, but what he would have said was completely drowned in the clap of thunder that followed that vivid and beautiful lightning flash.

CHAPTER CCCXXIII.

THE SPECTRE FUNERAL TAKES PLACE IN THE OLD MILL.

Poor Jack was evidently very much put out of his way at the idea of being in the haunted mill during the continuance of a storm, and without waiting to hear what his friends would say, he spoke as soon as the reverberations of the thunder had sufficiently subsided so that his voice could be heard.

"Let us leave this place at once," he said; "oh, let us leave this place, I implore you both."

"We cannot, Jack."

"Why not? I am better—indeed, I am. Let me suffer what I may, I shall be content, so that I ride away from this place."

There was now a strange rushing noise in the air, and several very large hailstones fell upon the highwaymen.

"Here it comes," said Dick.

"Yes, and we shall catch the worst of the storm if we don't get some shelter," said Claude. "Come, Jack, let me help you to get under cover. I beg that you will make no objection, but that for our sakes, as well as for your own, you will avail yourself of the shelter of the mill,"

Jack said nothing. The appeal that Claude had made to him was one that he could not very well resist, notwithstanding his great and shuddering disinclination to enter a place that had so evil a reputation as that haunted mill.

It is no new thing to the reader, though, to find that poor Jack is infected by superstitious fears. The peculiar incidents of his career had given rise to the feeling, and he could not shake it off, do what he would.

It is a strange thing with regard to superstitious feelings such as those that beset poor Jack, that no experience will ever suffice to rid any one of them. It will be found that in no one instance has this fear been at all resisted by the result of any combination of circumstances; but still, when a new combination arises, the fears still remain.

Of course, if one proof in the shape of an absolute event could ever be brought forward, one would not wonder at the feeling of superstition gathering strength; but when that is impossible, it does seem strange that experience does not dissipate it.

Claude led Jack into the mill.

"How cold it is," said Duval.

"Yes," said Dick; "and the place smells as damp as the very grave. I fancy it has been a pretty considerable time since there was ever a fire in this building."

"Well, it shan't be much longer, then," said Claude, "for I will try if I can't light one somehow."

"No—no," said Jack. "Oh, don't!"

"But you will be as comfortable again, Jack."

"Oh, never mind me."

"But it is you that we do mind. You are hurt, and it's you and your comforts that we must attend to now; so don't say another word about it—a fire we will have. You have some phosphorus matches about you, Jack, now, have you not?"

"No. That is, I think not."

"Stuff; you mean yes. That is, you think you have."

"Perhaps I have."

"Jack—Jack, produce the matches."

Jack did so with a deep sigh, for he thought that the lighting a fire in the old mill argued the fact, that his two friends thought of making some stay in it, which he was most decidedly adverse to.

"Now, then," said Dick, "you collect what dry rubbish you can, Claude, and I will light a wax candle, and we will soon see what sort of a place we are in."

The bit of candle that Dick Turpin produced was soon lit, and after sheltering it from any adverse blast of wind with his hand for a few moments, until the flame had gathered strength, he held it up, and let its little rays illumine the old mill as well as possible.

They all three looked about them now with considerable curiosity, and even Jack appeared to forget some of his fears in the interest that the old place excited in him.

It was well worth the looking at, was the lower portion of that ancient structure.

The area of the inside of the mill was much larger than it appeared possible to be, looking at the building from the outside, and at one time it was evident that it had been fitted up with a much greater regard to personal comfort than such buildings usually were.

The walls were all panelled with oak, and the flooring was well laid down.

At one end there was a large fire-place, and some massive iron supports for billets of wood to be burnt upon.

The roof was one mass of heavy rafters, crossing and recrossing each other in all directions.

The place, too, was not wholly destitute of some rude articles of furniture, and, take it altogether, it certainly presented a very desirable refuge from such a storm as that which was raging without.

That the storm was raging, the three adventurers were put in mind by such a rattle of hail-stones, that it was impossible for some few minutes that they could have heard a word that either of them might have addressed to each other.

Such a fall of hail, however, could not possibly last very long, and it suddenly ceased as if by magic, and all was still.

"It is over now," said Jack, faintly.

Claude had placed Jack in a large, rough-looking, old-fashioned, wooden chair, by the side of the ample hearth, upon which hearth he had then a quantity of rubbish that he found about the floor of the old mill.

"Yes, Jack," he said, "it is over for the moment."

"It is over for good, Claude."

"Don't say that, Jack," replied Duval, who divined his motive, and knew that he wished at any sacrifice still to leave the place—"don't say that. It may begin again, and in my opinion it will, too."

Jack was about to say something in contradiction of this opinion, when, as if Claude Duval's words had been prophetic, down came the hail again with greater clamour and speed than before, and so much of it found its way down the old chimney, and bounced into the apartment, if it might be called such, in which they were, that Jack was silent, and Claude found that the task of lighting a fire was for the moment out of the question.

"This is hail, indeed," said Dick, as he took up a large mass of ice from the floor.

"It is," said Claude; "but the storm will, in reality, be over soon, I fancy, now. These hail-storms are generally brief enough, and the appearance of the hail is the end of the storm."

"Yes," said Jack, "and we can go then."

Claude made no answer to this; but taking the light from Dick, he placed it among the rubbish he had collected in the ample fire-place.

A dense-like smoke rose, and for a moment or two came out into the room, and half choked them.

"We shall be forced to go," said Jack.

The chimney in a few moments then began to do its duty, and the cold air being forced out of it, there was a strong and steady draught, and the smoke ascended at a great rate, and a bright flame rose from the mass of material upon the hearth.

"That will do," said Dick.

"Ah!" said Claude, "how cheerful a thing is a fire, after all! Now, Jack, only look about you, and own, old fellow, that we are infinitely better off here than in the murky meadows outside. The flame imparts quite an air of comfort even to the old place."

"But our pursuers," said Jack. "It would not be very comfortable to have them pop in all of a sudden."

"I agree with you there," said Dick; "and so, while you look after the fire, Claude, I will go out and take a good look about the place, as well as listen if I can hear any sound that may indicate the approach of the soldiers."

"They are off our track," said Claude; "so if they come here, it will be by accident only."

Dick went out; and then Claude said to Jack—

"Come, now, Jack, don't let Turpin think that you are the slave of every ridiculous superstition that you have ever heard of. For my credit's sake, as

well as for your own, let me beg of you to make an effort to shake off such foolish fears."

"I will, Claude."

"You will? Well, then, if you will, it is as good as done; for superstition loses its power over us as soon as we have the courage to dispute it. It is like all other miseries, Jack, only powerful in so far as we choose to submit to it."

"I feel," said Jack, "that it is foolish to give way to such fancies; but as regards this place, there is, I assure you, a very fearful story told."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Claude; and when Dick comes back, if he should report that all seems to be safe, I will let you know it."

"Do so, Jack; and here he comes. Well, Dick, how do you find affairs outside?"

"Up to your knees in wet and muck."

"And no news of our foes?"

"None, whatever. It strikes me very forcibly that they won't at all fancy taking to the meadows in the sweet condition they are in at present. The horses, too, are all right, and don't seem at all put out of the way by the hail-storm."

"Very good; and see how the fire burns."

"It is quite a cheering sight."

"Jack says he will tell me why this place is called the haunted mill."

"Drive on, then, Jack, and let us know all about it."

Dick brought himself a seat, of which there were several in the room, and Claude having likewise provided himself with one, they both looked at Jack to begin; but just as he was about to do so, Duval said—

"How about the broken ribs, though, Jack? It's too bad to set a fellow to story telling in such a state."

"Why," said Jack, "I am inclined to think that after all it is only a sprain, for it is better, and I can use my arm, at all events, more freely; but there is a deuce of a lump on the side of my head."

"That was what confused your faculties a little, Jack."

"No doubt of it."

"Well, the story—the story," said Dick.

"You must know, then," said Jack, "that a murder has been committed in the mill. The fields all round this spot, and the mill, and a large mansion that is not far off, all belonged to a family named Wingrove. There were two sons of the proprietor of the place, and when he died he left all to the younger of the two, to the exclusion of the elder; but if the elder should survive the younger, the property was to go to him, as the old man said that if such should happen he hoped the elder would have acquired wisdom and virtue by years, which he did not then possess."

"Rather harsh, that," said Dick.

"It was, and it appeared that the elder son was in some foreign land, but hearing that his father was dead, he came to England and sent a letter to his younger brother to visit him here at this mill, for he set forth in the letter that he had committed acts that made it impossible he could show himself publicly in this country.

"Well, they met in the mill, and the elder murdered the younger in the upper floor of this very building, and cast the body down a trap-door in the ceiling."

"A trap-door in the ceiling? I wonder if it is really here still," said Claude, rising.

"Don't look for it," said Jack.

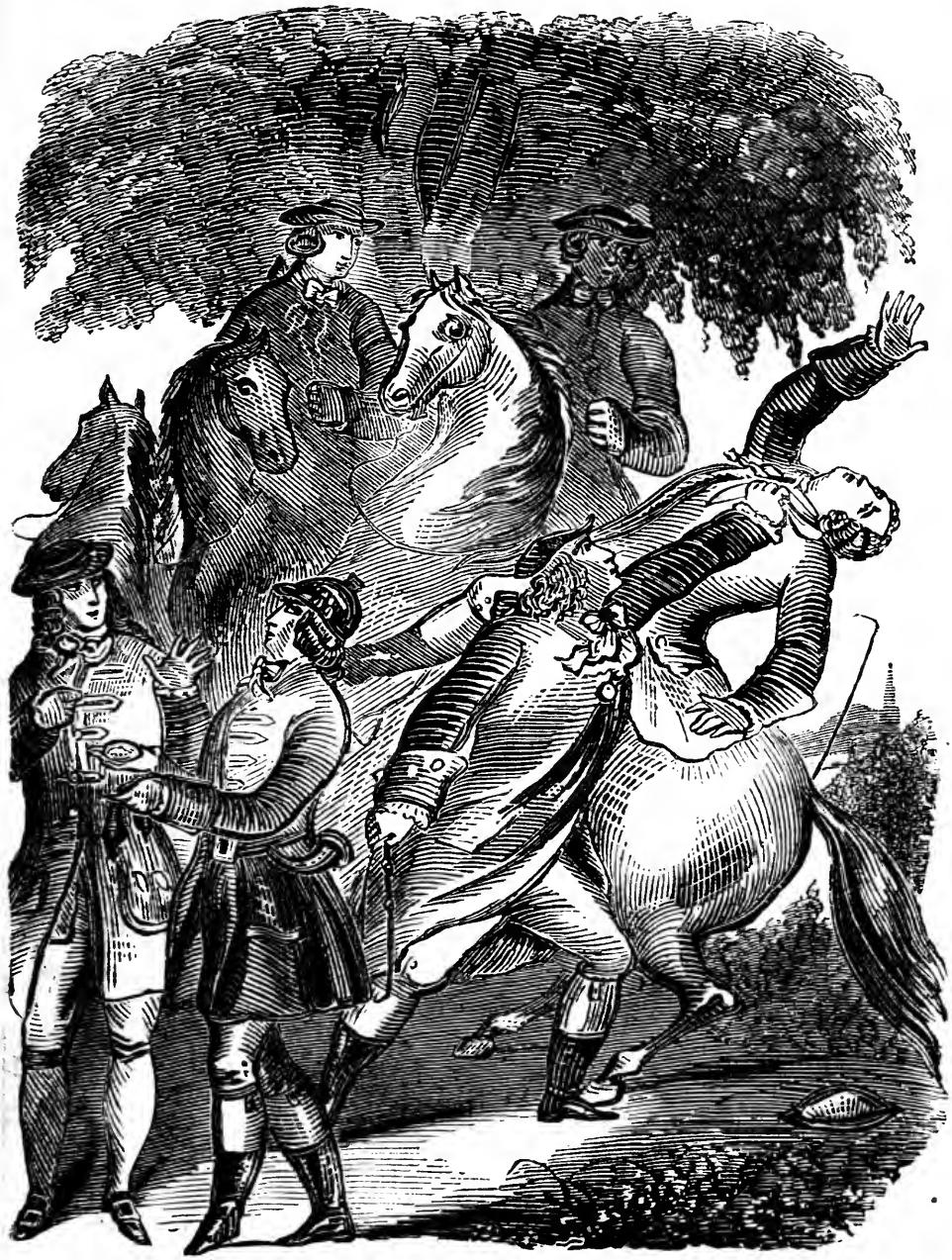
"Oh, why not? Stuff and nonsense, Jack. Why not? If I really find it, I shall place much more reliance upon your story, and if I don't I shall place none at all upon it."

Claude got a lighted brand from the fire, and held it up towards the ceiling, until at last he cried—

"Here it is."

"Well, then," said Jack, "I hope you are satisfied, that's all."

"I am so far."



DICK TURPIN CHASTISES MR. MILLS FOR ATTEMPTING TO SHOOT HIM.

A strange howling noise was now heard, as if from the upper chambers of the mill, and then there was a lumbering sound just above the very trap-door of which Jack had so recently made mention.

"What the deuce is that?" said Claude.

Dick and Jack had both risen; but the latter did not feel himself well enough

to take any active part in what might ensue; so he sank back again into his chair with a deep groan.

The noise had entirely ceased; but that something had taken place in one of the upper chambers of the mill there could be no doubt; for as they had all heard the noise, if could not be by any possibility ascribed merely to imagination.

"Go on with your story, Jack," said Claude.

"Perhaps I had better not," said Jack, faintly.

"Oh, nonsense! Let us know it all."

"Well, the elder brother buried the younger under the floor of this part of the mill; but as he was taking his way to the house after the deed of blood, and fancying that all would be his, there came on a storm, and he was struck dead by the lightning."

"Serve him right."

"He was buried here in the grave he had made for his brother, whose remains were removed to the family vault; but the ashes of the murderer moulder beneath this flooring, and the funeral took place at the dead of the night, being attended by some of the old servants of the family, and since then the mill is haunted by the ghosts of both the brothers, and once a year by the spectre funeral."

CHAPTER CCCXXIV.

THE SOLDIERS FIND THE MILL TOO HOT TO HOLD THEM.

"THE spectre funeral!" said Duval; "what sort of a ghost can that be, Jack?"

"Ah," said Dick Turpin, "I should like to know. I have heard of many ghosts; but the ghost of a funeral cortege must be something rare. I wonder how the ghost of a coffin looks?"

"You may laugh as you like," said Jack, mournfully; "but it is a fact, I assure you."

"What is a fact?"

"Why, that on the evening of the murder at midnight the spectres of all who buried the dead body of the murderer here appear, and go through precisely the same ceremony then, that they did originally; for they say that his spirit cannot rest, as it lies in unconsecrated ground, and that those who buried him can have no peace till some clergyman comes upon one of the anniversaries, and reads the burial service over the old bones that lie beneath our feet."

"Oh—oh!" said both Claude and Turpin, "you do not really and truly, now, Jack, expect us to swallow that?"

"You can believe it not, as you please," said Jack. "I only tell it to you as it was told to me, and I always thought it rather a fearful story. I don't feel well enough to contend with your unbelief; but I do think that even if you were to see the spectre funeral, you would not believe it, then."

"You are quite right, Jack."

"Oh, then, don't ask me to tell you anything else."

"Yes, we will, Jack; but we need not believe it for all that, you know."

"Hark!" said Turpin. "What is that?"

Three distinct knocks came upon the floor of the apartment above that which they were in, and then a strange, smothered scream burst upon the night air.

"There, there," said Jack. "I knew it—I knew it. Oh, let us get away from this place. I tell you it is haunted, and it cannot be a good thing for a living man to mingle with the spirits of the dead. Come away—oh, come! Ah, I—fear I cannot."

Jack made an effort to rise from the chair upon which he was sitting; but

he sank back in it again on the moment, for the hurts he had received from the fall of his horse so disabled him, that he was in anything but a fit state to carry out his own advice to fly from that haunted mill.

All was still again in the upper part of the mill.

"Claude," said Turpin, in a tone which showed how deeply his curiosity was excited, "what do you really think is the meaning of all this noise above here?"

"He cannot tell you," said Jack, rather pettishly.

"Well, I think I can. Some one or more persons are there, and they think they have a better right to the old mill than we have, and so they want to get rid of us."

"Oh, no—no."

"Yes, Jack, that is it, old friend; but they won't succeed while such a night as this is outside, I can tell them."

The same kind of noise now sounded from above; only now instead of the three knocks succeeding as though they were all upon the trap-door, they appeared to go over the floor, and to be in three very different parts of it.

Jack groaned aloud.

"Oh," he said, "I would not be here on the night when the spectre funeral appears for a trifle."

"What night is it, Jack?" said Turpin. "I might feel inclined to come just to see the sight."

"The third of August," said Jack.

"What?"

"The third of August."

"Why, Jack, do you know what you are saying, old fellow? This is the third of August! Why, you will forget your own name next, Jack. Don't you know that this is the very date you mention? Why, Jack—Jack, you are having a joke with us."

"It's no joke to him," said Claude. "I think he has fainted. I will raise a flame in the fire."

By giving the fire rather a vigorous stir, Claude Duval succeeded in getting up a flame in it, by the aid of which he saw that Jack was looking very pale, but had not absolutely fainted.

"Why, Jack," he cried, "rouse yourself from this torpid condition. I never knew you so completely overcome by superstitious fears before. Come—come, old fellow, laugh it off."

"The very day!" said Jack, faintly. "There is some fatality in this."

"Ha! ha! Well, what then, Jack?"

"What, then, do you ask, Claude Duval? I dread to think what then! I dread to ask myself the question."

"I don't, then. Do you, Dick?"

"Not I."

Jack raised his hand.

"There," he said—"there again. Do you hear that, both of you?"

"What?—what?"

"A voice singing. I hear it. Don't make me think that I am mad, and that I hear things that you do not. There it comes again. It is a voice singing something in a low, wailing accent."

"I do hear it," said Claude.

"And so do I," said Dick Turpin. "The noise gets louder, too, each moment. There it comes again. Where the deuce is it?"

"Hush!—hush!"

From a very low, weak voice that could scarcely be heard, the tones of some one singing a plaintive air became quite clearly perceptible, and in a few minutes more, although they were all rather at a loss to say whether the voice came from above or below, or from some room upon the same level with the one they

were in, they could all three plainly hear even the words of the song, if song that strangely chanted melody could be called.

Those words were as follows: —

"The blood of a brother
Will seek not to rest
When shed by the hand
That should shield the loved breast.
The cheek that is pale
From the guilt of the heart,
Will never know peace
Till the world shall depart—
Till time is no more—
Till the seas cease to roar—
Till sunk is the shore,
And the world to its core
Crumbles into the dust."

Three frightful shrieks concluded or put a stop to this strange rhapsody, which, towards the latter part of it, was articulated in a most singular fashion.

"Help!—help!" said Jack.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, I know not; but I feel—as if I were choking in this place. For the love of Heaven, let us go. Let us go, I say! What is the time? Is it near to midnight? I tell you both that the spectre funeral will be here to-night, as sure as we are living men!"

"Stuff! Be quiet, Jack."

"I cannot. I implore you to go from this place."

"Jack," said Claude, "there are several reasons why we cannot comply with your request, and one of them is, that to do so would be to give way to superstitious fears, which neither Turpin nor I feel at all inclined to do."

"Certainly not," said Turpin.

"But you cannot fight against facts, Claude."

"No; but I don't see the facts yet."

"Those noises—those terrible shrieks, and that unearthly singing. What call you all that?"

"Nothing more, Jack, than I could do myself at a veay few moments' notice, if there was any occas on so to do; but if Turpin is of my mind, he will take good care not to leave this place without some sort of solution of the mysteries connected with it."

"I am of that way of thinking," said Turpin, "and am quite willing to accompany you, Claude, in a search through the old mill."

"Come, then, I don't suppose that our foes, the soldiers, are likely to trouble us here, so suppose we try to discover what we can of the secrets of this place."

"And what am I to do?" said Jack.

"If you think yourself unsafe, Jack, we will not leave you; but I must confess I see no cause for such a feeling upon your part."

"Nor I," said Turpin. "Besides, of course, if we are in the mill we shall be near enough to you, Jack, to hear you if you see occasion to give any alarm."

"Go—go!"

"Take him at his word," whispered Turpin to Claude Duval. "He must be cured, if possible, of these strange fancies that possess him, and which really have the effect of warping his judgment and making his life quite miserable."

"Yes, I would do anything to give his imagination a different turn, but I much fear that it is too late to do so."

Poor Jack now looked at them both with a gloomy kind of intent as they made the preparations to get to the upper part of the old mill. A very brief examination assured them that there had been in one corner of the rather large apartment in which they were a staircase, or rather a set of open steps leading

to the upper rooms of the building, but they were there no longer, so that there did not appear to be any mode of reaching the rooms above, except through the trap-door in the ceiling.

"That will be our way," said Claude, pointing to it.

"Assuredly," said Dick Turpin.

Jack merely held up his hands and gave his head a slight toss, as much as to say—"Can it be possible that they are mad enough to put their heads through that trap-door." They observed him, but they took no notice of his rather expressive pantomime in disapprobation of their course.

Claude dragged a table under the trap-door, and then mounted it. As he did so, a deep hollow voice of the most unearthly cadences, suddenly said—

"Beware!"

"Eh?" said Claude. "What?"

"Beware!"

"Oh, thank you. I mean to keep a good look-out, and to take all the care of myself I can."

"Beware!"

"That will do. I heard you say that before."

"Oh!" cried Jack, "this is truly terrible. Three times he has been told to beware! and he treats the warning with the most shameful levity. Claude—Claude, the beings of another world will not be trifled with in such a manner."

"I beg your pardon, Jack, but I really think that I have more grounds of complaint than they have. They are trifling with me, for they keep telling me to beware! but they do not have the kindness to say what of."

Jack shut his eyes. He was truly shocked at the mode in which Claude Duval spoke of the supernatural world, and he would not encourage him by saying another word.

Claude nodded to Turpin, and then said—

"See that your pistols are in order, and follow me, Dick. We will, at all events, place ourselves in a position to form a clearer opinion of affairs in this place than we can do now. Follow me as closely as you can, Dick."

CHAPTER CCCXXV.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE HAUNTED MILL ARE RATHER ON THE INCREASE.

By standing on the table which he had placed in the middle of the room, Claude Duval found that he was of sufficient height to command the trap-door easily.

Dick Turpin sprang up on to the table by his side.

"Is it open, Claude?"

"Not yet, I am trying it."

The trap-door appeared to be quite fast, and situated as Claude Duval was, of course he could not bring much force to bear against it, so that a trifling fastening on the other side would have the effect of holding it tolerably closely down.

"We must get something to force it with," said Claude.

"Suppose you tried a pistol-shot through it."

"I don't like to do that, for, after all, we don't know who may be on the other side, and a chance shot if it hits any one, generally hits the wrong one."

"Well, there is truth in that. But I will get one of those spare pieces of wood that are in yonder corner behind where Jack is now sitting, and by its aid we shall soon succeed in forcing the trap-door.

"Do so—do so."

Dick Turpin jumped off the table to get the piece of wood he spoke of, and then there came the mysterious taps from above upon the trap-door.

"That will do," said Claude, "I hear you."

"Rash mortal," said a void, "once more beware. Desist from this wild attempt to penetrate the mysteries of beings that are not of this world. Mortal, be warned, and depart in peace."

"Thank you," said Claude, "for the caution; but I feel quite a curiosity to have a look at you, and as I do not come to you with any mischievous intent, I really don't see what you can have to complain of."

"Oh! oh!" said Jack.

"D—n it!" cried Claude, suddenly, "what is that?"

He sprang from the table, and then they all saw descending from various little crevices round the trap-door small globules of blue light, each one of which as it fell shot up from the table into a little flame of brilliant blue.

A loud yell then came from above, and Jack sprang up from his chair as though he had not been hurt at all, and shouted out—

"There—there is one of them!"

"One of what?" said Claude.

Jack gave the fire a plunging kick with his heavy riding-boot, which made it shoot up into a flame again, and then they all three saw reaching down from the trap-door, which was opened about six inches to allow of it passing, a hand and arm, but a perfect skeleton.

There were the long bony fingers, and the double bone of the fore arm, yellow with the marks of decay. Not a particle of flesh was upon that arm.

"Clutch me," said a voice, "and come to the dead."

The hand waved to and fro as if seeking for some one whom it might lay hold of below.

Now, without being superstitious at all, any one might be rather surprised at such a little incident as this, and it was no wonder then that both Claude Duval and Dick Turpin continued to look at the strange sight before them without getting upon the table again.

Dick appeared to be the most thoroughly astounded of the two; and the hand, after making as it appeared several ineffectual grasps to try and get hold of somebody, was withdrawn, and the blue lights went out.

Claude drew a long breath, and then he said—

"Dick, old friend, what is your opinion of all this?"

"I have," said Dick, as he sneezed terrifically, "a very powerful opinion regarding the blue lights. They owed their origin to brimstone, I can swear."

"I thought I smelt brimstone."

"You only thought you did? Oh, well, it is possible that some current o air sets this way, and so brings the greatest quantity of it to my nose; but I doubt if I shall smell anything else for a week to come."

"But the hand, Dick—the skeleton hand? What do you think of that?"

"Ah—what!" groanad Jack.

"Why, nothing."

"Nothing can come of nothing, Dick. You do not think it was anything supernatural?"

"I think it was a real skeleton hand, but I suspect that there was no skeleton body attached to it. Nothing could be very well easier than to probe a skeleton hand and arm through the trap-door, and to wave it about."

"That is true."

"But a mere supposition," groaned Jack.

Claude Duval appeared for a moment or two buried in thought, and then he said, sharply—

"I will not give way to this delusion—I will not leave this place with even the doubt upon my mind concerning the character of these sights and sounds. I will know that they are explainable by natural and human means, or I will further have grounds for believing that they belong to the supernatural."

"Oh, Claude, you don't know your danger," said Jack. "What if the supernatural beings who may be above in this mill do you an injury?"

"I don't believe they can, even if there be such. Things that have no substance cannot injure my body surely; and as for my soul, they cannot harm it—

'Being a thing immortal as themselves,'

as the man in the play says; and, therefore, I will not hesitate."

Claude Duval now set about making his way through the trap-door, and certainly by so doing he displayed an amount of courage which very few in his situation in that ill-omened and ill-reputed place could possibly have commanded.

Dick had already provided himself with rather a thick piece of the trunk of a tree, and Claude Duval now took it from him and sprang upon the table again. With such an example before his eyes, Dick Turpin did not scruple to follow at once.

Claude then spoke in a loud voice—

"Hark you!" he cried. "I address you who are above there. We are well armed, and upon the slightest attempt to attack us or to do us any injury, we are likely to retaliate in a way that will be more energetic than pleasant."

All was still.

"I may add, too," said Claude, after the pause of a moment or two. "I may add, if it be of any importance to you to know that much, that we are in no way connected with the constabulary or the law."

Still no reply.

"Now for it, then," said Claude.

The piece of wood made a most powerful kind of battering-ram even in the awkward position in which Duval stood to use it; and after the third blow with it upon the trap-door it burst open with a crash.

"All's right," said Claude.

"I have my pistols ready," said Dick.

Claude did not think that anything was to be gained by delay, so he caught hold of the sides of the trap-door and drew his head and shoulders through the opening into the upper apartment of the mill.

"A light, Jack!" cried Dick. "There is a bit of wax candle. Light it, and hand it up to me, here."

Certainly the state of affairs was now such as might well have aroused every latent feeling of superstition that might be in the minds of Claude Duval and Dick Turpin.

It is not in human nature to entirely divest itself of such a feeling; and an imagination that would be free of all such sensations would be a phenomenon such as the world has not yet ever seen.

Jack lit the piece of wax candle that Dick Turpin threw to him, and held it up towards the trap-door.

"Take this, Claude," said Turpin. "I suppose it is dark enough up there, is it not?"

"As pitch," said Claude.

"Oh, come down," said Jack.

"Not just yet. Rather, do you come up."

"I will," said Turpin, and he scrambled up in the same way that Claude Duval had done.

"Hold the light higher, Claude."

"Yes—yes. Oh, God! what is that? Look, Dick, look! What do you make of it, eh?"

They both crouched down by the trap-door, and at about twenty paces from them they saw by the dim light that the piece of wax candle gave them a tall figure in a dark-coloured kind of mantle, standing in the middle of the floor, and regarding them both with a fixed and stony gaze.

It was impossible that any one could look at the face of that figure for a moment and believe that it was human.

"There is more in this than I thought," said Claude. "Dick! what—what is it?"

"By heavens I know not."

"I will speak to it. What are you? Speak if you can, and dare do so."

All was still.

Claude drew a pistol from his pocket, and levelling it at the figure, he cried out—

"I swear by my life that if you do not give some token of who and what you are, I will fire!"

The figure did not move, and Claude fired direct at its chest.

The concussion of air put the little light out, but there stood the figure as it had stood before, with a strange blueish kind of halo of light about it, as if it extended from its surface.

"It is not human," said Dick.

The figure vanished.

"A light—a light!" cried Dick. "We must not be in the dark here!"

"Hilloa—hilloa!" cried Jack from below. "Claude—Claude! Dick, I say, Dick!"

"It is the voice of Jack," said Claude. "Something has happened below. What is it, Jack?"

"The soldiers!"

"The what?"

"The soldiers are close at hand. I have been to the outside of the mill. It is coming down it torrents, and they are coming rapidly across the meadow, in this direction. They are certain to take shelter here, and we are lost."

"Not so; you must come up here, Jack."

"But—but—"

"Hang it, this is no time for buts. As yet, if that be what you want to know, we have seen nothing more than ourselves up in this loft, so don't hesitate, old friend, I beg of you."

Jack, notwithstanding all his superstitious fears, could not help feeling that his only safety from the clear and tangible dangers below, was by scrambling as well as he could through the trap-door. This he succeeded in doing pretty well, with Duval's assistance; and that he did so without putting himself to much inconvenience, was a pretty good proof that, however he might have been shaken by the fall of his horse, no bones were broken.

It was very satisfactory to Claude Duval to see Jack better.

CHAPTER CCCXXVI.

THE SOLDIERS ARRIVE AT THE MILL, AND JUST MISS THE HIGHWAYMEN.

THE rain had, some short time before the period when Jack had called up through the trap-door to let his friends know that the soldiers were at hand, ceased in a great measure, and the friends had been led to believe that the most of the rain was over.

That belief, however, turned out to be completely fallacious; and in so desperate a climate for changes as ours, it is no wonder at all that it did so.

He would need be a bold man who in England would take upon himself to say what the weather was about to be, from what it appeared at any moment.

Now the rattle of the shower upon the top of the old mill made such a racket, that although Claude Duval and his two friends were yet one story removed from it, they could hardly for a few moments hear each other speak for the tumult.

That state of things, however, did not last very long, for although it still rained very fiercely, the water came down in smaller particles, and did not strike so forcibly against the building.

"Oh, but the trap-door," said Jack; "shut it at once, or we shall be seen by the soldiers."



THE ATTACK OF THE OFFICERS UPON THE BARRICADE.

"Are you sure now, Jack, that they are really coming?"

"I saw them."

"Well, that is proof positive, and down goes the trap-door."

"Stay," said Dick Turpin. "It will be a very easy thing to leave it open just so far as to enable us to hear what is going on below, and yet not so far

that it can be supposed to be otherwise than shut. Allow me, Claude. That will do it."

Dick placed a little piece of wood that he found in the mill-loft in such a position that it held open the trap-door to the extent of about half an inch, which was quite sufficient for the purpose of reconnoitring through, or listening to the occurrences below, but yet was so narrow an opening, that by looking from the room beneath upwards it was quite out of the question that it should be observed.

All was now complete darkness in the loft, with the exception of an occasional fitful gleam of light, that made its way through the small space that the trap-door was open when a flame would shoot up in the fire that they had kindled below.

"Oh, Claude," said Jack in an agitated whisper, "you have seen something here, although you will not tell me that you have. Is it not so? Tell me truly, I beg of you."

"We have."

"I knew it! I knew it. Ha!"

"There it is again," said Dick.

The same figure that they had before seen, and which was evidently proof against a pistol bullet, now presented itself to their notice, at the farther end of the old loft.

Jack sank down almost to the floor with terror, and his teeth chattered in his head, as he gazed at the awful spectacle. Claude and Dick, too, began to think that it must indeed be some being of another world, however unwilling they were to yield to such a fancy.

"Past! past! past!" said a deep, hollow voice.

Then there came one of the strange and terrible screams, such as they had before heard with feelings of alarm, and the figure vanished.

"Oh, Heaven!" exclaimed Jack, "save our reason. It is said, that it is not possible for aught human to look upon a being of another world, and still preserve that reason which belongs to the inhabitants of this earth; and now that we have looked upon such a spectre, we shall go mad—mad!"

"I beg your pardon Jack," said Claude. "You may go mad—mad, if you like; but I don't intend to do any such thing, nor I don't think Dick will join with you in such an intention."

"Certainly not," said Dick.

"Hush!" said Claude. "Here is some tangible danger at last. Jack was right about the soldiers. The soldiers are at the door of the mill."

"There is a light here, my men," said a voice below. "We may find some one who can give us shelter till the weather clears a little. March!"

The tramp of feet in the lower part of the mill now proclaimed the fact that the soldiers who were in pursuit of the highwaymen were there, and then a little sharp voice cried out—

"It's quite clear to me, Mr. Sergeant, that the rascals cannot be veay far off; and I hope you will resume the search for them as soon as this pelting rain is over."

"Plague take them!" said the sergeant.

"So say I," resumed the voice; "but as I am a professional man, I assure you, Mr. Sergeant, upon my reputation, that you could not possibly in anywise, notwithstanding, do a more acceptable service to society as aforesaid than by catching these thieves."

"Ah, you are a lawyer, Mr. White," said the sergeant, "and it's all in the way of your business; but we don't like it."

"There's no one here," said the corporal, who had attentively examined the room; "but there wouldn't be a fire unless some one had been here recently. It's a shelter, at all events."

Claude peeped through the small opening in the trap-door, and he saw the soldiers below, and a little meagre-faced man dressed in black, and whose

clothes shone very much with the rain, who he rightly conjectured to be the Mr. White mentioned by the sergeant a few moments before.

The soldiers were drying their accoutrements by the fire, and swearing dreadfully at the duty they were upon.

"We must get out of this," whispered Dick.

"Yes, but how?" said Claude.

"Well, I don't know just yet; but there is one proposition that I think will be pretty evident, and that is, that if we do not make the mill too hot to hold the soldiers, they will make it too hot to hold us."

"True enough; but yet I own that I am rather puzzled to know what to be at. Where is Jack?"

"Here," said Jack, faintly. "It has gone."

"He can think of nothing but that ghost," said Dick, "It is of no use to say anything to him, Claude. What are they doing below now? They are making a great noise."

"They are breaking up the old chairs and tables, and heaping them on to the fire. They don't seem very particular about how they get up a good blaze, I must confess. I wonder Mr. White's professsonal feelings are not outraged by such proceedings."

One would almost have thought that the attorney, for such he evidently was, had heard Claude, for he said at once—

"You will excuse me, I am sure, in what I am going to say to you; but I cannot help remarking that this conduct is very illegal—I may say, strikingly illegal—Hem!"

"What conduct, Mr. White?" said the sergeant.

"What conduct? Why, the breaking up of people's furniture to feed a fire. I can assure you that an action could be opened, and you, as the defaulters, would find that you had no defence."

"Stuff!" said the sergeant.

The fire blazed freely in the old chimney of the mill; and then Dick Turpin whispered to Claude Duval—

"I say, Claude, I have thought of a plan, if we could only manage to carry it out, which would make the stay of these fellows below in the mill as short as possible."

"What is it?"

"If we could only stop the draught of the chimney, they would soon be half smothered. I can smell the odour of wet straw which they are now heaping on to the fire-place."

"It might be tried. There is one other story above this, and if we could get there, there would be do great difficulty in reaching the top of the mill, surely. It is worth making the effort."

"It is, surely What are they about, now, Claude?"

"Ah, one of them has lit a torch, and they are are proceeding to make a careful examination of the mill. If we are to do anything like what you have suggested, it ought to be done at once."

At this moment a tremendous uproar ensued in the lower part of the mill, and the soldiers who were clustered round the fire all started up on the moment, and ran to where they had piled their firelocks. The fire was nearly extinguished, and the apartment was filled with smoke and soot. A large portion of the wall just abore the fire-place feel right out with a crash, and the greatest confusion prevailed in the place.

The mill appeared to be shaken to its foundations.

"What on earth is all that?" said Dick.

"God only knows," said Claude, as he hastily withdrew the piece of wood that had held the trap-door a little way open and let it close cautiously.

"Don't do that, Claude," said Dick, "we can neither hear nor see now. Open the trap again."

"We shall be smothered by smoke and soot if we do. It was coming up this

way in dense volumes. Wait a little until it has cleared somewhat, and then I will open the trap again."

Notwithstanding that the trap-door was shut, they could hear tolerably distinctly the noise of the soldiers below. The little cracked tones of Mr. White, too, came pretty plainly to their ears.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" he cried. "What is all this about? What is taking place, now, I should like to know? The blessed mill is certainly falling down, and no mistake."

For a few moments even Claude and Dick, who neither of them lost their presence of mind, were rather at a loss to account for the sudden noise and confusion that had occurred; but Dick, after a few moments' consideration, said—

"Claude, that was an explosion of gunpowder, I feel quite certain. There can be no mistake about it now; I smell it quite plainly."

The state of affairs was now anything but very pleasant to any of the parties in the old mill. That some gunpowder had, by some means, been lodged in the chimney, and had suddenly exploded by the aid of the large fire that the soldiers made with the chairs and tables, appeared to be a proposition concerning which there could be no doubt.

The unmistakable smell of exploded powder pervaded the whole structure.

Such an odour was not likely to escape the practised noses of the soldiers; and after the first surprise had gone off, the sergeant cried out—

"Why, it's powder, my men. We have hit upon a mine. I suppose we shall be all blown to Jericho soon if we don't look out."

The men seized their muskets and mechanically formed in line; but as there was no appearance of any enemy, they could only look at each other with inquiring eyes by the light of one of the links they had with them, and which had withstood the concussion of air caused by the explosion.

After all, the principal part of the concussion had expended its fury up the ample chimney of the old mill, or, no doubt, it would have done some very serious damage to those who were assembled in the room so immediately contagious to the scene of it.

Mr. White, though, the attorney, who was with the soldiers, and who had been compelled to accompany them by a magistrate to whom he acted in the capacity of clerk, was in the most abject state of fear, now, and considered that his life was scarcely worth a moments purchase under the then exciting state of things.

"Oh, goodness gracious!" he said, "do come away out of this place. It's only a question between fire and water, and if you don't prefer the latter, I don't know what you can possibly be thinking about. Oh, come—come, my good fellows; isn't it better by far to be carried up outside than to be blown up inside?"

"It's all over," said the sergeant.

"Oh—oh! is it? You don't say so?"

"Yes, I think it is, by Jove!"

"Then, good-bye," said Mr. White, who by the words "It's all over" of the sergeant thought he meant that there was no hope for them in this world; and as he knew that, being a lawyer, there was no hope for him in the next, he gave himself up quite to despair, and fell flat on his back in a corner of the room on a great heap of damp straw.

CHAPTER CCCXXVII.

THE SPECTRE FUNERAL ACTUALLY MAKES ITS APPEARANCE.

If the situation of himself and friends had not been quite so critical as it was, Claude would have been rather amused than otherwise at the abject fears of Mr. White; but he felt that he had other things to attend to of more importance than the ludicrous agitation of the attorney.

After what had happened, it was quite clear that the soldiers would not be content to sit down so quietly in the place as they were before. The sergeant soon confirmed such an opinion.

"My lads," he said, "this little bit of an explosion has done no harm, as it happens, to any of us; but it shows us that there is something else in the place but old tables and chairs and rats—gunpowder don't get into a chimney without hands; and it is just possible we may find something worth looking for if we bestir ourselves, for we ought not to forget that we are promised fifty pounds among us if we bring in the highwaymen, dead or alive."

The soldiers expressed their assent to this proposition, and Mr. White, looking faintly up, said—

"What was that you said about fifty pounds, sergeant? If there is any money going, don't forget me, Abraham White, Esq., an attorney of the Courts of Westminster."

"Go to the devil!" said the sergeant.

"Oh, I feel that I am going there," sighed Mr. White, as he sank back again upon the wet straw.

"My lads," added the sergeant, "in such an affair as this, I know you will do best without precise orders when you know what you have to do; and so, I say, search the mill right through, and let us see if we cannot find these gunpowder gentlemen."

"Ah, we will have them!" said the soldiers.

"Hold!" said a deep, hollow voice, that was of such tremendous violence as regarded sound, that it might have come from a giant of awful proportions.

Claude and Dick both started, and looked around them, but all was quiet and solemnly dark in the loft, and yet the sound seemed wonderfully close at hand. As for the soldiers, they all paused, and remained in precisely the same attitudes in which the sound had caught them, as though it had had the faculty of turning them suddenly to stone.

Mr. White pulled some of the wet straw right over his face, and kicked convulsively; for now, indeed, he thought that his time was surely come, and that Old Nick himself had taken the trouble to fetch him.

"Hold!" said the voice again, and then it died away in rumbling echoes through the old mill.

"The devil!" said the sergeant.

"That's it," groaned Mr. White.

The soldiers handled their muskets, and looked now at each other with doubt. Each one sought to gather from the face of his neighbour some explanation of the strange sound that had seemed to come from no mortal lips.

"Sergeant," said the corporal, "what do you take that to be?"

"Some trick of the enemy," said the sergeant, as he drew his sword, "and I don't intend to let it scare me from the mill. I am only the more convinced that we shall not have come here in vain, though it was accident that led us to this place."

"Very well," said the corporal. "I'm willing and ready for anything."

"Will you all follow me?"

"We will, sergeant," said the men—"we will."

"Come on, then."

The sergeant turned round three or four times, now, and seemed rather puzzled to know where to lead the men to, now that he had got their consent to follow him. He seemed rather to have assumed than been at all really aware that there was any mode of leaving that apartment of the mill except the one by which they had entered it, and which led out into the open air again, and that was not where they wanted to go.

"Hilloa!" he said, "I don't see any way up stairs."

"Nor I, either," said the corporal.

"The deuce take it!"

Mr. White groaned and kicked again, as he murmured—

"They are speaking about him again. I heard him say something about the deuce. I'm an undone lawyer!"

"Let's have a good look about the place with the aid of the link," added the corporal. "There is surely some way of getting to the upper story of the mill."

The link was held high up, and then several of them saw the trap-door at once, and the corporal cried out—

"Here's the way. There's a door in the ceiling, and it isn't very high; so we shall easily enough get up to it."

"Come on, then," said the sergeant. "On with you, my lads, as quick as you can."

Now, Claude and his friends heard all this quite plainly, and they felt that it was time for them to make some sort of movement in the matter, if they did not want to come into actual collision with the soldiers, which they certainly did not.

"This won't do," said Dick. "This place will be too hot to hold us in a little time, Claude."

"Yes, we must get out of it; but how I really know not. You must light your wax tapers, Dick, and see if there is any ladder or trap-door into the loft above."

"Yes, that is it."

Dick lit a taper, and held it up as high as he could; and then in one remote corner they saw a something hanging from the ceiling; but it did not look like a ladder.

"There is something," said Dick. "Come on."

"No," said Jack, suddenly laying his hand upon Dick's arm. "The soldiers will be here through the trap-door before we can determine what to do. I can hear them, now, piling up furniture, so as to get up to it; and if they had not so wantonly knocked to pieces the table by the aid of which we got here, they might have been with us by this time; but they have used that for fire-wood."

"What is to be done?" said Claude. "We have no means of making the trap fast, that I can see. If it had now but a couple of good bolts, it would give them some little trouble; but, as it is, we cannot hold it down."

"Yes, we can," said Jack. "I will soon show you how. You and Dick can hold down the trap, while I go and look for some means of leaving this place, if such are to be found."

As he spoke, Jack came to a pile of wood, that was in one corner of the loft, and returned with a long flat piece, which he laid over the trap-door. It extended some three feet over it on each side.

"Now, Claude," he said, "do you stand on one end of this piece of timber, and you, Dick, on the other; and I will then defy any force that they have below to move the trap."

"Good," said Claude, as he stood upon one end of the piece of wood. "I rather think you are right enough there, Jack. The pressure they will have to contend against will be immense."

Dick took possession of the other end of the timber, so that the trap-door was held down by a power equal to their united weights—and they were neither of them very light men. The piece of timber was quite thick enough to put any doubt of its being broken quite of the question.

They could hear the soldiers making of the broken furniture below some sort of platform to stand upon, to open the trap-door from; and the sergeant called out—

"Now, my lads, I think that will do. Up with you."

There was a general scrambling, and then the corporal called out—

"It's as fast as a rock."

"The devil it is!"

"I knew it!" said Mr. White. "He says, 'The devil it is!' Oh! oh!"

The soldiers paid not the slightest attention to the condition of Mr. White, nor to anything he said or did. They were too intent upon the work they had set themselves.

"It can but be bolted above," said the sergeant. "A blow with the butt of a musket will open it."

Bang! bang! came two heavy blows with the brass-bound butt of one of the muskets. But, although the trap-door creaked and shivered, it did not open.

"Why, it's got a house a top of it," said the corporal.

"Shall I send a bullet through it?" said one of the men.

"Ah, do."

Bang! went the musket, and crack through the trap-door came the bullet, and lodged in the ceiling of the loft.

Dick and Claude did not utter a word; but they looked rather anxiously for the return of Jack, to tell them if he had found any means of reaching the upper floor of the mill. It was just after the musket-shot had been fired, that Jack came back. He spoke in a whisper—

"Come," he said, "there is a rope hanging from the edge of an opening in yonder corner, that leads to a small oddly shaped loft above. There is no difficulty in getting up."

"All's right."

"Stop," said Dick; "if we leave this place they will open the trap."

"No. They will rest contented with the ascertained fact that it is too fast to move. Let us go."

Dick and Claude stealthily stepped off the piece of timber, and followed Jack to the corner of the loft, where the rope hung.

"It is quite fast and strong," said Jack. "I have been up."

"That will do. We will follow you."

"No—no; I will follow you both."

"This is no time to dispute about precedence," said Claude, as he laid hold of the rope, and with great quickness drew himself up into a very curiously shaped little chamber—a loft at the very top of the mill. Dick followed him; and then came Jack, who drew up the rope after him, and cut it from the iron hook to which it had been securely fastened.

The soldiers were now in deep consultation as to the best mode of forcing open the trap-door, which they thought to be so fast, but which in reality would now have opened with a touch.

It was quite ridiculous to think how they must be eyeing it, and shaking their heads, and wondering what held it so powerfully, for no bolts could have resisted the attack they had made upon it.

"Now for a light, again, Dick," said Claude, "that we may see where we are. It seems an odd place, rather."

Dick re-illumined one of the little bits of wax candle that he had with him, and then they saw the loft that they were in. The sides of it were nothing but what is called weather-boarding; and the top was the centre of the mill. Some sliding panels of wood at the sides, something in shape like the port-holes of a ship, let in air; and when Jack opened one of them, he found that it let in a great deal more than air, for he was nearly smothered by a terrible quantity of smoke, that came puffing into the loft.

A little examination let them see that the top of a chimney was just at that spot; and as the fire in the lower room was the only one in the mill, they could come to no other conclusion than that the chimney before them was the one communicating with it.

Jack shut the sliding shutter quickly enough, and Dick opened one opposite to it, which soon let out the choking vapour that the other had let in, owing to the wind being in that quarter. The rain was still coming down.

Indeed, what had appeared to be a mere storm and which would have been expected to be soon over, now seemed to have altered its character, for the night was

as black as pitch, and the rain came down with such a steady pelt that it promised continuance for an unlimited period of time.

Yet they all three were glad to lean out at the port-hole, if it may be called such, in the wall of that uppermost story of the mill, and breathe the cool fresh air, which, loaded with moisture as it was, was yet very refreshing and invigorating to them.

The soldiers, in the meantime, were not idle.

By the advice of the corporal, four of them brought their muskets to bear upon the trap-door in the ceiling all at once, and they gave it such a blow, thinking that it was of course as fast as it was before, that when it suddenly yielded, as it of course did, and flew open, they all four outstretched themselves, and down they fell off the tables and chairs they had piled up on to the floor of the lower room.

"Murder!" cried Mr. White.

"What's the matter, now?" said the sergeant.

The coporal, who was one of the four who had fallen, sat up and rubbed his head, as he said—

"The devil's in the trap-door! Why, it yielded this time to a touch, and flew right away as if it had never been fastened at all. I can't make it out."

The others who had come down with such a crash looked at each other rather ruefully, and felt anything but composed by the circumstance.

CHAPTER CCCXXVIII.

THE CONFEDERATES MAKE THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE HAUNTED MILL.

Claude Duval and his two friends, in the uppermost story of the old haunted mill, heard that something had gone rather amiss with their foes upon the basement by the noise that had come upon their ears; but what it was that was so much amiss they had no means of exactly coming at.

"You may depend that they have had a fall," said Dick Turpin, "or they would not make all that noise."

"No doubt of it," said Jack, "and I only wish it had been from the top of the mill to the bottom of it, for then they would get rather sick of the job of hunting us in the way they are now doing."

"We will sicken them," said Claude, "in a quicker, but yet, I doubt not, quite as effectual a way, as if they had the fall you talk of, Jack."

"How so, Claude? I can't exactly see how you are to get at them from here."

"Then I will show you, Jack. In the first place, I think that with a very little trouble we might get out of one of these openings—or windows, I suppose we may from courtesy call them—and get right on to the top of the old building. When there, I don't think it is at all likely they will see us, or even suspect that we are there."

"Well, that will do for one thing; but if they take a fancy to stay till daylight in the room below, why, then, I fancy they will be able to see us."

"That I don't at all intend to let them do, unless they are more independent of ordinary comforts than I think they are. What do you say to smoking them out?"

"Smoking them out?"

"Yes, Jack. There is the chimney top, within arms-length of us; and it strikes me that if we stop it up, the smoke will make its way anywhere but up here; and that the soldiers will find it not the most pleasant sort of atmosphere to breathe in. What do you say?"

"Do it."

"And you, Dick?"

"Anything to annoy the enemy. If they are at all prudent, even, they will go



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after such a smother as they will soon find themselves in. Let us now set about it."

They commenced looking about the old loft of the mill to see if they could find anything that would answer the purpose of stopping the chimney; and after awhile, Dick said in a cheerful voice—

"Here are the means all capitally at hand. Now, I have lit upon a heap of old corn sacks. They are so damp by lying long here, that they quite stick together, and are as mouldering as it is possible to conceive them to be. They are the very thing."

"Hush!" said Jack; "I hear our enemies in the room below this. Be careful how you move and speak."

They all three listened now attentively, and they heard the voice of the sergeant say—

"Come on, my men. There is nobody here. Come on. You must have loosened the trap before, and that was what made it give way so easily now. Up with you."

"They come," said Dick. "Quick, Claude! Open the casement opposite to the chimney top, and I will lower the sacks into it. Quick! quick!"

Claude opened the shutter that closed the opening by the chimney, and a puff of horribly thick smoke from the wet straw that the soldiers had imprudently flung on the fire, came in their faces.

Dick held his breath for a moment or two, and then he thrust one of the sacks into the chimney; but it disappeared.

"D—n it!" said Dick; "that's gone down."

"All the better, Dick. It will carry with it a capital dose of soot and smoke. Place another over the top."

"It is done. Fuff! what a smother! Ah! it is clearing off from us, now. I will warrant that no more of the smoke will get out this way."

A current of clear cold air set now in at the open casement, and it was very grateful to the senses of Jack, and Dick, and Claude, after the terrible smother of smoke that they had had to endure for the few moments before.

The effect upon the soldiers of sending all the smoke into the mill, instead of up the chimney, now had to be waited for; but it was quite out of the question that many minutes must elapse before it took place.

The next object that Claude and his friends had was to follow up their plan of operations, and get out at the top of the mill, so that when the topmost loft should be searched, they should not be found.

It was not a very easy thing to do in the dark, but yet there were many places for the foot to get a firm hold, and for the hands to gripe; and if there had been but a gleam of light sufficient to enable them to see what they were about, they would have found the task to turn more easy.

As it was, however, there was no time to think of difficulties, and they set about it with right good will.

They all three felt that their only chance of safety lay in the fact that the soldiers did not know they were there, however their sergeant might suspect such a thing to be possible. If they were once seen, of course there would be no hope of escape, for the soldiers would set about their destruction or their capture in such a professional manner, that one or the other of such contingencies would be certain.

"Let me go first," said Claude. "I am a pretty good hand at climbing, and I will take the rope with me that we cut away from the iron hook at the entrance to this loft. I may possibly find some place to fasten it to, so that it will be of the greatest possible assistance to you both."

"Do so, Claude," said Turpin, "and be quick, whatever you do."

Thus urged, not that indeed he wanted any urging at all in the matter, Claude Duval got out of the window on the opposite side to where the chimney was situated; and then he found, the moment he got on the outside, that there was a rude kind of railing there, by the aid of which it was an easy enough matter to reach the top of the mill, where there was a flat space of about eight feet square, likewise protected by a railing.

"Dick! Dick!" he said.

"Yes, Claude?"

"You and Jack can come up at once; it's as safe as anything can possibly be. Indeed, it is a little too safe, for our foes may take it into their heads to have a look here."

Dick followed Claude, and Jack came after him, so that in a few moments, without any danger at all, they were on the top of the mill; and as their eyes got accustomed to the dim night light, they could see with what facility the post which they had chosen might be reached, and they felt that if there was to

be a real search of the building, they had hardly bettered their position by getting where they now were.

"This won't do," said Claude.

"Not at all," said Dick. "If they choose to come after us, why they can; and when they can find us they have nothing to do but to go down below and pop at us with their muskets till they hit, or until we give in and let them take us."

"That they shall not," said Claude,

"Stop a bit," said Jack, "It is that bit of railing that makes it so easy to get up here."

"It is."

"Then I will put an end to that pretty quickly. It is as rotten as it can be, and I thought it would have given way with me."

As he spoke, Jack sat down on the extreme verge of the roof of the mill, and when in this position, he could just with the heel of his boot reach one of the principal supports of the railing.

"Now," he said, "one kick and it is gone."

"Do it," said Dick.

Jack gave the kick, and the railing, although it did not go, only hung on by a small portion of the fastening. The weight of a cat would have sent it down in one mass.

"Hush! Jack," said Claude, "that noise will betray us. Don't do that again, you can't think how that will sound in the mill. Be quiet, whatever you do."

"I did not think of that," said Jack. "I will not touch it again, but it will be no help to any one, for woe be to him who trusts to it."

"Come back, Jack," said Turpin, in a low voice. "I can hear the soldiers in the loft quite plainly."

They now all three crouched down on the top of the mill, so that they could not have been seen against the night clouds, and they watched the course of events with no small degree of interest.

Upon the occurrences of the next ten minutes hung the question to them of life and death—for capture was death, and escape only was life.

The soldiers, in the meantime, had recovered from the panic that the fall from the trap-door had occasioned them, and had followed the sergeant into the room above; but there, although they brought a lighted link with them, they found no traces of the men whom they sought.

The sergeant called to the attorney—

"Mr. White—Mr. White, I say."

"Yes, if you please," groaned the attorney, "I am here. Don't put me in a very hot place, I beg of you."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, dear, good Mr. Devil, you know what I mean well enough. I mean that I am a professional man, if you please—I mean that. Oh, dear, have the goodness to spare my feelings. If I can give you any advice at any time I'm sure I should be most happy, my dear sir. I am not absolutely on the grill, now, in a manner of speaking, but I am quite warm enough, I beg to assure you, sir."

"The fellow is mad," said the sergeant.

"He thinks," said the corporal, "that it's all up with him, and that he has gone down below to a certain old gentleman's dominions, and nothing will root it out of his head."

"Then let him be where he is."

"Yes, it's the best thing."

"Now, my men," said the sergeant, "I don't mean to go so far as to say that those rascals we are looking for are in the mill, but that there are some persons here, I think, we have heard enough to feel pretty well convinced, and, at all events, we will search it. Hold the light higher, and let us look about us."

The soldier who carried the link held it high up above his head, and it cast a livid and uncertain glare over the whole chamber.

That room was of the same size as the one below it, for it was not until the building got higher than that that it began to taper towards the top. One of the walls, however, was off the perpendicular considerably, so that it seemed as if that side of the mill were built very much inwards.

"There's nothing here," said the corporal, as shading his eyes with his hand from the too great glare of the link, he looked carefully about him.

A deep, hollow groan, coming as if from some one actually in the room, now filled up the pause immediately succeeding the corporal's brief remark.

They all started.

"What is that?" said the sergeant.

"None of us," said the soldier with the link. "The groan seemed to come from over in yonder corner."

The sergeant drew his sword, and stepped boldly forward, and made a thrust at the wall.

"Now, you cowardly rascals," he said, "come out, if you are hiding here anywhere—come out and show yourselves, and don't be trying any of your mountebank tricks upon us."

A shriek of terrible laughter rang through the place, and the soldiers looked at each other with dismay, while he who held the link stepped two steps towards the trap-door, as though he meditated making his escape from the place.

"Halt!" said the sergeant.

The men all stood perfectly still.

"Why, my men," he then added, "you are not quite so foolish, surely, as to believe that there is anything supernatural in this mill, I hope? All these are but tricks to scare us from our pursuit."

The corporal coughed and whiped his eyes, and the men began to breathe with difficulty, and then one of them said—

"Why, the place is filling with smoke as fast as it can. I am half choked."

CHAPTER CCCXXIX.

CLAUDE DUVAL MAKES MR. WHITE VERY USEFUL IN AN EMERGENCY.

THE effect of the stoppage of the chimney was now beginning to be but too apparent to those who had to endure it. The atmosphere was becoming impregnated with dense volumes of smoke, that not only impeded the breath by its acrimonious nature, but affected the eyes of the soldiers very sensibly.

Mr. White, who still lay upon his back in the room below, escaped much of the effects of the smoke that was now coming out of the fire-place in volleys, because it had a tendency, of course, to ascend, and the open trap-door acted almost like a flue, in drawing it up to the loft.

"What the deuce is all this?" said the sergeant coughing, and holding a handkerchief to his mouth. "Is the mill on fire?"

"I shouldn't at all wonder," said the corporal. "That explosion of powder in the chimney, I daresay, has done it."

"Ah, no doubt—no doubt. Run down and see what it is."

The corporal hastily went to the trap-door, but when he tried to descend by it, he was met by such volumes of dense smoke, that he found it impossible to get through there, and he was half smothered in the attempt to do so.

The soldiers were all coughing.

"It's coming in faster than ever," said one.

"Let it out," said the sergeant, and he took a musket from one of the men, and commenced hammering away at one of the walls of the mill. Several of the soldiers followed his example at the same spot, and they soon broke a hole in the side of that loft, through which the smoke forced itself in a dense volume.

This had the effect of relieving them a little, for a regular current now set in

from the trap-door to the hole in the wall, and that carried by far the greater portion of the smoke with it. The sergeant pointed to the opening in the roof leading to the upper story, and cried out—

"We must get up this way now, and I suppose that is as high as we can get."

"Come on," said the corporal.

"Hold!" cried one of the soldiers. "What is that?"

They all looked in the direction he pointed, and they saw standing a few paces from one of the walls a skeleton, with one hand outstretched, and the other resting upon its head.

A feeling of horror came over them all as they looked upon this figure, which shed around it from its festering, yellow-stained bones a kind of phosphorescent light. It was profoundly still, but there was no mistake in the fact that there it was.

"Who sees it?" gasped the sergeant. "Do—you—all?"

"All—all!" said the soldiers. "It is death."

"No—no."

The soldiers made a hasty rush towards the trap-door, but the corporal cried out—

"Stop! halt! Are we to be scared from our duty by such a sight as this here? I, for one, will not. A musket—give me a musket one of you."

"Here," said a soldier. "It is loaded."

The corporal placed the musket to his shoulder, and pointed it at the skeleton figure.

"I swear," he said, "be you angel or devil, that I will fire at you if you don't speak and let me know why you come here. I don't pretend to say that you are alive, because that don't seem possible; but you have not come here without a purpose. Speak!"

"Beware!" said a deep, hollow voice.

"Beware of what?" said the corporal. "Of what would you warn us to beware? Speak again, I charge you!"

"Hence—hence—hence!" said the figure, apparently, although they could see no movement of its fleshless bones.

"Fire upon it!" cried the sergeant.

"Shall I?"

"To be sure. That will try it."

Bang! went the musket with a tremendous uproar in that confined space, and when the noise a little subsided, and the soldier with the link stepped forward, and held it, although with trembling hands, in the direction of the figure, it was gone.

"Gone!" said the corporal. "I have scared it off by the shot, that's quite certain."

"No," said the sergeant—"no. Look!"

The figure appeared again in precisely the same spot that it had before occupied; but it was only for a moment, and as if for the purpose of showing how futile had been the musket-shot, for there came a peal of the same yelling laughter that before had broken upon their ears with such a stunning effect, and then all was still, and the spectre vanished.

Even the corporal, who certainly had the most courage upon the occasion, rushed back, and grounded the musket, with a look of consternation and horror upon his face.

"I don't know," he said, "what to say to this exactly."

"Nor I," said the sergeant.

The men crept towards the trap-door, and one of them said—

"I don't see any good in staying here. Let's go."

"Yes," said the others. "The rain has all but given over; let's go. Our horses are out in the open air, and will be all the better for a canter. Let's go at once, sergeant."

"Hold!" said the sergeant. "We ought not, my men, to think of what we had rather do, or not do just now; but of what we shall have to say about this affair to others. When the question is put to us of 'Did you search the old mill?' and we have to reply that we had meant to do so, but were frightened out of it by a ghost, we shall look rather foolish."

"Rather, indeed," said the corporal, "and, for my part, I will go all over the building, if I go alone."

"I will be with you," said the sergeant, "of course."

The men wavered; and then one said—

"We will all do our duty."

"Yes," said the others; "we obey orders, sergeant."

"No, my men," said the sergeant; "this is not by any means regular duty, so I will not order you upon it; but if with good will you will all follow me, do so."

"We will—we will."

"Come on, then. I don't suppose that there is more than one room or loft above this one that we are in, and when we have fairly looked at that, I think we may take upon ourselves to say that we were not frightened from searching the place."

They now advanced to the opening in the roof, through which Claude and his friends had made their way by the aid of the rope; but as rope there was none now, it did not seem so easy as it might have been to ascend to it.

The soldiers were tall men, though, and one of them proposed to stoop down and let a comrade stand upon his back, and so scramble up, when the next could do the same for him, and so on, until one was only left below, who might be considered as on duty there in the capacity of sentinel.

This was a proposition at once so feasible and so easy to carry out, that they all acceded to it. The only little difficulty consisted in who should ascend to the unknown loft above first; but the corporal put that at rest by proposing his willingness to do so; and, accordingly, one of the men went on all fours, and the corporal, when he stood upon his back, found that he could just reach the sides of the hole in the roof, and drew himself up by his hands, which his military exercises enabled him to do with considerable ease and dexterity.

"Is all right?" said the sergeant.

"Yes. Nobody seems to be here; but it is very dark. Come on with you, and bring the torch."

"Yes; coming."

In the course of a few moments, now, the whole of the party, with the exception of one man who remained below on guard, was in the upper part of the old mill.

Several of them crowded to the window, or opening in the wall, through which Claude and his party had made their way to the roof of the building, and they did so more from the satisfaction they experienced from getting a mouthful of fresh air than for any other cause, for the atmosphere of the mill was full of smoke, notwithstanding they had by making an outlet from it succeeded in letting a sufficient quantity escape to make the air just endurable.

The soldiers were now so close to Claude Duval and his friends, that they might have touched each other; and then the corporal said—

"There seems to be a kind of balcony with rails outside here, is there not?"

"Yes," said the man, with the link. "One of you hold the light, and I will get out, and have a look about me at what sort of a place it is."

The corporal took the light, and the soldier scrambled out of the window; but the moment he let much of his weight rest upon the little balcony, and its light railing, down it all went with a crash to the ground—a depth of nearly fifty feet.

This would certainly have been a fatal accident to the soldier, had not the corporal caught him by his belt and held him by it against the ledge of the

window till three or four of his comrades got a good hold of him and pulled him in.

"A narrow escape that," said the corporal.

The soldier looked quite white, and was for some few minutes unable to speak. Then with a shudder, he said—

"I thought I was gone, corporal. I owe you my life."

"Pho—pho! Don't mention it."

"Yes, but——"

"Oh, stuff. These things always happen in service, you know. All I wish of you is, that if you see me ever going in the same way, you will hold tight, my man, that's all."

"Indeed, I will."

The corporal had dropped the torch in the anxiety to save the man, but it had not gone out, and one of the soldiers, by waving it in the air, got it into a flame again.

The nearly fatal accident that had occurred had had the effect of damping the ardour of the soldiers a little; and after satisfying themselves that there was no one in the loft, they proposed to get away again as quickly as possible, which the sergeant did not oppose.

"I don't see," he said, "that we can do any more good here. We have searched the whole building."

"We have," said the corporal. "Let us leave it now. The smoke that cannot get out at the hole in the wall seems to find its way up here, and the sooner we get out of it the better."

"Come on, then."

The men were not at all sorry to leave that loft, and they sprang down one by one into the room below very quickly. The sentinel reported that he had seen nothing, but that a rushing noise of something on the outside of the mill had rather startled him. They let him know that it was the fall of the little balcony and its railings that had produced that noise, and then they hurriedly walked to the trap-door to descend to the basement story of the place.

"I say," whispered the sergeant to the corporal. "It's an infernal old den, this, and worth nothing."

"Not a mag."

"Well, then, it's only a harbour for such fellows as those we have been after, and there is but one way to prevent it from being such in the future. Do you throw the link into a corner among the straw when we come out, and the confounded place will be burnt down before the morning, and all the ghosts along with it."

"It wouldn't really be a bad thing to do so."

"A bad thing! It would be a good thing, I tell you. Come, mind you do it now."

"I will."

"That's right. You needn't say anything to the men about it. I will march them out, and as you follow you can do it. They won't know what you have done with the link, you know."

"All's right, I'll manage it. It will make a nice bon-fire, at all events, if nothing else. I will do it, you may depend."

The sergeant was quite satisfied with this ready acquiescence of the corporal in the idea of setting fire to their enemy's quarters before leaving, and he ordered the men to march out of the mill. They obeyed him with all the readiness possible, for they were by no means enamoured of that place, and were glad enough to get out of it.

The corporal remained last, and then he threw the link into a corner of the room, saying as he did so—

"I sincerely hope that it will soon burn down the old den, for I don't know when I have had such a fright as that skeleton ghost, if, indeed, it were such, gave me, though I did manage to fire at it."

He then left the mill, and it may be here remarked that they all, either unintentionally or wilfully, it is rather hard to say which, forgot that there was such a person as Mr. White, attorney at law, lying upon his back in the lower room of the old building.

CHAPTER CCCXXX.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS ARE IN GREAT PERIL IN THE MILL, AND SO IS MR. WHITE.

WHILE all this was going on, Claude and his two friends were snug enough at the top of the mill, but they little suspected the nice little design that the sergeant and corporal had concocted between them.

They, the highwaymen, had thought of smoking out the soldiers, but in a much more effectual manner the latter had thought of burning them out by setting fire to the building.

Claude did not think it exactly prudent to say anything for some little time after the soldiers had left the upper loft, for neither he nor his friends could possibly take upon them to be quite sure that that was not a mere *ruse*, or that they were really gone.

After about a quarter of an hour more had lapsed, and when by the most intense listening nothing could be heard of any one in the narrow apartment immediately below the roof of the mill, they began to conclude, as was the fact, that their foes had really gone.

"Jack," said Claude, "where are you?"

"Here, all right."

"And you, Dick?"

"I am here, Claude," said Turpin, "and I do think those fellows are gone at last."

"So do I."

"Be careful, though, yet," said Jack. "They may be lurking about, and we must not throw a chance away."

"Certainly not. Ah! what is that below? I see some figures, and I hear voices, too. They are tired of it, and are leaving the mill."

From the position he occupied, Claude could see pretty well over a ledge to the meadows below, and, dark as it was, he saw that the little troop of soldiers were on the move from the spot. The rain still came down; but it was only in a light, scattering kind of way, now; so that beyond the great discomfort that the wet state of the meadows would be sure to inflict upon them, there was nothing in the condition of the weather that could be any valid excuse for the soldiers seeking further shelter, merely for the sake of shelter.

Their horses had been picketted close to the mill, under cover of some trees, which had in some measure, though not to a great extent, protected them from the storm. The saddles and housings of the steeds were saturated with water; but the soldiers set about drying them as well as they could with such means as were at their disposal.

Situated as the highwaymen were, the sounds of the voices of the men below came quite clearly up to them, and they had no difficulty in hearing every word that was uttered. Indeed, the sounds came to them in quite a startlingly distinct fashion, as if they had been close at hand.

"Who can lead to the high road by a short cut?" said the sergeant. "We shall be up to our necks in these meadows soon, if we don't get out of them."

"I know the way," said the corporal. "It is directly past yonder clump of trees, and then we are on level ground."

"Come on, then," said the sergeant. "We have done all we can; and so I shall make away to head-quarters again."

The soldiers followed the sergeant and corporal, and as they went, they swore dreadfully in their anger at the whole affair; for they looked forward to the serious job it would be in the cleaning line on the morrow after the draggling ride



CLAUDE AND THE PRINCESS DANCING A MINUET.

through those meadows before they could present themselves for inspection to their officers. Moreover, several of them had rather serious bruises from the fall they had experienced during the attempts to open the trap-door.

"They are gone," said Claude.

"The devil go with them!" said Turpin.

"Well, I think you are mistaken there," added Claude, "for I don't see the lawyer anywhere; and the old gentleman you have mentioned is more likely to stay behind and keep him company."

"But where can the lawyer be?" said Jack. "Surely nothing has happened to him in the mill?"

"There is no saying just yet," said Claude; "but the most likely thing is, that when he found there was likely to be anything in the shape of danger, he ran off, and left the soldiers to encounter it alone. He was certainly not with them when they came up so nearly to us just now."

"Do you think not?"

"Certainly; he would have said something if he had been. I am glad, by-the-by, that the soldier was saved from falling from top to bottom of the mill along with the balcony and its appendages."

"So am I," said Jack.

"And I, as it has turned out," said Dick; "although I doubt if they would have said as much concerning us. But what is that odd crackling noise that I hear? Just listen to it, Claude."

"A crackling noise is it?"

"Yes. There it is again."

"Ah, I hear it now quite plainly."

"And I, too," said Jack; "but I cannot think what it can possibly be."

They all three now listened with the most marked attention to the odd crackling noise that seemed to come from the lower part of the mill, and it is just possible that they mighthave listened to it for a still longer period than they did, without being able to come to anything like a just conclusion concerning it, but that a circumstance took place that had the effect of opening their eyes, both literally and metaphorically speaking, to the exact truth of what was going on.

A dull red light began to show itself in the air, and to impart a strange radiance to the old mill.

It was Jack who exclaimed—"Why, that is fire!"

The moment he pronounced the one word "Fire!" it gave to Claude Duval and Dick Turpin a clue to the whole mystery of the strange crackling noise that had so much puzzled them, and they cried out with one voice—

"The mill is on fire!"

This was a state of things that required the most prompt and decisive action, and Claude was upon his feet in a moment.

"We must get out of it," he cried, "as quickly as we can. It is all wood, and will burn like a match."

"Yes; but how?" said Jack, who, after leaning over the side of the roof they were on, rushed back coughing from a mouthful of dense smoke that he had inhaled.

"How?" cried Claude. "Why, the way we got here, to be sure."

"Always forgetting," said Jack, "that the little balcony and railings that helped us up here are now gone."

"But you don't mean to say, Jack, that we are to stay up here and be roasted in this infernal mill?"

"It would be a hard case."

"Rather," said Dick, "and one that I don't intend shall be mine if I can possibly help it."

"Never mind," said Claude. "Where is that rope that we brought with us? Who has it?"

"I have it," said Jack, "and four or five yards more to add to it, if they are at all likely to aid us; but if your idea is to descend by its aid, I think you will find it to go about half way, that is all."

"Half way is something."

"Yes, but not enough, Claude. I must confess, that I think we are rather in what may be called a fix here."

There was at this moment a loud crash, and from one side of the mill that had taken light, there came rushing up a monstrous flame, hissing and crackling against the wet wood-work.

"Here it comes," said Jack.

"It does indeed," said Dick. "I can feel the hot glow of it even now upon my face. Claude, what do you propose now?"

"Escape."

"Escape, is the word, but it seems one more easy to utter in the present state of affairs, than to carry out. I don't seem at all to like the position of things here."

"We are lost." said Jack.

"Not so," cried Claude. "I have tied one end of the rope securely to a strong iron ring that is here. Now, Jack, produce the supplementary piece of cord that you spoke of. Is it strong?"

"Here it is," said Jack. "I had it round my waist, in case of an emergency, as at times a bit of cord is of inestimable value · and as for its strength, it would hold us all three."

"Good."

Claude took the rope, and firmly tied it to the end of the piece he had already.

"That," he said, "with the other goes about half way down."

"How consoling!" said Jack.

"So that it leaves," added Claude, "only twenty five feet, or thereabouts, below the end of it."

"Ah!" said Jack, "a pleasant drop."

"Dick?"

"Yes, Claude. I know you have some idea of saving us all. What is it?"

"Lend me your coat!"

"My coat? Oh, to be sure. Yes—yes, my coat tied to the cord, and your coats tied to mine, will go the distance, or so near to it that the drop will be nothing at all to speak of. All's right! By Jove, we shall get the better of this bout. Jack, off with your coat, man, and I'll warrant we shall be on the ground, safe, in another five minutes."

There was not, in good truth, much time to spare now in the matter, for the flames had fairly laid hold of one side of the mill, and were roaring and crackling at a fearful rate. If there had not happened to have been such heavy rain recently, the whole building would, as Claude said, have blazed up like a match; but it took some time for the heat generated by the fire to dry the weather-boarding, of which the external sides of the building were composed.

It was to that circumstance alone that Claude aud his two friends upon that eventful occasion owed their lives.

"Quick! quick!" said Jack.

"Yes; steady and safe! All is well. Your coat, Jack."

"Here."

"That's it."

"Oh, Claude, I can feel the mill shake."

"The devil you can!" said Dick. "I didn't think that it had come to that just yet. How are you getting on, Claude?"

"Well."

Claude Duval would not allow himself to be hurried in tying the coats together. He felt how much would depend upon the ability and security with which he performed that part of the business; and he was resolved to do it well. It would be of little importance to gain a few moments in time, and to lose, as a consequence, everything in the inefficiency of the apparatus of escape.

Claude tied the coats together by the arms, and he found that he could do so with a feeling of perfect security, and then he flung them over the roof of the mill.

"Now, Jack," he said, "go."

"No."

"What do you mean by no? We will follow you."

"No; I will follow both of you."

"This is no time for nonsense," said Dick Turpin. "While you two are settling which shall go first, I will go; and when I get to the ground I can perhaps help you."

Dick, without another moment's hesitation, descended, and found that the coats brought him within a few feet of the damp ground by the side of the mill. Jack was firm in being the last, so Claude called out to Dick—

"Is it all right?"

"Quite," said Dick; and then Duval himself descended; and, although one of the coats tore a little, and he thought that the mill itself shook, he did reach the ground in safety: but he was much alarmed for the safety of his friend above.

"Safe! safe!" said Jack.

"Don't cry out till you get of the wood," said Claude; "or rather out of the mill."

"Well, but all is well now."

"I hope so. Come on, Jack. I have hold of the coats. Come steady, now, old friend. Slow and steady."

Claude Duval really had the greatest apprehensions that poor Jack would never reach the ground in safety, and yet, what to do in the world to aid him he really knew not.

There were two dangers to guard against.

In the first place, after the passage of himself and Dick down the rope and the coats, Claude Duval did not think they were anything so secure as they had been; and in the second place, he felt as certain as possibly he could be that the mill itself shook, and showed some symptoms of topping completely over. Should such a catastrophe as that happen, it would be likely enough to involve him, Claude, in destruction, as well as Jack. It was, truly, a moment of fearful suspense.

Jack came sliding slowly down.

"Steady, Jack!"

"Yes, Claude; yes. The rope is—is ——"

"What?"

"Only cracking."

Even as Jack spoke, the rope parted and down he came; but Claude was resolved to save him, and with great dexterity he, without actually catching him in his arms, broke his fall; so that what with the coats and that friendly interposition as well, Jack reached the ground without sustaining any injury at all.

"You are safe, Jack!"

"Quite. Thanks to you, Claude, otherwise I had been a dead man."

CHAPTER CCCXXXI.

THE FUNERAL CORTEGE ARRIVES JUST A LITTLE TOO LATE.

SCARCELY had Claude and his friends time to congratulate each other upon reaching the ground in safety, when a most singular spectacle met their eyes, and for a time transfixed them to the spot with astonishment.

Turning just round a corner of one of the outhouses belonging to the barley mill, came one of the most singular cavalcades that they had ever seen—a cavalcade, too, which at such a moment was of strange and significant moment.

First there came two men in long black clothes—such as are worn at funerals—and with hat-bands hanging down their backs, after the absurd fashion of undertakers' men. Immediately following them came one man, with a white cravat, similarly attired to the others; and then came four supporting a coffin, with a pall over it.

Following the coffin there were six mourners, who, if one might judge at all

from their appearance, were in a great state of affliction, for, according to the most approved mode among mourners, they each held a crumpled up white handkerchief to his mouth; for, strange to say, mourners at funerals always do hold their handkerchiefs to their mouths instead of their eyes, thus leading to the idea in some cases as though they were trying to smother their laughter, instead of stem the current of their grief for the departed.

Where on earth such a cavalcade as this had sprung from was the mystery, and in the dim light, cast by a lantern that was placed upon the coffin near to the head of it, they certainly looked extremely spectral and mysterious to Claude Duval and his two friends.

"Good gracious!" said Dick Turpin.

"This is surely our last moment," said Jack.

"Confound it, don't be frightened at a funeral," said Claude.

"The devil!" said Dick.

"If it be his funeral it's a good job, Dick, so don't put on such an appearance. Where are they all going, I wonder?"

The funeral cortege did not pause nor appear as if its members saw or paid the smallest attention to Claude Duval and his friends, but on it went past the door of the mill with a slow and solemn step, and then took a course towards one corner of the meadow.

The solemn and slowly moving figures—the dim spectral kind of light, and now and then an odd wailing noise that came upon the ears of the listeners, all combined to render the scene striking and picturesque in the extreme, while it invested it, too, with an aspect of terror, and was significant of thoughts of another world.

No doubt if it had depended upon Jack or Dick to stop the cortege of death, neither of them would have done so; but Claude was there, and he was really not a likely person to allow such a mysterious cavalcade to pass unquestioned.

"They are going," he said. "Let us follow."

"Oh, no—no!" said Jack.

"Well," said Dick, "I hardly know what to say."

"But I do," said Claude. "I hate to have anything to think about afterwards to puzzle me. I will follow them, I tell you. You can come with me both of you or not, as you feel inclined."

"If you go," said Dick, "I go."

"No—no," cried Jack again.

"Then you stay here, Jack."

"But, Claude——"

"Nay, Jack, I know as well as possible what you would say. All your superstitious fears are fully awakened in this matter, and you who would look upon possible danger as nothing, would shrink from interfering with yonder cavalcade; but I have made up my mind to it."

"Come on," said Dick.

"I will; and be they ghosts or living beings like ourselves, they shall find that I am not one to be trifled with with impunity."

As he spoke, Claude Duval dashed forward, followed clasely by Dick; and Jack, rather than be left alone probably, likewise followed them.

When Claude Duval got a little nearer to the funeral procession, he called out, in a clear, bold voice—

"Halt! Stop, I say. You do not pass on unquestioned."

No attention was paid to him, and the funeral passed on at the same solemn pace.

Claude would not be baffled, but passing the cortege, he turned abruptly and faced the two men at the head of the procession with a pistol in his hand, saying as he did so—

"Advance another step and I will test the vitality of some of you. I am a man of my word."

The procession stopped, and the two men held up their arms in an attitude

deprecatory of his interference with them. One in a deep hollow voice spoke—"Rash man, forbear! The valour that would be great as against those who are mortal as yourself is useless when directed against us. Depart in peace!"

"Not till I know who and what you are."

"Beware—beware!" said the other man, and in that deep and solemn voice Claude could well imagine the one who had uttered the same word at the old mill.

"Thank you, my friend," he said. "I heard you say 'Beware' once before, and I don't know that anything came of it; so I don't mean to let you go on."

"Nor I," said Dick.

"Unless," said Jack, who by that time was by the side of Claude and Turpin. "Unless you declare who and what you are."

"There is one who may declare it," said the one with the wand, as he slowly advanced, "but we may not. Let the dead declare the secrets of the dead to these men. If they survive not, it is not the fault of our erring souls. That will not sit heavy upon our frail natures. Let the dead speak!"

Those who carried the coffin now set it down, and one lifted the lantern from it. Then as Claude and his friends looked on with interest, and Jack at least of the three with alarm, there was a strange commotion under the pall.

Jack stepped back.

"Hold!" said Claude in a whisper. "Don't let them see fear or hesitation, Jack."

Jack advanced again, but he shook with agitation as he looked upon what was passing.

The pall became each moment more and more agitated, and those who had been bearing the coffin shrunk down almost to the ground, as if they dreaded what was about to take place, while the others forming the funeral procession knelt down upon the moist grass and uttered low wailing sounds.

The man with the wand spoke.

"The body of the murderer cannot rest," he said. "It lies in unconsecrated earth, and till the great day when the sons of man shall arise and look again upon the light of day, will his frail dust agitate the folds of the covering that should hide it from mortal view. It is in vain that, chased through a world, the skeleton form is brought to a resting-place. It cannot rest—it cannot rest."

The agitation beneath the pall still continued.

"Claude?" said Jack.

"Well."

"This is the spectre funeral."

"You don't say so?"

"Oh, Claude, do not oppose this fact, for it is one. The body that lies in that coffin is, without doubt, that of the brother who killed his brother. The body of the fratricide cannot rest. Oh, let us away from this dreadful scene. I implore you to fly from it."

"Not yet."

"But, Claude—Claude, and you, Dick, too—only consider!"

"Only do you consider, Jack, if you please, that I am really very much interested, and if you will do so, I am sure that you will not ask me to leave this place. Come—come, be quiet, that is all I ask of you."

Jack saw that it was useless to contend with Duval upon this point, as he had made up his mind to stay, so he only retired a step or two, and in a crouching attitude, awaited the result of the extraordinary scene.

"You see," said the man with the wand.

"Oh, yes," said Claude.

"Depart, then, in peace."

"Thank you. I would rather stay."

"Oh, fool—fool!"

"Upon my life, you are very complimentary. Allow me to return it, by saying that in my opinion you are an ass."

"Ah! Dread my vengeance!"

"I won't."

The agitation in the coffin under the pall increased each moment, and the pall itself was shaken violently to and fro. The man with the wand raised it in the air, and muttered some words that were not intelligible to Claude, and then he touched the coffin with the end of it. The mourners raised another wailing cry, and the curtain of the pall began to rise up, and it was quite clear that some figure in the form of humanity was rising from the coffin and taking the pall with it as it did so.

The scene was rather an exciting one, and had it not been that terror really at the moment deprived him of the use of his limbs, the probability is, that Jack would have justified all that could have been expected from the affair, and taken to flight.

Neither Dick Turpin nor Claude Duval, though, were so affected.

"Beware! beware!" said the man with the wand—"beware! No mortal eye has ever looked upon this sight and left the brain of the sad spectator free from the wild madness that such a spectacle must produce."

"Very good," said Claude. "This is a fellow of some education, Dick. He uses very tolerable language."

Dick was silent. Without affecting him as it had done Jack, the scene certainly did in a manner take a hold of his imagination, and, perhaps, it did the same in a lesser degree to Claude, only he would not show it.

The figure in the coffin still rose up under the pall higher and higher; and being carefully covered by the black velvet of that funeral covering, it was left entirely to the imagination to conceive what it could possibly be like, and the effect of it so rising was truly shocking.

Up—up it went, till it had got to such a height, that the pall on its edge rested upon the ground, and finally upon the coffin, and then it paused; and the man with the wand said—

"Oh, enough—enough! Rest—oh, rest, perturbed spirit! Sufficient of thy awful presence is now apparent. Rest—oh, rest!"

"I beg to differ from you, my friend," said Claude Duval.

The man with the wand looked sternly at Claude.

"Mortal, begone!"

"Oh, dear, no. That gentleman under the pall has quite roused my curiosity, as he raised himself, and I don't intend to go till I have had a good look at him; so, as it is beginning to rain again, the sooner he indulges me the better."

"Claude, are you mad?" said Jack.

"No, Jack; but you be quiet."

"Let me speak to you in kindness," said the man with the wand. "Pass on, and do not further interfere with this awful ceremony. It can lead you to no good, be you what you may; and it is possible that to your dying day you would repent of a foolish obstinacy in such a case."

"I am very much obliged to you for your kind advice; but I am one of the most obstinate fellows living."

"He is—he is!" said Jack.

"And," added Claude Duval, "when I take a thing into my head, there is no such thing as getting it out again."

The man with the wand muttered a curse, and then he called out—

"Arms—arms!"

The six mourners upon this advanced along with the men who had borne the body, and Claude saw that they had pistols in their hands; so he stepped back a pace or two, as he said—

"So—so, it has come to this, has it? This is the very first time that I ever

heard of ghosts who used gunpowder; but if you have a mind for anything of that sort, I and my two friends here are well armed."

"D—n it!" said a voice, "I'm nearly smothered!" and then the figure under the pall suddenly threw it off, and sprang out of the coffin, exhibiting to the eyes of Claude and his friends a very ordinary-looking man in his shirt sleeves, and with a very red face.

"It's all up," said the man with the wand. "One word—Are you officers?"

"Officers?" said Claude. "To be sure not."

"Then what the devil are you?"

"Permit me, first of all, as your conduct and appearance is much more mysterious than that of me and my friends, to ask you that question."

"Smashers!" said the man with the wand.

"Oh, coiners of base money?"

"Not at all base when it goes; but base enough when any one won't take it. So now you know all about it, and, perhaps, you will say who you are?"

"I will. In the first place, my name is Duval!"

"What, Duval the highwayman?"

"Well, they do call me a highwayman, I rather think."

"Hilloa, comrades! it's all right. Oh, my eye! if we had but known this before, what a trouble we might have spared ourselves! Why, it's Claude Duval, the great highwayman, after all!"

The strange assemblage crowded round Duval, and looked at him with interest.

CHAPTER CCCXXXII.

DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS MEET WITH AN ADVENTURE AT BERRYMEAD PRIORY.

Jack was now so thoroughly ashamed of the fears that he had shown in the matter, that he quite shrank back, and Duval had to call him to persuade him to appear at all.

"Come—come, Jack, come forward, and you, Dick, too."

"I'm here," said Turpin. "Upon my word, this is a good joke."

"And who may you be, sir?" said the man with the wand, who was evidently the chief or leader of the party.

"They call me Richard Turpin!" said Dick, as he slightly raised his hat, and bowed.

"Dick Turpin!" shouted the coiners. "Then who is the other?"

"Sixteen-string Jack, at your service," said Jack, advancing, and putting on as good a face as he could on the matter.

"Yes," said Claude, "and you did manage to frighten Jack."

"No, I was only pretending."

"Oh! oh!" laughed everybody; and Claude and Dick looked at each other and laughed; but Jack pretended now, if he had not before, for he affected not to be at all aware that what he had said had been received with any degree of incredulity, although it was so apparent that such was the case.

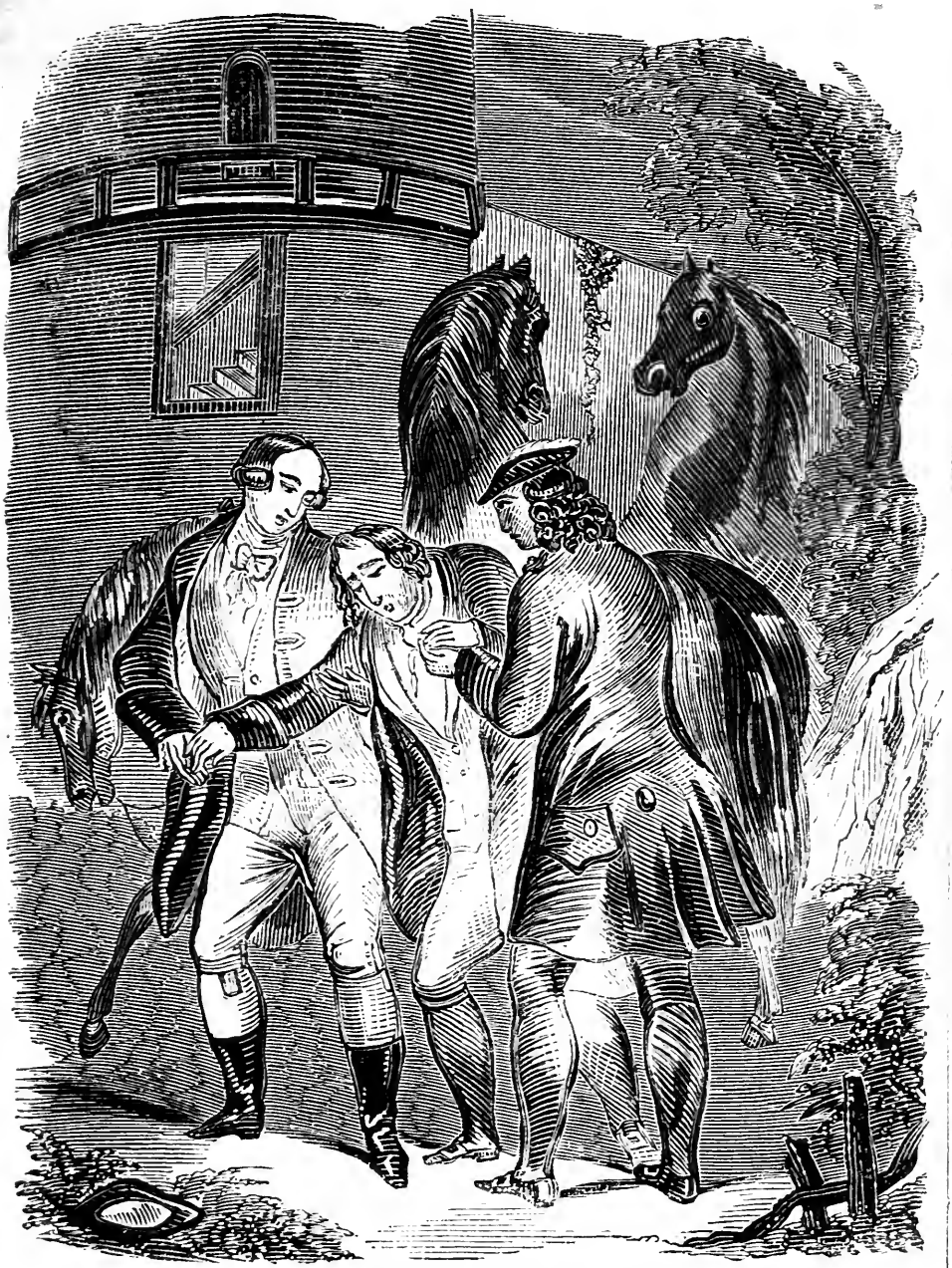
"I can assure you, gentlemen," said the man with the wand, "that if we had had the least idea such illustrious visitors as yourselves were in the mill, we should have tried to do the honours of it better than we did; but we mistook you for three officers from Bow-street."

"Nothing could very well," said Claude, "be a greater mistake than that, I take it. But I suppose now that the mill is doomed?"

"As how, sir?"

"Why, it is burning."

"Oh, no. We put that out. As soon as we found that the flames were get-



THE TWO FRIENDS BEARING JACK INTO THE DESERTED MILL.

ting to a height, we managed to quench them, and the old mill is safe enough now. It is stronger a great deal than it looks. And now, as the rain is coming down again, let me beg of you to come back to it, and we will try what we can do in the way of hospitality."

"Well," said Claude, "I am willing, for, to tell the truth, there are some matters connected with what we saw and heard in the place that I cannot understand. Of course, we know that all was delusion, but we don't know how the delusion was managed."

"You shall know all."

"Thank you; I and my friends much wish it."

"Of course, we have no secrets from you now, Claude Duval, nor from your friends, Turpin or Jack; and we will show you our magic-lantern."

"Your what?"

"Magic-lantern, by the aid of which we can easily produce the appearance of what kind of ghost we like."

"It is all explained, then," said Claude. "If that was the way it was done, you need not say another word about it. Do you hear that, Jack?"

"I do."

"And you, too, Dick?"

"Oh, yes; and I may say that I suspected it before. The effects that so surprised us could very well be produced by such means; and I do believe that a great many of the capital ghost stories that we hear are to be accounted for by the powers which those who are acquainted with science, and who are in possession of scientific apparatus, have over those who are ignorant of such subjects, and who have no such means by them."

"No doubt."

"But still," said the man with the wand, "I hope you will re-enter the mill, although there is nothing now to explain to you."

"Yes; lead on. But what, in the name of all that's troublesome, made you hit upon this affair of the funeral?"

"Why, the fact is, we had a great quantity of coined money in the mill, and our object was to get it away without suspicion; and when we got up this funeral set out, we still had our doubts about whether we had put out the fire or not. Those doubts are now resolved, and the mill is saved. We thought that you had set it alight to burn us out."

"No. It was the soldiers."

"Oh, we can easily understand all that now; but our suspicion was that you were Bow-street officers, and that you had a magistrate with you, who had procured the assistance of a company of soldiers, in case we should feel inclined to resist you."

"We have been all, then, going at cross purposes it seems."

"It does, indeed."

"But there was a skeleton hand and arm," said Jack. "I saw it myself appear down the trap-door. What do you say to that?"

"Oh, this is it."

The man dived his hand into his pocket as he spoke, and produced the very hand and arm that Jack mentioned, and held it so close to him, that the long bony fingers appeared to clasp his, Jack's, wrist.

"Murder!" said Jack; "murder! Don't put it near me."

"Oh, well, I didn't know you were afraid of such things."

"I ain't afraid of them. But—but—"

"But he don't like them," added Claude.

"Many people share with you the dislike," said the man with the wand, as he replaced the hand and arm of the skeleton in his pocket. "I suppose it had a pretty good effect from below?"

"Very good, indeed," said Claude. "But you must not judge of my old friend, Jack, by what he says or does now, for he has had a serious fall from his horse, and has been very much shaken, indeed; and is, I have no doubt, now struggling against the pain of his hurts upon that occasion."

Jack felt grateful to Claude for saying this much, as it in a manner saved him from the reproach of cowardice, which, otherwise, might to some degree have been attached to him.

They all now re-entered the old mill, which, although it had had a good warming from the flames, had yet in its principal parts escaped the destruction that at one time had really seemed to be inevitable.

"There is a story connected with this mill," said the man with the wand, "which enables us easily to frighten any of the country people who come to it."

"We know all about it," said Dick. "It is of the wo brothers, one of whom murdered the other here?"

"It is so. And so, every now and then we take care hat such sights should be seen here, and such sounds be heard, as shall keep up the delusion that the place is haunted by the spirits of the murderer and his victim."

"Then it is not so haunted?" said Jack.

Claude gave him a nudge with his elbow, as he whispered—

"Don't ask such questions, Jack."

"Why, no," said the man; "you did not suppose it was, did you, now, really?"

"Oh, no—no."

"Of course not. Confound these fellows of soldiers! they have not left us a table or a chair in the place, I declare. And how it does smoke, too. Fuff! It is enough to smother one. What on earth have they done to the chimney? The explosion of the few ounces of gunpowder that were put into it could not have stopped it up. It ought, on the contrary, to have cleared it."

Claude laughed.

"You have us to thank for the condition of the chimney," he said. "We tried to smoke the soldiers out of the mill by stopping it up with some old sacks from above, but they can easily be moved."

The man laughed, as he cried out—

"You, Jem Brown, go up and clear the top of the chimney. You hear that it is stopped with some sacks."

"Yes, Mister Blue," said the man.

"What an odd name," said Jack to Claude. "His name is Blue."

"That is to show that I'm anything but green," said the man, who overheard Jack's whisper.

"Excuse me," said Jack, "I meant no offence."

"And none is taken. Of course, Blue is not my name; but a man must call himself something; so that is short, and answers the purpose here quite as well as any other; so you will be so good as to know me as Mr. Blue."

"Very well," said Claude. "Ah, I can see the smoke going up the chimney again all right. The mill will soon be clear enough."

"It will," said Mr. Blue; "and in the meantime allow me to offer you such refreshment as I can command. Come, my men, do the best you can in honour of our illustrious visitors upon this occasion."

Thus urged, the coiners, for whose society, however, Claude Duval by no means evinced the greatest longing in the world, set about propping up, as well as they could, one of the broken tables, and then they spread the pall upon it by way of a cloth, which made Jack look rather askance at it, for he did not exactly like the idea of eating or drinking on such a funeral-looking emblem as that.

From a concealed cupboard, then, the coiners produced various good things in the eating and drinking way, so that the table was soon well spread; and then Mr. Blue said—

"I'm afraid I cannot say sit down, for those fellows of soldiers have broken all the chairs, but we must just manage the best way we can. Ah, that will do—that will do."

One of the coiners had managed to lay a flat piece of board across two of the broken chairs, and so to extemporise a very tolerable form, upon which Claude and his friends could rest themselves with ease, and they at once did so, and fell to work upon the eatables and drinkables before them.

Mr. Blue called to his gang of coiners, who seemed to be completely under his control, to come to the table, and the whole party was soon quite jolly and as friendly as if they had known each other for twenty years at the very least, instead of only half an hour.

"It gives me great pleasure," said Mr. Blue, as he rose with a glass in his hand. "It gives me great pleasure to propose to this highly talented and

honourable company, the health of our illustrious visitor, Claude Duval, whose name in the annals of adventure must be familiar to you all as one who, under all conditions——"

"Amen!" said a voice.

Mr. Blue dropped the glass that he had been holding by its rather slender stem between his thumb and fore-finger, and looked around him in surprise.

"What is that?" he said, "oh! what is that?"

The coiners all looked at him, and so did Claude and his friends, and then Jack said, in rather a tremulous voice—

"I don't see any good, now, in playing off any of your tricks to try to frighten us."

"It is not with my good will," said Mr. Blue, "that anything of the sort is done."

"But, there was something."

"Yes, there was. Somebody said Amen!"

"Amen!" said the voice again.

They all now sprang from their seats, and Mr. Blue, in a very angry voice, cried out—

"Which of you is playing this foolish trick? I won't have it!"

"It's none of us," said the coiners all in a breath. "It's none of us."

Mr. Blue himself looked a little put out of the way, but he managed to get over his surprise in a few moments, and then he said—

"Well—well, I suppose it is nothing, after all."

"We all heard it," said one.

"And so did we," said Claude.

Dick smiled, and Mr. Blue looked rather suspiciously at him, as he said, in a tone of reproach—

"Ah, Turpin, so it was you who, after all, was playing us this little trick?"

"Not I."

"Then, I don't know what to make of it. But come what may, I will finish the toast that I was about, with another glass, as that one is broken; so now again I say, that if the devil himself—"

"Oh, lor!" said the voice again.

The coiners looked at each other with apprehension, and it was quite evident, from the expression upon their faces, that they had nothing to do with the sounds that disturbed the harmony of the feast.

"This is quite inexplicable," said Mr. Blue. "I cannot make it out. Where did the noise come from?"

"There!" cried half a dozen voices, and as many fingers were all at once pointed to one corner of the spacious apartment, in which there was a quantity of straw. "There!"

Dick laughed again.

"Ah, Turpin," said Blue, "you know something of this, I am certain."

Dick Turpin made no answer to this supposition, but Mr. Blue at once went to a corner of the room and got a toasting-fork that hung there, which he brandished over his head, saying—

"If any one be crouched there among the straw, I will give him a hint to come out."

With this, Blue stepped up to the straw, and gave two or three such well-directed thrusts with the toasting-fork among it, that a voice yelled out—

"Murder! Oh, don't! Murder! Oh—oh! Put me in some cool place, do, and I will give you lots of advice for nothing. Oh, murder!"

There was a great commotion among the straw, when Mr. White, the lawyer, who had been completely forgotten by Claude Duval, rolled on to the floor.

"Oh, spare me!" he cried. "Oh, dear—oh dear! If you are the devil, pray recollect that I have done your work for a good many years in this world, and you ought to have some mercy upon me."

CHAPTER CCCXXXIII.

MR. WHITE MAKES RATHER AN IMPORTANT REVELATION UNKNOWINGLY.

When Claude Duval and Jack saw the attorney, and heard how he bawled out his appeal for mercy, they joined Dick in a roar of laughter, in which the coiners soon joined, when they saw there was really no danger.

"Laugh—laugh, ye fiends!" cried the lawyer, as he discumbered his face from the straw, "I appeal to your master, the devil, himself."

Upon this, they only laughed more, and Claude, turning to Dick, said——

"You recollected this fellow, but really I did not."

"Oh, yes," said Dick. "The moment he said, 'Amen' I knew his voice again."

"Gentlemen," said Mr. White, "allow me to remark, that, although even in such a place as this, to which I have been blown by a very unexpected explosion of a quantity of gunpowder, I yet hope that you will feel disposed to treat me with liberality and respect."

"Certainly," said Mr. Blue. "Who are you?"

"John Doubleday White, Esq."

"And what are you?"

"Well, I suppose, these questions are matters of form in these courts, for, of course, you know very well, gentlemen fiends, who and what I am; but I do not at all wish to be contumacious or unpolite, so I admit at once that I am an attorney."

"A lawyer!"

"Yes, commonly and vulgarly called a lawyer, which, I suppose, accounts for my being here, though I must confess I never believed there was such a place at all till now, as there was no evidence of the fact that I could ever find concerning it."

"And, pray, where do you suppose yourself to be, Mr. White?"

"Don't mention it; but it is commonly considered to be a very warm place, that is, down below—Hem!"

"Why, you don't mean to say you take this for—— Eh?"

"I—do—Hem!"

Another roar of laughter from the coiners awakened the echoes of the old mill, and Mr. White said, with a dubious look—

"You don't mean to tell me that I am mortal, do you? Laugh—laugh, you finds! Oh, dear, no!"

"Certainly not," said Blue; "you are quite right, sir."

"Ah, I knew it; but still I must say that, considering the place has the reputation of being rather a warm climate, I don't find it very oppressive just now; and if it should be no warmer, I—oh, lor!—oh, murder! Don't do that again. Oh, dear!—oh, dear!"

One of the coiners, upon finding that Mr. White conceived himself to be in a certain place of a hot description, had crept behind him with a lighted piece of stick, and held it against his lateral anatomy until the flame reached his skin, and caused him to give a most alarming jump, and to utter the exclamatory expression we have recorded.

"Who, in the name of all that is odd," said Blue, "is this person?"

"We know but little of him," said Claude.

"And that little," added Dick Turpin, "is, I am sorry to say, not at all to his advantage."

"Oh, dear!—oh, dear! Good devils, have some sort of consideration for a poor fellow, who, although he always——"

"Be quiet," said Blue.

"Yes, sir, if you please; but I was going to tell you all."

"Perhaps," said one of the coiners, "it would be as well to let him go on with his tale?"

"Oh, sir," said White, "I beg your pardon. I have not got that length yet. Your own tale, I suppose, sir, you mean, humbly. I am only an attorney, sir, if you please, and not a devil."

Claude and his friends had to turn aside to conceal their laughter upon this occasion, for it was quite evident that poor Mr. White was in a very sad state of mental confusion with regard to his whereabout in particular, add things in general. The explosion of gunpowder in the chimney of the old mill, which had prostrated him in the first instance, had so thoroughly and confusedly impressed him with the idea that he had gone direct to that region where such as he are supposed eternally to luxuriate, that nothing of an ordinary character sufficed to get him rid of the rather extraordinary notion.

The coiners were excessively pleased with the state of mind that Mr White was in, and they consulted with each other, not as to the means of awakening him to a sense of his real position, but as to the best way of thoroughly strengthening him in his delusion.

Blue whispered to Claude.

"I suppose it is in pursuit of you, and not of us, that this lawyer came here?"

"Precisely so."

"Well, then, you can do as you please in the matter. Only say what you propose, and my men will assist you in it."

"Very well, do so, and I will take care that if he should prevaricate in any way, some means shall be resorted to to convince him that that is a policy which here brings with it rather a prompt and, perhaps, uncomfortable retribution. Leave that to me."

"I will."

Claude now stepped up to Mr. White, and Blue, with a look of gratification, whispered to one of his gang of coiners who went to a corner of the room, and after some seeking, returned with a pair of iron nippers, or pincers, which he handed to Blue, who then stationed himself exactly behind Mr. White, who had been lifted from the floor and placed upon a chair, to which the coiners had bound him tightly.

Claude spoke to him in a deep clear, distinct voice.

"Your name is White, and you are an attorney?"

"I—I am. Oh, dear! I am."

"Silence!"

"I only——"

"Peace, I say, or else it will be the worse for you."

"A great deal the worse," said Blue, as with the pincers he gave Mr. White a rap that made him jump again.

"I am a dead man!" said White.

"I know that," said Claude. "Now tell me. Whom came you to seek to the old mill?"

"Claude Duval, and the other thieves," said Mr. White.

This was a sincerity of expression that Blue would have rewarded by a rather severe pinch, but Claude motioned him not to do so; and as Mr. White saw him, he thought that it was some conjuration that was being practised against him, and of which he would soon feel the effects, and he groaned accordingly.

"You say you came here in search of Claude Duval and others. Who are the others?"

"One is Dick Turpin."

"And who else?"

"There is another, most gracious gentleman fiend, but I don't know who he is, so I cannot tell you. You, however, know, without a doubt."

"I do."

"Of course you do. But situated as I am now, that is all past, and there is no further interest in the affairs of the world that I am upon and have belonged to."

"None whatever. Have you any papers or documents about you?"

"Yes, a few."

"Give them up."

"With great pleasure. I—I—that is, if you please, of course I will give them up. Here is a little packet of letters and other matters, only interesting to those whom they may concern. Hem! I have nothing else."

From the manner of Mr. White, the man who had the rather odd name of Blue, thought that he had something else that he wanted to conceal, so he gave him a nip with the pincers, as he said—

"Liar and slave! You need not attempt to deceive us."

Mr. White gave a yell of agony, and would have bounded up from the chair only that he was tied tolerably firmly to it, and then, while the tears came to his eyes, he said—

"Oh—oh, you might as well have said that you wanted to see young Mr. Beachem's letter, without pinching a piece out of the small of my back at the same time. Here it is. Oh—oh, here is the letter."

Claude Duval had not the remotest idea of what Mr. White meant by an allusion to young Mr. Beachem's letter, but he did not let him see that the name and the existence of such a letter was to him perfectly new, so he merely held out his hand, saying—

"Give it to me."

"It is here, worthy sir—it is here; and there is my memorandum of private instructions, likewise, if you please."

Claude Duval took the memorandum, and read as follows—

"Mr. White,—You will have no difficulty at all in finding Berrymead Priory, as it used to be called, in Acton. It is now, as I told you, a nunnery, and there you will find Alicia. The letter that you have, you will give to the Lady Abbess, who will find from that that we entirely trust you in the matter, and that if you say that the deed is properly signed, we shall be satisfied. After that, she has her further instructions regarding Alicia.

"It is very probable that you will be introduced to Father Garvey, and if so, you will find him a very amiable, pleasant man, indeed. He is the confessor of the young ladies at the nunnery, and quite in our interest, as he is to get a thousand pounds wholly to himself.

"As soon as you have successfully carried out this affair, you will be so good as to come to London again, and let me and my father and mother know, when the reward that we promised you will be paid to you without fail.

"Till then, believe me to be yours truly, "B."

When Claude Duval had read this letter through, he was not much wiser than before, but he could well understand that some villany was intended; and he said, in a cold, severe tone to Mr. White—

"You must tell all."

"Yes, gracious dev—I mean, sir, I will tell all. You see, Miss Alicia Horton is the niece of Sir John Beachem, who is a catholic baronet, and because she will not marry his son, Henry Beachem, they popped her into the nunnery; and there they intended to force her to sign a deed conveying half her property to the nunnery and the other half to themselves, as she will be of age directly; and the abbess assists them, of course, and so does the confessor, and the only person they are afraid of is young John Field, who is in love with her, and whom she loves, and who is a gentleman, although not a rich one."

"How much money has the girl, Alicia Horton?"

"About fifty thousand pounds. Her mother was Sir John's sister, and she married an officer in the Indian army, who was poor at that time, but to whom a rich relation left that sum. He was killed in battle, and the mother died of grief for his loss, leaving her child, Alicia, to the care of her uncle and aunt, Sir John and Lady Beachem, and their whole object has been to force her to marry their son, Henry; but she loves John Field, and so refuses, and, therefore, they are trying what I told you."

"But——"

Before Claude could say more, two of the coiners who had been keeping watch on the outside of the mill came in, dragging with them a man, whom they had made prisoner, and who, in a strongly marked Irish accent, called out—

"Och, then, murder, you villains! Bedad, an' what is it myself has done that I should be kilt entirely any way, and my young master murdered in cold blood?"

"What is this?" said Blue.

"We found, sir," said one of the scouts, "two men lurking about the meadow, and thinking them spies, we tried to frighten them away, but one of them knocked down Joe Ellis, so we hit him with our cudgels and he lies outside. This is the other."

"Lies outside, does he, you spalpeen?" said the Irishman. "It's yourself that lies inside, Oh, the poor master, who is only looking for the nunnery and lost his way, to be took up for a spy!"

"The nunnery?" said Claude. "What nunnery, and who is your master?"

"Bedad, then, I'm Dennis, his man, and me master is Mr. Field, and he is looking for the nunnery, where the swate darlint, Miss Alicia, is after being smuggled up."

"Is this possible?"

"It's myself that can't say that, but by the holy poker it's true."

"Follow me, some of you."

Claude and Dennis and his friends and some of the coiners rushed out into the open air, and there, by the aid of a torch, they found a young man, elegantly dressed, lying in a state of insensibility on the ground

"This deeply interests me," said Claude Duval, "I fear that, quite unwittingly, we have stopped one whom we would readily have permitted to proceed upon his course; and yet, after all, it may be for the best, for all we know to the contrary."

"It is so," said Jack.

"I am of the same opinion," said Turpin; "and if we can but rouse this young man to a state of consciousness, we may be able to do much more for him in the furtherance of his object than he could by any possibility have done for himself."

"We will try it, at all events," said Claude. "Come, Mr. Dennis, you be so good as to hold your master from the damp ground, and we will get some water and dash it in his face."

"Bedad, it's myself will do that same."

Claude Duval was much afraid that young John Field, as the attorney had named him, was severely injured, and so, taking him right up in his arms, he carried him into the mill.

"It's a strong chap that, by gor!" said Dennis, "for the master, though he isn't as fat as a piece of bacon without any lean, is heavy enough."

Mr. White looked at all that was happening with the dreamy look of a man who is only half awake, and when he saw Claude Duval come in with the insensible form of young Field, he said—

"Oh, dear, there's another! I wonder if that's a professional man that they have caught this time. Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

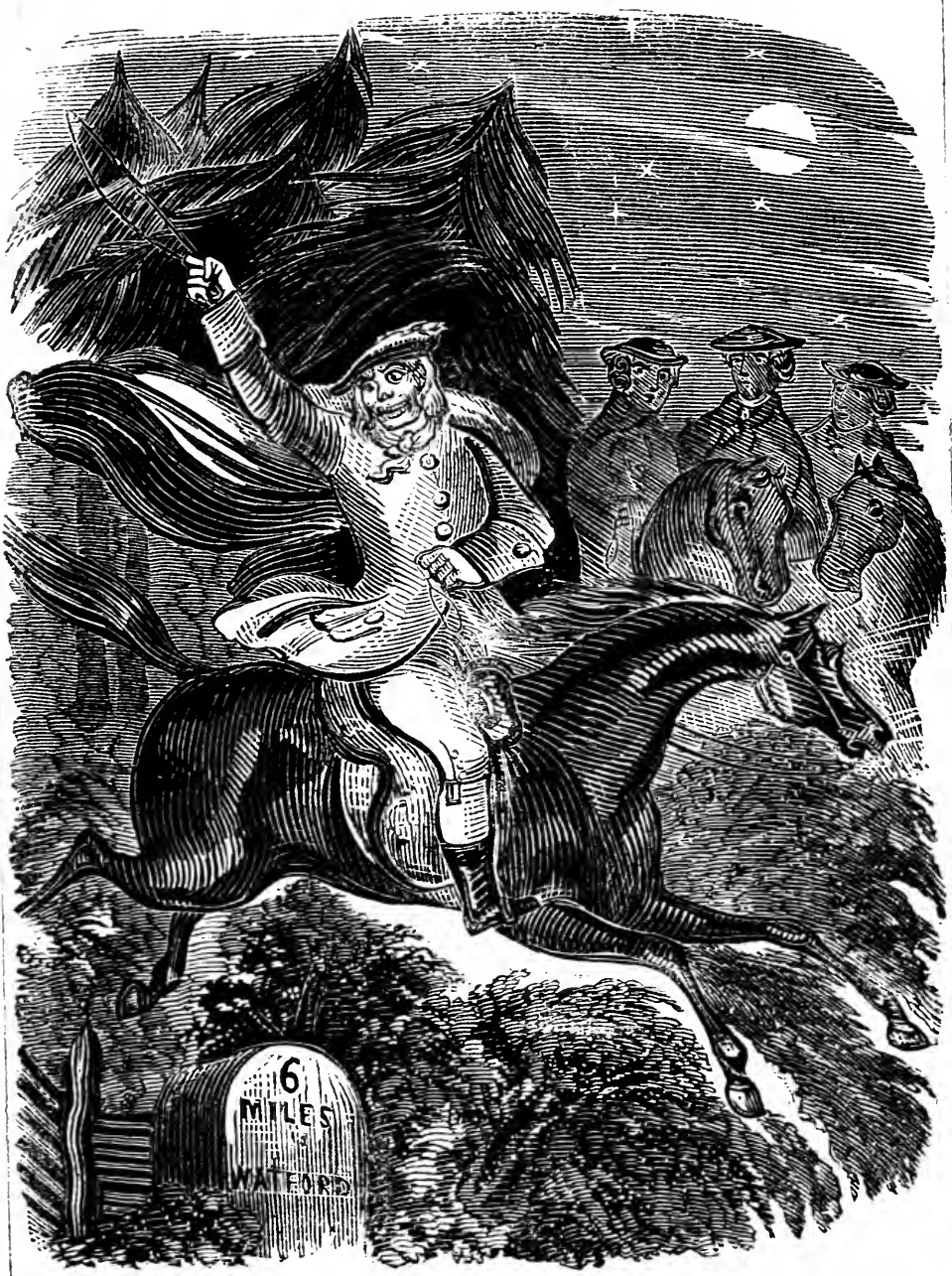
Claude asked for some wine, and Mr. Blue, from the mysterious cupboard, which really seemed to contain something of everything, produced some, and a little had the effect of reviving Mr. Field, who opened his eyes and looked about him.

"Are you a professional man?" said Mr. White.

"Be quiet," said Claude. "Ask no questions."

"Bedad, then, he ain't quite dead, though he is kilt," said Dennis. "It's how do you feel yourself now, Mr. Field?"

"Field—Field?" said Mr. White. "Oh, dear, who would have thought of his coming here!"



THE ADVENTURERS ALARMED ON BEHOLDING THE SKELETON HORSEMAN.

CHAPTER CCCXXXIV.

TAKES A GLANCE AT BERRYMEAD PRIORY, ACTON, AT EARLY DAWN.

It was quite evident that Mr. White, attorney-at-law, thought every one who was brought into the mill were consigned to the keeping of a certain elderly gentleman in the infernal regions.

Hence was it that, although the name of Field had struck him as not exactly belonging to his party, he thought he, too, had found a home in the infernal regions for some act or action which he, Mr. White, was not cognizant.

"Do you mean to say, sir," he said, addressing the young man, who was now fast recovering from the state of stupor into which a blow upon the head with a bludgeon had thrown him. "Do you mean to say, sir, that your name is Field?"

"It is."

"John Field?"

"Yes, John is my name."

"Oh, dear, then perhaps you are the very individual who was looking after a certain Miss Alicia Horton, as aforesaid?"

"Alica Horton!" cried the young man, starting to his feet. "What have you to say of her? If aught that it will give me joy to hear, speak quickly; but—but if your news be sad, it is better that you speak it not at all."

"Well, it don't much matter to either of us, now, sir," groaned Mr. White, "does it?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, situated as we are, you know, sir—oh, dear, in such a place as this, you know, sir, where, if you are fond of a good roaring fire, I suppose it may always be had—eh?"

"Are you some madman."

"I don't think so, but I believe sir, we are both in——"

"Silence!" said Claude, who had only allowed the attorney to go this far, in order that he might be certain of the identity of the young gentleman as the lover of Alicia. "Silence, Mr. White; you are not yet permitted to speak, except in answer to a question."

"Yes, but—"

"I warn you. You will find yourself in the centre of the lake of burning brimstone, if you don't be quiet."

Upon this, Mr. White was so deeply affected, that over he went backwards, chair and all.

Young Field looked at Claude inquiringly, as much as to say, "What is the meaning of all this strange talk?" and then Duval said to him, in too low a tone to reach the ears of Mr. White—

"Sir, are you sufficiently recovered, do you think, to take an active part in any enterprise?"

"Oh, yes, if it concerns Alicia Horton."

"It does so."

"Then, I pray, sir, that you may consider me as quite well."

"Stop a bit. How came you in this neighbourhood at all?"

"I will tell you presently. I received an anonymous note, saying, that Alicia was a prisoner in Berrymead Priory, which is at the corner of a lane close to Acton, and I set off at once for the place, and my servant, Dennis, here—"

"That's myself," said Dennis.

"He thought that by going across the fields we should save a great extent of road; but, as is commonly the case when people try to take a near cut to any place where they are not well acquainted with the country, we lost ourselves, and were attacked in the fields by two men, one of whom struck me on the head. I know no more."

"Sir," said Mr. Blue, "llow me to say, how deeply I regret that my men should have made the mistake of thinking you an enemy."

"Your men? Who and what are you?"

"That, sir, permit me to say, is a secret that I must still keep to myself, for the present, if you please."

"Pardon me. Nothing can be further from my intention than to seek to intrude upon your secrets."

"Not a doubt of that, sir; and I can only add, that if this gentleman," alluding to Claude, "thinks proper to interfere in your affairs, or is of opinion that any effectual assistance can be rendered to you, I shall be most willing to aid him to the extent of my abilities in the matter."

"I am deeply obliged."

"I do think proper," said Claude. "From what I have heard, I think that it is our duty to aid you, sir."

"What, in the name of Heaven, have you heard?" said Mr. Field. "All this so amazes me, that I may well doubt, even now, if I am in my right senses. For Heaven's sake, sir, tell me if you know anything concerning Alicia Horton, for it is to her your speech seems to refer."

"Small blame to me," said Dennis, "if I don't think so too."

"Peace—oh, peace!"

"Peas is it you are after wishing for, sir? Bedad, me grandfather, who was one of the ould rale stock, and descended from the ould kings of Munster, had as illigant a crop of peas as you would wish to see, and one day he—"

"Dennis, I wish to hear this gentleman," said Mr. Field.

"Oh, well, I—oh!"

Dennis was silent, and then Claude said—

"You love Alicia Horton. Her aunt and uncle, she being an orphan and possessed of considerable property, wish her to wed their son, and her cousin, Henry Beachem; she loves you, and, therefore, refuses to wed him, and they, in revenge, and being solely actuated in the whole matter by the grossest cupidity, have placed her in a convent."

"Yes—yes, all that is true."

"Well, your object is to get her away from it."

"It is."

"And to marry her."

"Delightful thought! Oh, if I could but call Alicia mine, I should be the happiest of human beings; and I think, too, she would be happy in my care, for I would strive to make her so."

"No doubt of it."

"But, believe me, sir, whoever you may be, that I am not actuated by any motive connected with the property. If she had not one farthing in the world, she would be as dear to me as she is now, and I should still consider her as a priceless treasure."

There was such a tone of heartfelt sincerity about the young gentleman as he spoke, that it would have been quite impossible to doubt him for a moment, and Claude replied to him—

"Sir, it is an accident which has brought down privations upon her. That Alicia Horton is possessed of money, but that it has nothing to do with your affection for her, I can well believe; and yet I am glad that she is so well endowed, for money may be a great good, if in proper hands."

"That is true, sir."

"Well, read this, and it will give you some further insight into the affair in which you are so deeply interested."

Claude Duval handed him the letter of instructions which had been given up by Mr. White, and Mr. Field read it through with contempt and indignation. Then turning a melancholy gaze at Claude Duval, while the letter trembled in his grasp, he said—

"Are you—that is—am I to believe that——"

"That what, sir?"

"That this letter was addressed to you, and that you repent of—of the part you——"

Claude laughed, as he cried out—

"Oh, dear, no! I have not the honour of being a confidant of the Beachem family, I assure you. There is the gentleman from whom I get the letter, and to whom it was addressed."

Claude pointed to Mr. White, who, with his eyes fast shut, and his hands crossed upon his chest, was lying on the floor, with his leg over the chair, expecting each moment to find himself in the brimstone lake that had been mentioned, and the horrors of which had taken a firm hold of his imagination.

"That the man?"

"Yes, Mr. Field, that is the lawyer."

"His name is White?"

"It is."

"The rascal! Why, I can assure you, sir, that there is not a more cold-blooded, thorough scoundrel than this man, White, in the whole profession to which he belongs."

"I can very well believe that, Mr. Field; but it is quite a fortunate circumstance that we have got hold of him, and got possession, too, of his despatches. What do you say, Dick? You have heard all this affair. Do you feel inclined to assist Mr. Field in it to recover the Lady Alicia from the hands of those who hold her in bondage?"

"Indeed I do," said Dick.

"And you, Jack?"

"Command my best services."

"Then I have to inform you, Mr. Field, that we three will assist you, and I do think that, with your own resolution and our aid, much may be done. In fact, I do not believe but that we shall be able to wrest her from the hands of her persecutors. Do you accept of our aid?"

"Oh, my friend, how can I thank you?"

"Reserve all that till we have done you some good: The morning is now approaching, and it is time that we left this place. There is one thing, though, that I have to ask of you, sir."

"Name it."

"It is, to be content that we will befriend you, and not to seek to extend your knowledge of who and what we are, beyond what you know of us already."

"And that is nothing. But I give my word freely."

"Very well; then, we quite understand each other. And now, Mr. Blue, where are you?"

"Here."

"Will you send one of your men to look after our horses, if you please?"

"Certainly."

"And will you"—Claude here lowered his voice to a whisper—"will you take good care of Mr. White till you hear from me again?"

"That I will."

"Very good. That is all, then, that I shall ask of you, Mr. Blue, for the present; but from the kind and gentlemanly manner in which you have treated me and my friends, I hope that I may have the pleasure of at another time resuming our acquaintance; and if ever it should be in my power to do you a good turn, you may depend upon me."

"I am sure of that."

There was a tone of great dejection about this man, Blue, as he shooks hands and so spoke to Claude Duval. It was quite evident that he was a man of superior education, and it was a sad thing to think that he should have come to such a pass as to adopt such a line of life as he had, and which, sooner or later, would be quite certain to end in disgrace and death.

The coiners who had been sent out to look for the horses came back to say that they were all right, and Jack hurried now to the shed where they were to see if his own steed had suffered anything from the fall it had had. He hoped that, as he had, after all, received no injury but a good shaking, from which he had nearly recovered, that the horse was no worse off.

Claude now said to Mr. Field, appealing by a glance to Dick as he spoke—

"I think that the best thing we can all do now is to go to some quiet inn not very far from Acton, and there breakfast, where we can consult as to the best mode of proceeding at the nunnery?"

"I will be wholly guided by you," said Mr. Field.

"I think it is the best way," said Dick. "Have you a horse, Mr. Field, or are you on foot?"

"On foot, sir."

"Well, it don't matter much; we shall all have to wait till nightfall again, I expect, before anything can be done."

"No doubt," said Claude. "Oh, here is Jack. He, too, has been to see after the cattle. Well, Jack?"

"All's right. The horses are in good condition, and only, I suppose, would look a little grateful for half a peck of corn each."

"That they shall soon have. Now, Mr. Field, if you will come with us we will see what we can do to aid you; but you must keep your servant from getting us all into any difficulties by his blundering, and there is but little chance of our failing in rescuing Alicia Horton from the convent in which she is now confined."

CHAPTER CCCXXXV.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS HAVE RATHER A NARROW ESCAPE.

It was rather a hinderance to Claude Duval and his friends that Mr. Field and Dennis had not horses, as they were obliged to go at a walking pace for the purpose of accommodating them.

Claude preferred walking on foot with the bridle of his horse over his arm, for in that way he could converse with the young lover with much greater ease than as if he had been in the saddle and Mr. Field on foot.

They soon reached the high-road, and as the sun was just above the horizon, and the morning after the stormy character of the night was beautifully fine and fresh, it was quite a delightful thing to see nature, as it were, awakening, and the glow of the sunlight slowly but surely creeping over all things, both animate and inanimate.

The birds flew hither and thither, apparently in a wild delirium of joy, and filled the air with their joyous tones; and from every wild flower in the hedge-rows there exhaled some perfume more or less grateful to the senses.

"This is truely beautiful," said Claude, as they reached a rising spot of ground from the summit of which they could command rather an extensive view around them.

"It is," said Mr. Field. "How astonishing it is that people residing in London fancy that it is necessary, before they can get natural and pleasing scenery, to go to great distances, while the suburbs of the great city really present as many natural beauties as any part of the country can show to the eye of the lover of nature."

"It is a prejudice," said Dick, "and it is one that enters into our feelings with regard to all things. That which is at hand and easily attainable is never much prized."

"That, I suppose, is about the solution of the mystery," said Duval. "But however delightful the undulating country may be, and those dark patches of wood, and that pretty winding stream, which is the Brent, I suppose, and those fields with their rich luxuriance—yet there is one thing which, just now, we should all find, I do believe, quite as delightful."

"What is that?"

"Breakfast."

They laughed, and then Mr. Field said—

"It is I who impede your progress, being on foot; but if you will say where Dennis and I can find you, we will come after you as soon as we can get over the ground."

"Oh, no," said Claude, "let us keep together. What is that yonder, Dick, in the middle of the road apparently?"

"It is a sign," said Dick; "but, I suppose, the winding of the road makes it seem to us in the middle."

"No doubt—no doubt. Well, suppose we make up our minds to go to that inn, be it what it may, to breakfast?"

"Agreed—agreed!"

Upon this they rather quickened their pace, and Dennis said, in his rich unsophisticated brogue—

"Bedad, then, I have just thought of a wonderful plan of getting on mighty quick."

"How is that, Dennis?"

"Why, sir, it's as easy as kiss your hand. You see, sir, there's only three beastes here."

"Three what?" said Claude.

"He means horses," said Mr. Field.

"I beg to inform you, Dennis," said Dick Turpin, as he patted the neck of his beautiful and intelligent steed, "that I think there are very many creatures upon two legs that are much more beasts than this one upon four."

"No offence, sir," said Dennis. "The same to you, sir, and many of them. But as I was a saying, the way to get on quick, would be for you to gallop on at a mighty great rate, and for us to walk aisy and quiet after you; and then, when you get on a mile or two, you can wait for us, and when we reach you we can mount and gallop on, and you can walk after us, you know, and so on."

"And you fancy Dennis, that by that system we should make greater progress—eh?"

"Bedad, then, of course we should."

"Permit me to doubt the fact, Dennis. But it don't much matter, for here is a turn of the road, which will take us at once to the inn yonder, which sign we have had in sight now for some time."

The moment they turned the corner in the road and got fairly in sight of the inn, Dick reined in his steed, and said in a tone of alarm—

"Halt, Claude!"

"What is it?"

"Look! look! Are you blind?"

"Oh, I see now. This way—this way!"

Claude turned his horse's head in a contrary direction at once, and went off at a swinging canter, followed closely by his two friends, and leaving Mr. Field and Dennis in the middle of the road, staring about them in wonder and amazement at such extraordinary proceedings.

When Claude had got some little distance on the other side of the corner in the road again, he pulled up, saying—

"By Jove, that was a narrow escape."

"But what was it?" said Jack. "I saw nothing to give us any alarm. What was it, Claude?"

"You were not forward enough to see the entrance to the inn, Jack," said Claude, "or you would have observed that our friends, the soldiers, were there before us."

"The deuce they were!"

"It is a fact. If we had only advanced a little more, they must have seen us; but as it is they did not."

"Are you sure of that, Claude?"

"Quite, or they would have been at our heels before now. But do you just lay your hand upon the bridle of my horse, Jack, and I will go back on foot, and get Mr. Field and his servant to follow us."

"You need not. Here they come."

Mr. Field, as soon as he had recovered from his first surprise at the sudden disappearance of his new friends, had run on after them, for he could not suppose that they meant to desert him, after in so kind a manner proposing to befriend him in the way they had.

"Dick," said Claude, "and you, Jack, listen to me. I think it will be better, and, in fact, it is but right and proper, to let that gentleman know who and what we are. If, then, he has any scruples about an association with us, or about accepting our services, we can bid him good morning; but if he has none such, it will be much more agreeable to us that he should know us from our own lips, than find it out by some accident."

"I think so too," said Dick.

"Claude," said Jack, "tell him now, by all means, but keep the information from the servant. There is no occasion to fill Mr. Dennis's mouth with such news."

"None in the least. He shall know nothing. I will take his master apart, and let him know."

Mr. Field now reached the spot at which the three highwaymen had halted, and he said—

"Gentlemen, what is the meaning of this? I have no doubt of your good faith to me, for a moment, but this is rather an extraordinary start, is it not?"

"It is, sir," said Claude. "Pray come closer, and I will tell you all about it. You must know, sir, there were soldiers at the inn to which we were approaching, and that is the reason why we rather declined going to its door."

"But, you are not deserters?"

"Oh, no. I am a highwayman!"

Mr. Field reeled a step or two, as he repeated the word, "Highwayman?"

"Yes, I am a highwayman, and those two friends of mine follow the same profession. And now, sir, knowing what we are, if you feel that you compromise either your safety or your feelings by keeping further company with us, just say so, and we will wish you good morning."

"I know not what to say. Is this a jest?"

"Oh, no, sir. It is the sober truth."

Mr. Field looked from one to the other of them, with rather a scrutinizing gaze, and then he said—

"I have frequently heard of a highwayman who has done the most kind and generous acts to those who have been suffering from privation and misfortune. The name of that man is Claude Duval. Do either of you own that name?"

Dick and Jack looked at Claude and smiled; and then Duval, lifting his hat just a few inches from his head, said—

"I am that person, sir, and I think that there are two sorts of people who do me an injustice in this world. One of them make me out much worse than I am, or ever can be, and the other much better."

"So, you are Claude Duval, the famous——"

"Say highwayman, sir. I am not at all offended at being called by such a name. After a lawyer feels no way hurt at folks calling him one, surely the the more honest—because more straightforward and truthful—calling of a highwayman need not be thought such a disgrace. But a truce to badinage. Mr. Field, I am Claude Duval, the highwayman. I feel an interest in you, and in the young lady to whom you are attached. It is ever a great pleasure to me to go a little out of the way now and then to do a good action, and to frustrate villany and chicanery. It seems to me something like a kind of set-off against my own ill deeds; and so I will assist you, if you like; but if you object to the source from which the aid comes, say so, and we part as we met, and for the future are strangers to each other."

"I should be both foolish and ungenerous, Duval, in the extreme, were I to do such a thing."

"You accept, then, our services?"

"With many thanks, I do, and with far greater hopes of success than I had before. If there be a man in the world who can really aid me, it is surely you, with your courage and perseverance, and doubtless resolution, in whatever you undertake."

"Don't flatter me," said Claude.

"By heavens, I do not! I speak the genuine sentiments of my heart in what I say, I assure you, sir."

"Well, I am much obliged to you for your good opinion, then, and all I wish is, that you do not enlighten Dennis as to who and what we are; because, although we might easily enough depend upon his fidelity, we might not upon his discretion."

"There is no necessity to tell him; although, Duval, you know little of the Irish peasant if you are not aware that his natural cunning is quite sufficient always to guard him from saying that which he wishes not to say. But, now, will you take me yet a little further into your confidence by telling me who your two friends are?"

"Yes; this is Dick Turpin."

"What, the famous Turpin, who, they say, has a mare that is quite a fiend, and capable of anything, and which understands every word he says to her?"

"I am certainly Turpin," said Dick, laughing, "and this is my mare, Black Bess, bless her heart! I do believe at times that she does know what one says to her. Only look at her ears, now—she knows as well as possible that we are talking about her."

The intelligent look of Bess would need to have been seen to be believed; but, really, to judge from the attitude and manner of the creature, Turpin's idea that she knew when she was being spoken of did not seem to be at all out of the way.

"You have yet another acquaintance to make, Mr. Field," said Claude. "This is Sixteen-string Jack."

Jack bowed.

"You—you mean some successor of that person?" said Mr. Field.

"No; this is the veritable Jack."

"I thought he was—was——"

"Hanged, you would say," said Jack, "long ago; but, for all that, here I am. It is a long story; and at some other time, if you want to hear it, I will tell it to you, sir, and in the meantime rest content with the assurance that I am the only true and veritable Sixteen-string Jack."

"I am full of amazement, I confess," said Mr. Field.

CHAPTER CCCXXXVI.

CLAUDE READS THE LETTER TO THE ABBESS OF THE NUNNERY.

It must not be supposed that during this time the three highwaymen had remained standing on the road in such dangerous contiguity to their foes, the soldiers. On the contrary, they had walked on, so that they were nearly a mile from the corner in the road which hid them from the inn, which so fortunately was situated in a kind of hollow, from which very little of the road, either to the right or to the left, was visible.

Dennis kept at a respectful distance, at a sign from his master to do so; but he was terribly curious to know the meaning of the consultation that was going on, as, from the quietness of the party, he guessed that the conversation was very curious and interesting, indeed.

How to satisfy that curiosity, though, was a proposition that did not seem at all easy to solve; but yet he made up his mind that he would not lose anything in ths shape of information from the want of trying in an oblique way to get at it.

With this view he decreased the distance between himself and the party, which they observing, induced them to adopt some means of disappointing him, so Claude said loud enough for him to hear—

"I prefer the round ones."

"And I, kidneys," said Dick.



DICK MAKES A FIRE IN THE OLD MILL TO RESUSCITATE JACK.

"Well," said Jack, "you may say what you like, both of you, but give me the reds—the old original reds."

"Oh, bedad!" cried Dennis, "and it's praties they are talking about all this time. Och, murder! is it praties you mean, sir?"

"Yes," said Claude.

"Well, then, there is a pratie that is called the Ould Irish, and it's the maliest in all the world, and grows convanient to the boys in ould Ireland, and is so big by the same token, it often takes a whole family to punch one of them into the pot to boil."

"That's nothing," said Dick, "to a potato we have in Yorshire."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing at all. There is a potato called the Old Yorkshire Wheelbarrow."

"The what?"

"The Old Yorkshire Wheelbarrow, and it's a common thing to put a wheel on each side of it and a broom-stick for a handle, and then to scoop out with a spade about half a hundredweight of the inside, and it makes an excellent wheelbarrow."

Dennis looked confounded for a minute or two, and then he said—

"Oh, yes. It's myself have heard of them sort before. But the Clare praties bets 'em."

"How?"

"Why, they stick up on an end—mind, they are kidneys are the Clare potatoes—and then they get all the neighbours to hold them, and it takes a couple of weeks to scoop out the inside, leaving the walls about two foot thick, and it makes an elegant cabin, with four rooms on the floor, and eight up stairs, and a little place on the roof to smoke a pipe on, quite grand."

"That will do," said Mr. Field. "That will do, Dennis."

"Thank you, sir."

They all laughed at Dennis's stories of the potato, and Dick said to Claude in a whisper—

"It's of no use contending in lying with gentlemen of Dennis's country. They will beat you out of the field. But now, what do you advise us to do, and where are we to go, for the cattle want corn and water, and we want breakfast?"

"I think, if we could find some cottage where they would accommodate us, it would be better than going to an inn."

"That is a good thought. It would be much better if we could only find such a place as would suit us to go to; but there is the difficulty."

"It vanishes," said Claude, as he pointed to the top of a little cottage-chimney that rose up from amid a cluster of trees at a short distance to the right of the road-way. "The difficulty vanishes, for there is a cottage."

"Yes, there is a cottage, but you don't know exactly if there are the people in that cottage who will make us welcome."

"Certainly not; but we will try, at all events, if they will do so. They may, you know. But does this mode of proceeding meet with your approval, Mr. Field?"

"Whatever meets with yours will meet with mine," replied the young lover.

"And I beg to say," cried Dennis, "that, although discended from the ould kings of Ireland, and so entitled to a will of me own, I give in to you, jontilmen, entirely."

"We are very grateful," said Claude; "and so, now that that is settled, let us push on for the cottage. I must confess that the smoke rising from the chimney looks very inviting indeed."

A little turning of about eight or ten yards in length brought them to the door of the cottage, which was as pretty a one as anybody would wish to see.

There was a placard in the window, which went a long way towards justifying them in expecting that they would get every accommodation there that they required, for it announced that new milk and eggs were to be had within.

"This will do," said Claude. "If they sell milk and eggs here they will sell other things besides. The only doubt is concerning the cattle. But we can see about that."

Jack held Claude's horse while he dismounted, and entered the little garden that was in front of the cottage, and made his way up a gravelled walk to the door of the place. A neatly dressed young woman came out of the cottage and asked him what he wanted, upon which Claude said—

"We want some of the new milk and the eggs, and some fresh butter and

bread, and, in fact, anything to eat and to drink that you may have in the place that is likely to be acceptable to hungry travellers, such as we really are."

"Then, gentlemen, you need breakfast?"

"I rather think we may say that we do."

"Walk in, sir. We shall be very happy to accommodate you; and if you will let my son, Benjamin, take the horses to the shed, he can attend to them likewise."

Claude was quite delighted to find that at this cottage they could get well accommodated, and he called to his friends to dismount and come into the garden. We need not pursue minutely all that Claude said, and all that the young woman said, and all that her son, Benjamin, who really looked much too old to be her son at all, did to make the horses comfortable. Let it suffice that in such peace and comfort as he, Claude, had not enjoyed for many a long day, he breakfasted with his friends at the cottage.

Mr. Field was very anxious to know what plan of operation Claude thought of adopting; and after a while, Claude said to him—

"The fact is, I feel in a little difficulty, for I have a letter which was taken from, or rather given up, by Mr. White, and which is addressed to the abbess of the convent; but it is sealed, and I have some scruple about opening it, although, I daresay, it contains information that would be very useful to us."

"Scruple!" cried Dick. "I have none."

"Well, then, do you open it, Dick."

"Stop!" said Jack. "We don't know yet but that such a letter may be useful in an evidential way; so don't destroy the seal of it, Dick, on any account."

"That is well thought of."

"But yet," interposed Claude, "I don't know whether we really ought to open the letter."

Mr. Field was silent, and Dick thought, as he had the letter in his hand, that it was incumbent upon him to say something concerning it.

"Let me," he said, "try what I can do to settle this question of gentlemanly morals as regards the opening another person's letter or not. Hem! In the first place, to open a letter not addressed to yourself, or even to read one that is open, and placed in your hands otherwise than in a fair way, is not only a breach of honour, but a signal guarantee of bad state."

"Granted," said Claude. "What else?"

"But——"

"Ah, there is always a but."

Dick laughed, as he proceeded.

"But when the opening of a letter, or even ten thousand letters—although that would be rather a long job, I admit, and one that I by no manner of means for myself desire—may have the effect of defeating some very great villany, I think that one is fairly justified in doing so, as in this instance."

"In that case, then, Dick, you think that the end sanctifies the act?"

"I do; but mind you, Claude, that is a specious doctrine that I by no means give way to on all occasions; but in this it holds good, as, after all, the act only consists of a breach of courtesy and good manners, and really inflicts no harm upon any one else."

"Bravo!" said Jack. "Very well argued, Dick."

"Thank you. Just put the blade of this knife into the fire, and let it get hot, if you please."

Jack nodded, and placed the blade of a small, thin knife that was upon the table between a couple of red-hot coals, and when it was tolerably hot, he carefully wiped it, and handed it to Dick, for he knew very well what he meant to do with it.

With great dexterity, then, Dick slipped the hot knife under the seal of the letter, and fairly cut it off, without in the smallest degree injuring the impression upon it.

"That will do," said Jack.

"Yes; and here is the letter open. Don't let the seal drop on to the floor, and we can easily fasten it on again when we have read this precious epistle to the Lady Abbess. Have you any objection, Claude?"

"None."

"Nor you, Mr. Field?"

"Oh, no. They say that in love, as in war, all is fair."

"So it is. Here goes, then.

"'Beloved mother—'

"The deuce! who does that mean?"

"It is the way that people who are high in the Catholic religion address the superiors of ecclesiastical establishments," said Mr. Field. "It is only a farce."

"Well, every one to his taste. 'Beloved mother,' it begins with. Sweet, certainly."

"But who is the writer of that letter?"

"We will soon see that."

Dick turned to the bottom of the page; and then he saw the name of John Beachem.

"It's the old rascal himself," he said—"it's Sir John Beachem who begins with, 'Beloved mother.'"

"That is the uncle, then, of my Alicia?"

"Good; and this letter, no doubt, contains the villanous and rascally instructions as to how the beloved mother is to force the young creature into a compliance with the designs of her charming relative."

"No doubt—no doubt."

"And yet," said Claude Duval, with indignation, "this is what they call a civilised country."

"But," said Jack; "the lord chancellor is the proper person to interfere in this matter, and, of course, he would."

"If he were forced to do so he would," said Mr. Field; "but not otherwise; for you must know that the lord chancellor dines with the Beachems, and that they helped him up the road to fortune; and that it is suspected that he has in secret professed the Catholic faith for the sake of getting business, when he was an attorney and a barrister, from the people of that persuasion."

CHAPTER CCCXXXVII.

THE ADVENTURERS FIND ADMISSION TO THE OLD PRIORY.

"Oh, what villany there is in this world!" said Claude, "when even those in the highest places are not exempt from such iniquities; but the time will surely come, when there will be greater purity among public men."

"I doubt it," said Dick. "But if you want to hear the letter read, attend at once, for I have got as yet no further than 'beloved mother.'"

"Go on—go on, Dick."

"'Beloved mother——'"

"Good gracious! don't say that again! The expression makes me quite ill," said Jack.

"'Beloved mother—The bearer of this epistle is one, who, albeit he is not, perhaps, exactly the sort of man with whom we should like to have much to do, is yet extremely useful in his vocation. He is a man who may be bought as you would buy any other commodity; and let the work be what it may that has to be done, this man will do it, provided you agree with him as to terms.

"'I need not, beloved and highly religious mother, expatiate upon the im-

portance and the great benefit to be derived to the true faith from such an acquaintance.

"'The name of this person is Mr. White, and he is an attorney-at-law, and, therefore, quite competent to act in the little affair which has been entrusted to him.

"'He will place documents before Alicia to sign, which will have the effect of dividing her property equally between me and the blessed convent. I shall find many uses for my share, and the convent's, of course, will be divided between you and the beloved Father Garvey, the confessor.

"'And now, beloved mother, it is for you to adopt such means as may have the effect of forcing the rebellious girl, who might have obliged us very much by marrying Henry, to sign the papers that Mr. White will lay before her. Those means will be such as in your wisdom will be sufficient; and when she has signed these papers, it will be just as well that she should not go out into a sinful world again.

"'Beloved mother, I have no doubt that you perfectly comprehend your sincere friend,

"'JOHN BEACHEM.'

"That's all," said Dick.

After the reading of this precious epistle, the friends looked at each other, as well they might, with both surprise and indignation, for a more hypocritical, Jesuitical letter could not possibly have been indited

It was Mr. Field who broke the silence, and rising hastily, while a flush of colour spread itself over his face, he cried—

"The villain, John Beachem, would destroy Alicia entirely, if he could but force the signature he requires to the deed. Why, the letter first counsels coercion in obtaining that signature, and afterwards hints at her murder!"

"It is very like it," said Claude Duval. "But I pray you to be calm, sir."

"Calm! Can you or any man ask me to be calm, after listening to such an epistle?"

"Yes, for I can give you the best reason in the world why I ask you; and that is, that if you wish to save Alicia from her foes, it will only be by calmness and resolution. Violence ill-directed is sure to defeat itself. We will aid you; and, although I confess to feeling great indignation at such an epistle as this, yet I feel likewise that if I were to give way to its impulses, I should do no good in affair."

"You are right, sir—you are right. My judgment tells me that you are right, and I am thankful that I have one by me who can, and who will, step between me and my agitated spirit."

"Be satisfied, Mr. Field. This young lady shall be rescued."

"You promise me that?"

"Upon my faith I do."

"But—but, it may be too late."

"Not so. I think, if you consider for a minute or two, you will find that such cannot very well be the case. She is in the convent, no doubt, or this letter would not have been sent. Well, this letter has not yet been delivered, so that the lady abbess is waiting for the instructions that this letter gives to her; so it is quite clear that it is not too late."

"Oh, what a glorious hope!"

"Come, sir, you must calm your agitation, and we will all act together in such a measure as to insure success."

"But this lawyer—this villain, White?"

"What of him?"

"Why, he may go to the convent before us, or he may go back to Sir John Beachem, his base employer, and detail the loss of the letter, and then some urgent steps may be taken in the matter."

"You forget that White is at the old mill, and that the man Blue has promised that he will not let him go from it till he hears from me again; so that dread may be given up."

Mr. Field clasped his brow with his hands for a few moments, and then he said—

"Pardon me, my dear and kind friend, but really, the shock that that wicked and detestable letter gave to me, drove from my thoughts what I ought to have recollected. I now have a perfect recollection of what you tell me, and I know that you are saying all for the best. I hope that you will not feel any way hurt at what I may say in the agony of my spirit."

"Not in the least. I can feel for you fully, and I know that were I in your case, that I should find it quite as difficult as you find it to preserve anything like calmness and serenity, under the painful circumstances."

"Now, then," said Dick, "what is to be done with the letter?"

"It merits dertruction," said Mr. Field.

"No," said Jack. "Take care of it, I beg of you."

"Care of such an epistle as that?"

"Yes. Is it not the passport to the convent?"

"Ah, yes. It is—it is."

"Then, I say, take care of it, and do you, Dick, fix the seal again, so that it shall not to a cursory observer have the appearance of having been at all tampered with, and, no doubt, we shall find that letter of the greatest possible use in the matter that we are all so willing to undertake and to carry out to the best of our abilities."

Dick upon this warmed the wax again and replaced the seal so neatly, that it would have taken a far more minute observation than any one usually bestows upon the fastening of a letter, unless there is some object in a close scrutiny, to divine that it had been touched.

"That will do," said Dick.

"Capital," said Claude.

"Listen to me," said Mr. Field. "I beg of you to give me that letter."

"For what purpose?"

"I will go with it to the convent gate—the production of it will at once enable me to enter the building; and then, in the face of all opposition, I will carry off Alicia."

"Very romantic," said Jack.

"And very bold," said Dick.

"And very imprudent," said Claude.

"How so?—I would ask how so? The boldest mode of proceeding is in most cases the best. I pray you to allow me to go at once and try what I can do. Give me the letter."

"Mr. Field," said Claude Duval, "this is your affair, and you are certainly entitled to the letter, if you like."

"Thank you—thank you!"

"But if you will be advised by one who looks upon this matter with a calmer judgment than you can possibly bring to bear upon it, you will not be so hasty, but adopt a course of conduct more likely to conduce to a pleasant result. Will you listen to me?"

"Yes—yes."

"Then I counsel that we wait till the darkness of the evening, and then that I go to the convent with the letter. I will personate Mr. White, and you shall go with me as my clerk. By such a mode of proceeding we shall find out where Alicia is hidden."

"Hidden, say you?"

"Yes. You do not fancy that you would find her in the intricacies of such a place as that by going in and in a loud voice demanding her? Believe me, no. They would baffle you in that mode of proceeding, you may depend; and after a vain search, during which you would incur, perhaps, very great personal risk from treachery, you would have to leave the convent again, with the certainty that before you could get back to it she might be disposed of."

"And then again, if you were to apply to the law to aid you," said Dick, "I

don't think you would be any the better off, for, after all, you are not the young lady's guardian, and Sir John Beachem, it appears, is; and she is, you say, still a little under age, and, if ever so little, she remains the ward of her uncle, and so to a certain extent, at all events, amenable to his authority."

"Ah," added Duval, "and while all that was being settled, and the semblance of an interference was being canvassed in the court of chancery, all that we dread would be accomplished."

Mr. Field looked from one to the other in dismay, and then clasping his hands he said—

"My good friends, do with me as you will—make your own arrangements—heed me not, but just tell me what I shall do, and I will do it to the best of my ability. I assure you—I resign myself, in this affair, entirely into your hands."

"Very good," said Duval. "I don't think you can do a wiser thing. The object will be to find out where Alicia is imprisoned in the convent, and then to save her. But, as yet, it is impossible that we can say what force they may not have there to resist us, and, I fancy, you would rather get her away quietly than with a riot."

"Oh, yes—yes."

"Very good; we will manage all that for you; and when you have a husband's right, you can defy your foes as much as you like."

Young Field was quite convinced that what Claude Duval advised in the matter was the most prudent course to adopt; so it was fully agreed upon, and all they had to do was to dispose of themselves in the best way they could till the evening.

A whispered consultation took place between the highwaymen; and then Claude, turning to Field, said—

"Sir, we will meet you at the cottage at sunset; till then we have some business to transact."

"Be it so—you will not fail me?"

"If we are alive we shall be here."

"I, then, will go to London, and make such arrangements for the reception of Alicia with a female relative of mine, as shall insure to her protection and comfort at once when she is rescued from the convent."

"You had better, too," said Dick, "have a coach in waiting on the Acton-road, with a man upon whom you can depend, for it will be desirable to get the young lady away with all the speed possible, when once we have got her clear of the convent walls."

"I will—I will."

"Till night, then," said Claude, "farewell."

They all three shook hands with young John Field, and he went towards London, while Claude Duval, after having liberally paid for what they had had at the cottage, mounted his horse, and with Dick and Jack took to the road. It was about ten o'clock in the morning then, and by no means the most favourable time for gentlemen of their profession to exercise their calling; but, the fact is, that after a brief conference as to their resources, they found that they were getting very short of money, and that it was necessary, as Dick said, to transact a little professional business for the sake of replenishing their purses.

"We are rather in strength," said Dick, "and so I don't see what is to hinder us from taking toll upon this road. Of course, we can pick and choose by the broad daylight our customers."

"Yes," said Claude, "we can do that certainly; but yet it is rather contrary to the ordinary practice to cry, 'Stand!' to a traveller on the highway in broad daylight; but if there be a necessity for it, why, I will not say nay to it."

"I tell you what we can do," said Jack.

"What now?"

"Why, about a couple of miles further on there is quite a thick little wood, and if we ensconce ourselves among the trees in it, we shall see whoever comes

down the road, and can either keep snug or sally out, according as we shall think proper. The wood, too, is on both sides of the way, so we can baffle any one who may come to look after us, by crossing from one side to the other."

"Be it so. Come on, then, at once."

A sharp trot soon brought them to the wood, if wood it could be called, for, after all, it was but an artificial plantation, which, owing to the estate to which it belonged being unoccupied, had been allowed to grow to a wild state, which would have been prevented had it been in careful hands. It was quite thick enough, though, to afford a good shelter to man and horse.

CHAPTER CCCXXXVIII.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS ESTABLISH A TOLL IN THE HIGH WESTERN ROAD.

"WHICH is it to be, to begin with," said Claude. "The right or the left sid of the road?"

"This way," said Jack, and he plunged into the plantation on the left. They both followed him.

The road which led to Brentford was very narrow at that point, and the plantation on each side was only divided from it by a bank which was not above four feet high, so that the horse had stepped over it with all the ease possible. The trees close to the road-side, from getting more light and air there than in more confined situations, had grown very tall and robust, and in some cases had shot out branches that nearly crossed the road.

Under these circumstances, that bit of roadway was rather in the dark, and was perpetually crossed by masses of shadow, through which only at times a bright bit of sunlight, when that luminary was high in the heavens, would find its way, and lie upon the road like a sheet of molten gold.

It was a sweet spot, for the soft air that blew from tree to tree carried upon its invisible wings the odours of fair flowers; and the birds carolled from branch to branch of the trees, as though they considered that spot specially devoted to them, and to be one where they could enjoy life and liberty, free from the danger of molestation, to which they were ordinarily subject.

The three highwaymen dismounted, and looked about them a little; and then Dick said—

"This is 'under the greenwood tree,' in the full acceptation of the words, I rather think, Claude. But which of us is to sally out, and cry 'Stand!' to the first traveller who passes?"

"You," said Jack; "and there he is."

Dick gave a start, and glancing out into the road-way, he saw a quiet, gentlemanly-looking elderly man, mounted upon a short-legged pony, or cob, with a flowing mane and tail, and who, as well as his master, seemed intent upon looking about him, and enjoying the quiet gloom-like aspect of the scene.

"Shall I go?" said Dick.

"Yes," said Claude, "and I will take the next."

"Very good."

Dick sprang into the saddle, and quietly trotted out of the wood into the road. The old gentleman started at the sight of him, and surveyed him from top to toe in silence.

"A fine day, sir," said Dick.

"It is," said the old gentleman. "Good morning, sir."

Slightly touching his hat, the old gentleman would now have passed on; but Dick placed himself across the road, saying as he did so—

"I am sorry to interrupt you, sir; but if you will have the kindness to hand me out your watch and purse, if you have one, I shall be obliged."



THE APPARITION IN THE HAUNTED MILL.

The old gentleman uttered a deep-drawn sigh.

"You are a highwayman?" he said.

"Just so," said Dick.

"Well, I have the sum of thirty-six guineas here in a little leathern bag; but they are not mine."

"Exactly," said Dick; "from the moment that I saw you, they became, in a manner of speaking, mine."

"Hear me, sir."

"Go on, then; but don't be prosy, for I have no time to spare."

"The money I have named to you belongs to a poor widow, who, if it be not

paid within this day, will, with her young children, be turned out of her house destitute. It is a whole year's rent, which I am taking to her landlord. It has been raised by—by"—the old man's voice faltered as he spoke, and tears gathered to his eyes—"by subscriptions, the amount of any of which has not exceeded one shilling. I—am the curate of this parish, with a stipend of forty pounds per annum, and eight children to support out of it."

Dick looked down, as he said in a low tone—

"Is all that true, sir?"

"So help me Heaven, it is!"

"Where is the bag and the money?"

"Oh, God! he will take it—he will take it! Here it is! Young man, for you are young in comparison to me, may Heaven pardon you for this grievous sin!"

Dick took the bag, and opened it. Then diving his hand into his pocket, he took out all the gold he had, which amounted to thirteen guineas, and poured it into the bag, on top of the amount that was already there. Then handing the bag back to the astonished curate, he said—

"Take it, sir, and forget that you ever met me."

"Good God!"

"Go, sir—go."

"But—but—What is the meaning of this?"

"If, sir, you find, when you empty that bag before the landlord, there is any overplus, take it back to the widow and the children. Good morning, sir."

Dick would have turned away; but the old clergyman rode up to him, and laid his hand upon his arm, as he said—

"Your name! Who are you?"

"You had better not know, sir."

"Oh, yes—yes, I beg that you will tell me who you are. You may be some one with whom, at another time, I may be able to communicate. Who shall say that I may not save you from continuing this course of life?"

"That's a vain hope, sir, although I thank you for the expression of it; and if you will know my name, you shall."

"I want to hear it."

"Richard Turpin!"

"Turpin? Is this possible?"

"It is true, sir."

"Why, report has painted you as one who never knew pity—as one of the most reckless and heartless of men—as an individual who was to be dreaded—as a pest to society; but I find you with a feeling heart, despite all your errors."

"It won't do to believe report, sir, too implicitly, either for good or for evil; but now that you know who I am, you perceive how completely out of the question it is that I should be other than what I am."

"Alas!—alas! I am afraid——"

"That it is so, you would say, and you are right, sir. It is so, without a doubt; and so, once again farewell."

Without waiting for another word from the old curate, Dick Turpin now turned his horse's head towards the wood again; and, bounding over the little bank, he disappeared among the trees.

The clergyman, after a pause of a few moments, rode on with the little canvas bag of money in his hand, apparently unconscious that he so held it, so deeply was he in thought concerning the strange encounter he had had with Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

When Dick got back to his friends, Claude said—

"Well, Dick, what luck?"

"Oh, stunning luck," said Dick.

"That's right. How much did you get, old friend?"

"Why, I tell you what it is, Claude, if we go on in the way that I have begun, we may as well shut up shop, and go into some other business. When we, a little time ago, compared our resources, I believe I had the greatest amount; but now I am quite sure I have the least."

"You speak in riddles, Dick.

"Or else he caught a tartar," said Jack, "and has been robbed himself instead of robbing the traveller."

Dick laughed.

"I did," he said, "in one sense, catch a tartar, as you say, Jack; and the traveller has gone off with all the gold I had, instead of surrendering all that he had; although I admit that I held his gold in my hand for a moment or two."

Jack looked amazed; but Claude said, very gently—

"I am quite sure that Dick had some good and sufficient reason for acting as he has done; and so, for one, I am satisfied."

"I had a reason," said Dick; "and I will tell it to you both with pleasure."

Dick then related exactly what had occurred; and when he had concluded, both Claude and Jack applauded him for the manner in which he had acted; and it is no stretch of truth to say, that they were much better pleased than as if he had brought to them the canvas bag of the poor widow, with her rent in it.

"Here you are," said Jack, suddenly.

"Where—where?"

"A gig! Now, Claude."

They both looked into the road, and then they saw two persons in a gig; and it so happened that the horse, when he got to that shady place, either thought that it would be a nice place to come to a short halt in, or was alarmed at the sudden change from the sunshine to that place, for he came to a halt; and when the man who was driving tried to whip him on, he stood upon his hind legs, and very nearly sent both the persons in the vehicle out at the back.

Those persons consisted of a man and a woman, both very much overdressed; and, by the vulgarity of their appearance, evidently people into whose laps fortune had fallen, without any effort or exertion of theirs in the least.

"Stop him!" cried the female. "Oh, stop him, do!"

"Woa!" said the man. "Woa!"

The horse, when he found that all that was required of him was to be quiet, stood still enough, and only whisked his tail about in defiance of the flies, that would annoy him if they could.

"Jack," said Claude, "Providence has made these two people a present to you."

"To me?"

"Yes; this is your adventure. Be quick about it, or they will go on. Come, now, Jack, these are folks that you can ease of their ready money, without having any scruples. So, go at once, that's a good fellow."

"But I though that you———"

"No—no."

"Oh, very good. I cannot possibly have any objection. It's all in the way of business. So, here goes."

Jack made his horse bound over the bank, and in a moment was by the side of the gig, to the no small consternation of the man and woman who were in it, and who glanced at him in evident alarm. The man spoke first, saying—

"Who are you, sir? I—I should like to know who you are?"

"So should I, indeed," said the woman, making a great rustling with the vulgar finery of her apparel.

"A highwayman!" roared Jack, in a loud voice; "and if you don't at once give up your money and valuables, I'll blow both your brains out, if you have any, with all the pleasure in the world."

The woman screamed, and the man opened his mouth and eyes so wide, that it seemed doubtful if they would ever shut properly again.

"Quick!" cried Jack. "Your money and jewellery! Quick, I say!"

"Oh, Lord!"

"You can say your prayers when you get home," added Jack. "There is no time for them now."

"You wretch!" said the woman, "do you know who I am?"

"No; nor I don't care."

"Then, I can tell you that my husband here is a gentleman—quite a gentleman. He is a clerk."

"In the law," stammered the man. "I am a lawyer's clerk, if you please. But I am very well off—that is, I—oh, dear! I am the attorney-general's principal flunkey—no, I mean the attorney—that is to say, clerk. Spare my watch, and take my life. The gig is only hired, I assure you, sir, if you please; and all I have had to-day is a glass of sherry, that my doctor has tasted first, to see that it ain't poisonous to my constitution, sir, indeed."

"Yes," said the woman; "but Mr. Day is highly respectable, and was brought up at one of the first charity schools in the city of London."

"Your money," roared Jack.

"Oh, give it to him—give it to the wretch, do."

Mr. Day handed to Jack a well filled purse, and then Jack said, "Is that watch you have gold or silver?"

"Listen, if you please, sir. You see, we flunkies of the law have to carry our master's wig box to Westminster every day, and if we are not in time, oh, don't we catch it! So don't take the watch. Oh, dear!"

"My dear," said the woman, "you are quite the gentleman, you know."

"Yes, oh, yes, I am—I am. I think I am—eh? Oh, there's somebody coming. Oh, you rascal! I'll have you taken up."

Jack looked along the road, and saw a couple of men on horseback coming forward at a trot.

"Hark you," said Jack, as he took a small pistol from his pocket, "I can easily hold this pistol in my hand in such a way, that with my finger on the trigger, I can fire at any moment, and yet I can cover it with the cuff of my coat from observation. Now, if you give the least alarm to these two men who are advancing, I will send a bullet into your skull."

"Oh—oh!"

"It's of no use your saying, oh! but I will do it. Your best plan is to answer me quite civilly what I shall ask of you, in the hearing of these two men who are now approaching."

CHAPTER CCCXXXIX.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS STOP A STAGE-COACH AND CARRY IT OFF.

From where they were situated in the wood, neither Claude Duval nor Dick Turpin could see the two mounted men who were advancing on the road, and who would soon be upon the scene of action. If they had seen them the probability is, that, without considering whether it it would be best to do so or not, they would have sallied out, fearing that Jack would be in serious danger.

It they had done so, a *melee*, in the course of which bloodshed would have been certain, would have taken place, and that was a state of things they were always desirous to avoid.

Jack, too, was well aware that he might have summoned his two friends to his aid easily enough, but he thought it better to succeed in surmounting the danger that threatened by finesse than by force.

The two men were well mounted, and by the appearance of the saddles of their steeds, Jack's experienced eye could very well guess that they had holsters and pistols at hand.

"Well, my dear fellow," said Jack, in a loud voice, as the men came up,

addressing Mr. Day in the gig, "it's very kind of you to be so pressing in your kind invitation, and I will certainly endeavour to call upon you the very first opportunity."

"Do so," said Mr. Day, faintly.

"Come, madam," said Jack in an under tone, "say something."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Day, "you would be kind enough to come to luncheon at our house in town, Mr. a—a—"

"Smith," said Jack.

"Mr. Smith?"

"Confound her," muttered Mr. Day, "she always asks men to luncheon when she knows that I can't get away from the chambers at Lincoln's Inn. What can she do that for, I wonder?"

The two horsemen reached the spot, and one of them said—

"Have you seen any suspicious characters on this road?"

"Keep off," cried Jack. "We don't intend to let ourselves be robbed, I can tell you. Keep off!"

"Why, who do you take us for?"

"Oh, I don't know, but the fact is, we have heard that there are highwaymen upon this road."

"Then you have heard right; but we are police-officers."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Look at our waiscoats—don't you see they are red? If you want any further proof, we will show you our constable's staffs."

"Oh, what a relief," said Jack. "My friends here really were afraid of being robbed, just now."

"We was indeed," said the lady, in defiance of grammar.

"You need be under no apprehension now," said the two officers. "We are in advance of a party that will, I hope, before nightfall clear the road of these rascals, that we hear upon good authority are upon it. There is a capital reward offered for them."

"How much?" said Jack.

"Why, there's as good as a thousand pounds, one way and another, for the whole three."

"You don't say so! Well, don't I wish that I could meet with them. But, however, it's no use getting one's brains blown out even for a thousand pounds, is it, Mr. Day?"

"No—no—no!" shouted the man in the gig.

"But, it is a large sum," said the lady.

"Yes, my dear friend," said Jack; "but I feel quite certain that the highwaymen would shoot even you, if they thought that they were in any danger from your dear delightful tongue wagging too freely."

"They would," said one of the officers.

The lady shrunk back in the gig, for she just saw the muzzle of the small pistol that Jack had in his hand, and she fully believed that he would not be very particular whether he sent the bullet into her head, or that of her husband.

"Well, we have no time to spare," said the officer who was the spokesman of the two. "You had better look sharp, if you want to avoid the rascals, for they will be sure to stop you and rob you."

"I should resist them," said Jack.

"You would be foolish to do so, sir," said the officer, "for you would be sure to get a bullet for doing so. No, sir, keep out of their way, if you can; but if they do stop you, resistance is foolish with such fellows. They have everything to gain by shooting you, and nothing to lose."

It was a curious fact at the time when the roads round London were quite infested by highwaymen that the police were always advising people not to resist them, but to let themselves be robbed quietly; and no doubt that arose from several considerations. In the first place, the police by no means wished that the public should cut short the career of the highwaymen; and, in the

second, they considered it an interference with, and an infringment upon, their own professional pursuits for any one to contend with a highwayman, as they were sure to reap both profit and importance for the capture of one.

It so happened, though, in the present instance, that it suited Jack admirably that the officers should give this advice, as it thoroughly completed the alarm of the two persons in the gig.

The officers then rode off without the least suspicion that it was Sixteen-string Jack they had been talking to, for one of them had happened to know by sight the man in the gig; and knowing that he held a kind of law official situation about one of the courts of law, he took for granted that all was right with one who appeared to be travelling on the road with him.

"Well, this is truly dreadful!" said the lady.

"Did you speak, madam?" said Jack.

"I did, you wretch!"

"Thank you, madam."

"Oh, you needn't thank me. I think you the most odious, and the most ugly, and the most horrid wretch, I ever saw."

"You don't say so?"

"I do say so!" screamed the lady.

"There you go again," said her husband. "When you do begin, upon my life you are quite a—a—Oh, dear!"

"I don't see," said Jack, "that any one has a right to complain. The fact is, as far as I am concerned in the matter, if the lady, or female more properly speaking, had fancied me as she does you, I should have begun to ask myself what was amiss in my appearance or conduct to bring me under such a stigma; but as she abuses me, of course that is to my mind the most complimentary course she could possibly adopt in reference to me."

"Ah! Oh, dear! Well, I suppose we may go on, now," said Mr. Day. "I beg, sir, to assure you that you have got all the money I had about me, except what will be barely sufficient to pay the tolls. And so, sir, if you please, I should very much like to say good morning to you."

"Good morning," said Jack, with a smile; "but just for the present I object to your going in this direction."

"What, not as we were going?"

"Certainly not. I have a very particular objection."

"Oh, dear! then we shall have to go back to town, I suppose?"

"I rather think you will; and as you have been so polite as to hand to me your purse without much trouble, I will give you a pass-word, which will save you from being stopped by any of my friends on the road."

"Thank you—thank you. Oh, dear!"

"Very good. When you, then, see any one on horseback approaching you, you will at once pull up and call out 'Bones and blood!'"

"Oh, gracious!" cried the lady, "I couldn't do it."

"It is the only thing that will save you," added Jack, with all the gravity in the world, for he was resolved to let the couple in the chaise into a row on the route back to town, if he could—"it is the only way by which you may save your lives."

"That is something," said Mr. Day. "My precious life is everything."

"Oh, stuff!" said his wife.

"It's all very well for you to say stuff, because you want to marry again, and spend my money; but I have a different opinion, and I will say 'Bones and blood!' to everybody who looks at me as we go home, for home we will go, I suppose, now? It is quite clear that this highwayman—I mean, this gentleman, don't want us to go on this road any further."

"Yes," said the lady, with acrimony, "and that is for fear we should come up with the two constables who have passed us."

"Madam," said Jack, "you have got it there. I admire your discrimination. Now, sir, be off, if you please."

Jack pointed the pistol at the head of Mr. Day, who, looking upon that as a good hint to depart at once, turned the horse's head towards town, and set off at a trot, repeating to himself as he did so—

"Blood and bones!' Oh, dear, no, it was 'Bones and blood!' I wouldn't forget it for the world. 'Bones and blood!' What a dreadful pass-word! But still if it answers, it will be all right."

Jack trotted back to his friends.

"Well," said Claude, "what luck?"

"All's right," said Jack. "I have done better than Dick in his adventure."

"Nay, excuse me," said Dick, "I don't think you have, for my adventure has pleased me more than a great booty would have done. We can always take, but it is not always that we find so good an opportunity of giving as I had."

"You are quite right, Dick. I admit fully the truth of what you say; but here is a tolerably well-filled purse, at all events, and one comfort is, that it comes from a quarter that can very well afford to lose it."

Claude just opened the purse, and saw that it was gold that it contained, and then he gave it back to Jack, who, however, said—

"Do you keep it, Claude."

"No. It is my turn to stop the next passenger on the road, and so I ought not to be the treasurer, in case anything should happen amiss to me, for in that case you would lose both me and the money. You keep it yourself, Jack."

"Very well; but if anything was to happen to you, Claude, I would just as soon let the money go as well."

"So would I," said Dick; "but as it is Claude's turn to stop the next affair on the road, I think he will have a job, for it is a stage-coach."

"The deuce it is?"

"Behold it coming."

Claude raised himself up in his stirrups a little, and there, sure enough, he saw approaching the spot a stage-coach, with four horses, and coming along at very tolerable speed.

"Now, Claude," said Dick. "Sally out. It's your turn now."

"Stop—stop!" cried Jack, "this won't do!"

Dick laughed, and so did Claude, and then the latter said—

"Well, it is rather an awkward thing for one man to stop a coach with four horses, even at night, when the uncertainty as to whether he has comrades near at hand or not adds to the alarm of the passengers; but in broad daylight, when there is no sort of difficulty in seeing that he is alone, it is ten times worse; so I decline."

"Of course," said Jack.

"But we can all do it," said Dick.

Jack looked rather thoughtful, but Claude rode to the top of the bank and took a long look around him, and then he said—

"Well, I don't see why we should not. The road is uncommonly clear just now. Ten minutes will do the job, and, really, I do not see that we need shrink from it, as there are three of us."

"Agreed," said Dick.

"Well, but," said Jack, "I think——"

"Jack, if you have any objection," said Claude, "I will give it up. It shall not be said that I drew you into an adventure of this kind against your own will and judgment."

"Come on, then," said Jack, "I have no objection; and there is no time to argue the matter. I will stop the leading horses, and keep the coachman quiet, while you and Dick do the rest of the business."

"Agreed. Come on."

They all three at once, now, dashed into the road, just as the coach was about a hundred yards from the spot where they emerged from the little wood. Jack placed himself in the middle of the road, with his face towards the advancing vehicle; and Claude and Dick took up each of them a position on each side of

the road, so that when the coach should reach that spot, it would be hemmed in. The natural result of this state of things was, that the coachman took the alarm, and gradually pulled up his horses, so that, without at all intending to do so, he really assisted the highwaymen in the attack upon him and his passengers.

"Here's a dozen highwaymen, at least!" he called out. "We shall all be murdered, as safe as a gun!"

Some ladies in the inside of the coach began to scream; and the commotion among the half-dozen outside passengers was immense, as Jack seized, with his left hand, the head of one of the leading horses, and called out—

"Coachman, if you don't want a couple of slugs through your head, you will keep your cattle quiet and well in hand."

CHAPTER CCCXL.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS FIND THEMSELVES IN POSSESSION OF RATHER A LARGE BOOTY.

"Oh, lor!—oh, lor!" said the coachman, as he dropped his whip. "I am as good—I mean as bad as a dead man!"

"Be quiet, all of you," said Claude, in a clear, distinct voice—"be quiet, and make no resistance, and there will be no danger. It neither suits our objects nor our disposition to hurt a hair of any one's head if we are not provoked to do it."

One of the outside passengers began hurriedly to descend; but Claude rode up close to the coach, and placing the muzzle of a pistol against his cheek, said quietly—

"Allow me to request you, sir, to resume and keep your seat, or I shall have to waste a charge of gunpowder upon you very unwillingly."

With a face as pale as death, the passenger scrambled back into his seat again, and sat there shaking like a piece of jelly.

By this time Dick had let down the glass on the side of the coach next to him; and he gave three raps upon the edge of the window with the barrel of a pistol, and then he said—

"Ladies and gentlemen, I will thank you for your money, watches, rings, and any other little articles of portable value that you may have about you. The ladies may retain their ear-rings, as it is sometimes inconvenient to take them out; but if there is any trouble with any gentleman, we always find that the shortest plan of operation is to send a bullet into him."

There were four ladies and two gentlemen inside the coach; and the four ladies uttered four screams, as Dick finished his speech, and the two gentlemen swore dreadfully to themselves; but they took good care, for all that, to get their purses out of their pockets.

"Silence, ladies," said Dick.

"Oh, dear, yes!" said one, "we are silent, I assure you, good Mr. Robber. I swear to you that I have got no money!"

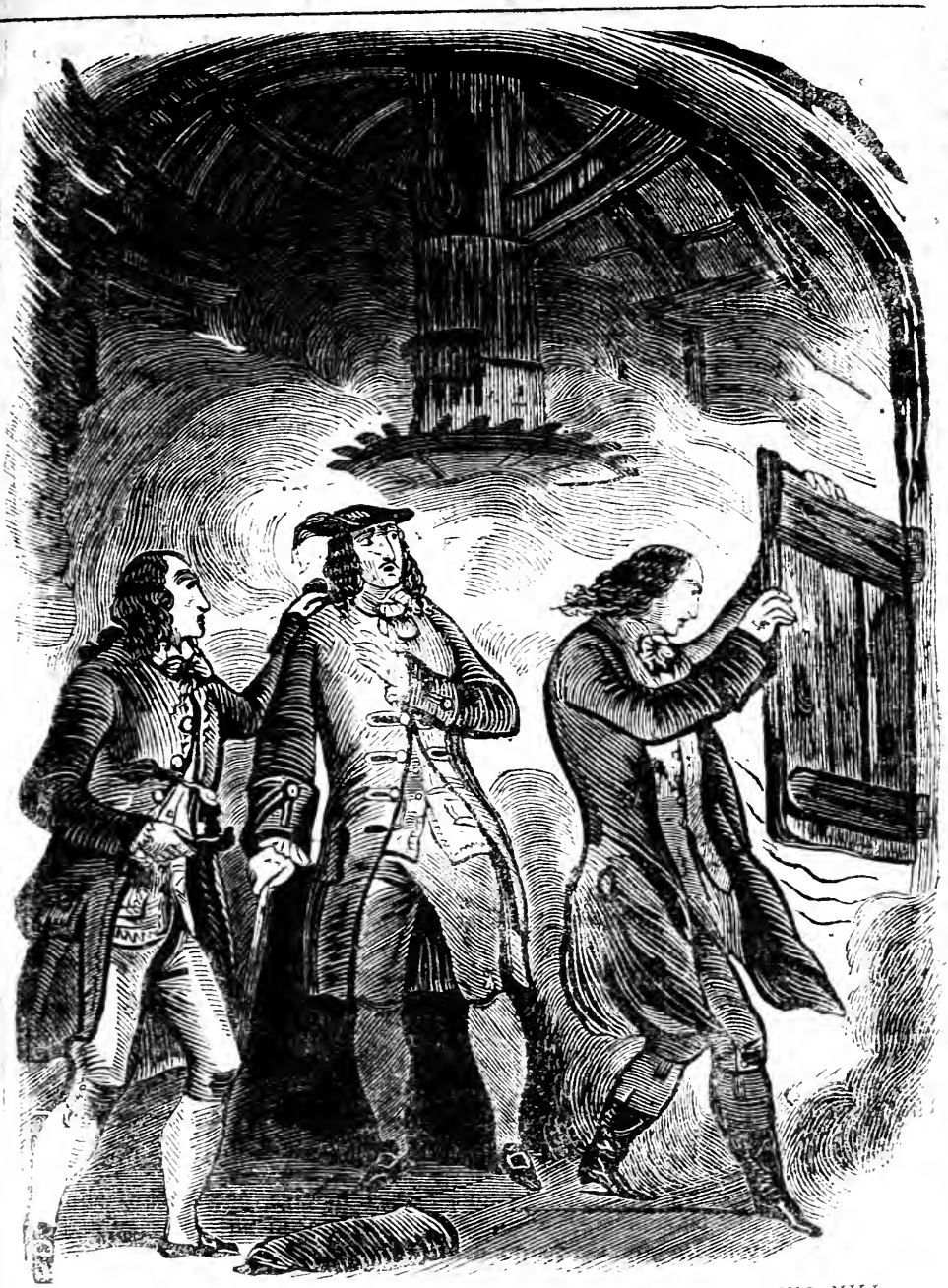
"Very good, madam; then of course you cannot give me any. I don't do the searching business. There is one of my comrades, a black man, who does that, so I shall have to hand you over to him."

"Oh, gracious! there's my purse!"

"Thank you, madam."

"And there's mine!"—"And mine!"—"That is all my cash!"—"I hope you will let me keep my watch?"—"Oh, you don't want my wedding-ring, surely? I have no more than what I now hand to you."—"D—n it! there ought to be a guard to this coach!"

Such were a few of the expressions of the inside passengers, as they handed



THE THREE FRIENDS ESCAPING TO THE ROOF OF THE BURNING MILL.

to Dick the property he demanded of them; and then a young lady, who sat in a corner, said—

"Mr. Highwayman, I don't like to give you my purse, for it has only got five guineas in it, and my uncle gave them to me; and they are all I shall have for three months for pocket money."

"My dear," said Dick, "don't mention it; keep them, by all means."

"Oh, thank you."

"Well, I'm sure!" said a rather corpulent old lady, "that is always the way with men. They are ready to let children have their own way in everything. I don't see why we should all be robbed, and an infant, who cannot have long got out of the nursery, should escape."

"I am seventeen, madam, if you please," said the young lady. "Nursery, indeed! I hate the nursery."

"Sir," said one of the gentlemen, "I trust you will have the kindness to return to me my watch, as you seem a civil sort of a ras—I mean person, for I set some value upon it, I assure you."

"Do you, indeed, sir? Does it go well?"

"It does."

"Very good; then it will go from you as well as it used with you. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I make no doubt in the world but that I have been in this affair most atrociously swindled."

"Swindled?" said the old lady. "Oh, dear! what does the man mean by that?"

"Just this, madam: that I think, and, in fact, I may say that I know, I am atrociously swindled, and that you have not handed me, any of you, above one half of the property you have about you; but I and my friends do business in that liberal kind of way that we allow you to cheat us."

"Allow us to cheat you?" said one of the gentlemen. "Upon my word, that is about as cool a thing as I ever heard of."

"You should always be cool, sir," said Turpin; "for let you be transacting what business you may, you are sure to get through it better by coolness than by being in a flurry."

With these words, Turpin drew up the window again, and was turning off from the side of the coach, when a loud crack came upon his ears, and his hat flew off his head in a moment, while the report of a pistol rang in his ears.

"What's that?" cried Claude Duval.

"All's right," said Dick, as he coolly turned to the coach again, and let down the glass.

The passengers were all looking as pale as death itself, and one of the gentlemen had his lips so compressed, that every particle of colour had left them. Dick pointed to him, as he said, slowly and deliberately—

"It was you, sir, who fired at me!"

They were all silent.

"I say, sir, it was you who committed that cowardly act, for it was cowardly in the extreme."

"What is it?" said Claude, as he galloped to the spot.

"Nothing—nothing. Look to the outside, Claude. I will manage this gentleman."

"You are not hit?"

"Oh, no."

"That is well. All is right, if that is the case, and I know I can leave you to manage your own affairs."

"Thank you, Claude."

Duval had been receiving the contributions of the outside passengers, who had given them, it must be confessed, with rather a bad grace; but still they had given them, and they had amounted to a considerable sum in all.

The gentleman who had fired at Dick Turpin in what we cannot help calling rather a treacherous and cowardly manner, was evidently too much terrified to speak. He only sat glaring at the highwayman, and with a dreamy kind of wonder in his mind as to what he would do next.

"Sir," said Dick, and he spoke with rather startling coolness and determination. "Sir, if, when first I came to this window, you had in a bold and straightforward manner, as you might have done and as you would have been fully justified in doing, resisted me, I should have thought nothing of it; but, on the contrary, you waited until I was off my guard, and for the mere purpose of petty revenge, because I had taken from you a few pounds, you fired at me, and that in the most treacherous manner that you could possibly do it in. Sir, if I were an angry man——"

"Oh, spare him," said the young lady. "Don't kill him."

"That is not my intention," said Dick. "I say, if I were an angry man I should this moment shoot you through the head, as I might do by the least pressure of my little finger upon the trigger of this pistol."

As he spoke, Dick held the pistol muzzle within a couple of inches of the gentleman's head.

"Spare him—spare him!" said the young lady. "I entreat you to do so."

"I will; it would be murder to shoot him now."

"This generosity will meet with its reward," said the young lady. "You may be assured, sir, that it will."

The gentleman now, if he might really be called such, upon finding that Dick Turpin had not the intention to kill him for the attempt that had been made upon his life, gathered courage to speak.

"I am glad I missed you," he said.

"No, sir, you are not."

"Well, a man has a right to defend his property."

"Yes, in a manly manner, but you, sir, have the mind of an assassin, as you sufficiently exemplified by the mode in which you sought your revenge. You did not attempt to defend your property, but you gave that up through fear, and then you sought to assassinate the man you dared not face."

"Oh, nonsense! I fired at you, as I should have been quite willing to have done before, only I could not get at my pistols. I did not want to take any unfair advantage of you."

"Then you mean to tell me that you are the sort of man who would like a fair shot at such as I am?"

"Yes, I am; but it is all over now, and I make you welcome to what you have taken from me. Good morning. Ha! ha!"

There was quite as much nervous excitement as a kind of foolish recklessness in this mode of speaking of the gentleman; but he had no idea that Dick meant to take him at his word.

"Well, sir," said Dick, "I am one who will oblige you or anybody if it be in my power. I will forget the unfair shot that you have had at me, and you shall have a fair one."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that you shall get out of the coach and have another shot at me in a fair and open manly manner, and I will have one at you."

"Oh, no—no!"

"But I say, oh, yes—yes."

"I am quite satisfied. I don't want to have anything more to say in the affair or to do with it, I assure you. I am quite satisfied, sir, and you are welcome to what you have got."

"But I am not satisfied, and out you shall come. Claude—Claude!"

"Here," said Duval; "what is it?"

"This fellow wants a fair shot at me, and I am determined to let him have it, and now he shrinks from it. Help me to get him out of the coach, Claude, so that he may be satisfied, in spite of himself."

"Come, sir," said Claude, as he reached in his arm and seized the man by the collar and had him out in a moment. "This is the way, if you please."

"Murder!" said the old lady.

"It might have been murder," said the young one. "Pray, sir, are you Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Oh, I have so wanted to see you!"

"Take a good look at me, then. I cannot say that I have so wanted to see you, for I did not know of your fair existence; but when I do look at you, I esteem myself very fortunate in having that pleasure."

"You are a wretch!" said the old lady. "Go away, do."

"But is she not a pretty girl, madam?" said Claude.

"No!"

"Oh, how can you say that? Ha! ha! Now, Dick, where is your man? Oh, here he is. Well, sir, so you tried one shot at my friend, and now you object to treat us to another?"

"Spare my life!"

"What a coward!"

"Yes," said Dick; "but I don't intend to let him off on that score, for a coward is, after all, a far more dangerous animal than a brave man. I know, sir, that you have another pistol, so you can produce it; and as the one you fired was well loaded, as I may judge by the report, the other is, no doubt, in quite as satisfactory a condition. This is a duel, Claude; will you see fair play?"

"I will, Dick."

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve paces," said Turpin, as he stepped them out upon the side of the road, and then faced his antagonist. "Now, sir."

The man dropped to his knees, and in a very abject manner, cried out—

"Spare my life—oh, spare my life! There was no bullet in the pistol."

"Lie the first," said Dick.

"And I didn't mean to hit you."

"Lie the second."

"And I have no other pistol about me, I declare to you."

"Lie the third."

"Oh, it is true—it is true; and if you fire at me, you will be firing at an unarmed man."

"What's this?" said Claude, as he dived his hand into one of the coat skirt-pockets of the man, and brought out a very beautifully made pistol. "What is this?"

"Oh—oh—oh!"

There was a silver plate upon the stock of the pistol, with the letter B upon it, but at the moment it did not strike Claude what name it might refer to.

"Come, sir," he said, as he threw up the pan, and then carefully closed it again, as he saw the pistol was very carefully primed. "Come, sir, these weapons are in good order, and will do. The word shall be 'fire,' and I will count three before I give it."

"That will do," said Dick.

"One—"

"Stop—stop"! cried Mr. B. "Stop."

"What for?"

"Only to consider a little. I—I—"

"Plague take you. Get up! It is not at all fair that you should be upon your knees, while my friend is upon his feet."

"Never mind," said Dick. "It's much the same."

"Two," said Claude.

Bang, went the pistol of Mr. B., and inflicted a slight flesh wound upon Dick's arm.

"An accident! An accident!" he called out. "I didn't mean it!"

CHAPTER CCCXLI.

DICK, WITHOUT INTENDING IT, GETS RID OF ONE OF MR. FIELD'S AND ALICIA'S ENEMIES.

THERE could be no doubt whatever but that the rascal who had already had one unfair shot at Dick, had, when he saw affairs were desperate, and that there was no escape from the encounter, determined upon trying the chance of another, and had so fired, when Claude said "Two," instead of waiting for the completion of the signal.

His calling out that it was an accident, was but a weak attempt to get rid of the consequences of the dastardly act.

"Three! Fire!" cried Claude, and before the smoke from Mr. B.'s pistol had cleared away, and before he could scramble to his feet, and fly from the spot, which he was attempting to do, Dick fired.

With a yell, the man sprang up into the air, and then fell like a log to the ground.

"That has done it," said Claude.

"I expect as much," said Dick; "but, after all, I am sorry for it."

"He is a great rascal."

"Yes, but not worth powder and shot, after all, when you come to think of it. But perhaps he is not killed."

The ladies in the coach now began to set up such a screaming, that Claude was obliged to run to the window and cry out to them—

"Silence! There is no harm done. It's only a joke, ladies, after all; but if you make that noise you will frighten the horses."

"Oh, but isn't anybody killed?"

"Certainly not. Be quiet, I beg of you."

Claude went back to were Dick was gazing at the body of his late foe, in an abstracted manner.

"Gone!" said Dick.

"Is he indeed dead?"

"Look!"

Dick indicated with his toe a spot on the forehead of the man, and there, sure enough, the bullet had gone right into the brain, making a clear round orifice into which you might put your little finger. His death must have been instantaneous.

"Come away, Dick," said Claude. "We have been too long here already. This is a deed that will soon be bruted all over the country, with such additions to it as will make it wear a very different aspect to the real one. Let us be off at once. Come—come."

"I should like to know who he is."

Claude ran back to the coach door, and said—

"Can any lady, or can you sir, tell me who the gentleman was who was here with you as a passenger?"

"Yes," said one lady, "it was Sir John Beachem."

"Sir John Beachem? You don't say so!"

"Yes, sir; and by your speaking of him as you do, I presume that he is dead."

Claude made no answer to this, but hastened back to Dick, and was upon the point of telling him who the dead man was, when Jack cried out loudly, but not in a tone of alarm—

"To the wood! To the wood!"

"What is it, Jack?"

"A strong party of horsemen are on the road. They seem to me to have seen the coach at a stand still, and to think it suspicious."

"The deuce they do."

"Quick! They come now."

"Where's my horse?" said Dick. "I tied her bridle to this tree. Good God! if I lose her I lose my right hand."

"There she goes into the wood," said Claude.

Jack galloped up to them.

"Are you both mad," he said, "that you do not fly from here? I tell you that our foes are all but upon us."

"They may be quite upon us," said Dick Turpin—"but how can I go without my Black Bess? Here is her broken bridle. The pistol-firing must have scared her, and yet I never knew her start at it before."

"No, Dick. But you were not with her now."

"Ah! that's it—that's it! We are lost—no, I mean I am. You two can go off; and I beg you to do so, and good luck go with you."

"Bad luck go with us if we desert you," said Claude. "Cannot we all take to the wood?"

"Yes; but these people will tell where we are; and you forget that I am on foot."

"Stop!" said Jack. "Listen to me. Dick, you can get up outside, and keep the passengers there quiet upon pain of death. Claude, you get inside, and do the same thing. Here, let us start your horse and mine into the wood. They won't go far either of them. I will borrow the coachman's coat and hat, and take his place on the box; and we will try and get through this rather ugly affair by a little finesse."

"By Jove, Jack, it's a capital plan!"

"Admirable!" said Dick; "and there is just enough of us to do it. But this dead body will tell tales, if we don't move it. Help me, Claude, will you?"

"Willingly. There he goes. Splash!"

They took the dead body of Sir John Beachem between them and cast it into a deep ditch by the road side. For a moment or two it seemed as if it would not sink in the rather thick fluid that the ditch was full of; but, gradually, as the clothing of the dead man became saturated with water, the fearful-looking evidence of violence settled down to the bottom of the muddy pool.

"That will do."

If the plan that had been suggested by Jack was to be carried out at all with any prospect of success, no time was to be lost in doing so; and, accordingly, the three highwaymen, with a certainty and promptitude that the life of danger and of hair-breadth escapes they had so long led could only have imparted to them, made the requisite arrangements.

The other two horses were conducted to the road side, and sent into the wood. Jack took possession of the coachman's hat, coat, wig, and whip, and said to him—

"You will sit behind me, and be quiet."

"Oh, dear, but—"

"Very good. Open your mouth."

"My mouth? What for?"

"The neatest way of blowing a man's brains out is to fire a pistol into his mouth upwards. It commonly blows off the top of his skull, and that is a settler."

"Oh—oh! it is! it is! I will do anything you like."

"So I thought you would. You are quite a sensible man. Now, get up and be quiet."

The coachman took a vacant seat behind Jack, who mounted the box, and, whip in hand, waited the result of the plan.

Dick Turpin clambered on the roof of the coach, and sat down among the passengers quite calmly, saying as he did so—

"Now, gentlemen, listen to me. The first one of you that makes the slightest alarm will get a bullet into his head. If I and my friends are caught we hang—and it makes not the least difference to us whether we take one or two of you into the other world with us or not."

The outside passengers looked rather ruefully at each other; and one, with his teeth chattering together with fear, that it sounded as if he were doing it on purpose, and trying to execute some extraordinary tune by that means in imitation of the castanets, said—

"Oh, dear me, I don't want to say nothing to nobody. Oh—oh! I wish I had my wife here."

"Silence!" said Turpin.

Claude Duval, when he saw that all was right with his two friends, sprang into the coach.

The ladies uttered screams; but he said "Silence, ladies!" in so peremptory

a manner, that it had the effect he desired immediately; and then, as he sat down, he added in a low, distinct tone—

"Ladies, I beg that you will attend to me. There will come some wicked me? to the coach windows to ask some questions, possibly. I beg that you will leave me to answer them; for, if by word, or look, or action, you let them know that I am not a passenger by the coach, or contradict me in anything I shall say, there will be such a bother as you never saw or heard of; and there will be much bloodshed, the result of which I cannot foresee."

"Oh, we won't speak!"

"That is right. Fear nothing, for, mark me, I hold out no threats to you; so do not say afterwards that Claude Duval owed his safety to frightening the ladies."

"Then you are really," said one, "the—the—Duval?"

"I am, miss."

"Oh, dear, I never was so delight—I mean, so frightened—in all my life. Oh—oh!"

"Listen, if you please. They come! My life, ladies, I commit to your keeping. By a word, any of you may, I heartily believe, condemn me to death within the next five minutes, for I don't intend to be taken alive. Will any of you speak that word?"

"No—no!" they all said.

Claude smiled.

"I knew you would not. Beauty and gentleness ever go together."

"What a nice man!" said the oldest and most plain of the whole party. "Oh, sir, if you would only repent, and reform, and all that sort of thing, and—and then marry some one."

"Nobody would have me, madam."

"Well, perhaps no very young person; but—hem!—perhaps some one who was just past the follies of extreme youth, and—and in her prime of life, with a little property——"

"I don't think, madam," said a young lady, "that Claude Duval would like to marry any one old enough to be his grandmother."

"His grandmother, minx?"

"Why, yes; you are surely fifty-five?"

"Oh, gracious!—oh, providence!"

"Ladies—ladies!" said Claude, "I pray you to be mild, if you please—mild and quiet."

"But the idea!" said the old lady—"the idea of children, who ought to be kept in nurseries, and perpetually whipped, saying such things, is really—too—oh, gracious!—too dreadful!"

With a dash, and a great clatter of horses feet, the strong party of mounted men reached the carriage; and one of them cried out in a voice of authority—

"Halt!"

They all paused; and except the pawing of some of the horses upon the road, and the snorting of others, they were all still enough.

"Is anything amiss here?" said the man who had commanded the party to halt.

"Yes; there has been," said Claude Duval.

The man stooped, and looked into the coach.

"What is it, sir? We are on the look-out for three highwaymen, whom we have good reason to think are in this neighbourhood. I hope you have not been at all incommoded by them?"

"Only stopped and robbed, that's all."

"Robbed, sir?"

"Ask these ladies, if you doubt me."

"Oh, yes, it is true!" said all the ladies. "That is true enough."

"Confound it! how unfortunate," said the man, "that I and my party should be too late for the rascals."

"It is, indeed."

"How long ago was it?"

"Why, if you had come up, sir, only five minutes' ago you would have found them here, taking the affair quite easy, and having everything their own wey."

"Is it possible?"

"Quite so, I assure you; but you are just a little too late."

"By Jove! that is the most provoking thing that ever occurred to me. Did you know who they were, sir?"

"Why, of course, I should not; but in the coolest manner possible, one of them declared himself to be the celebrated Claude Duval."

"Oh, dear!—oh, dear!"

"What's the matter?"

"I was only groaning at the thought that I had missed him, that was all; and it is enough to make anybody groan."

"I don't know that. He is a determined fellow, and a good shot, they say, and I have heard that since his late escape from Newgate, he has made a determination that, let the consequences bet what they may, he will never be taken alive."

"Oh, stuff, sir. I have twenty men here."

"Twenty, say you?"

"Yes, twenty."

"Well, that is a good force, I admit; and I only wish you had got here a little sooner with it, and you might, perhaps, then have saved my watch and seals that I have been forced to part with to the fellow."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! Which way did he go?"

"Towards town,"

"And here you are, all of you, outside and in, and suffer yourselves to be robbed by Claude Duval!"

"Ah, but he had two others with him."

"Two others! Why, they are Dick Turpin and Sixteen-string Jack! I should have nabbed them all!"

CHAPTER CCCXLII.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS EFFECTUALLY ESCAPE THE OFFICERS, AND STOP A CARRIAGE.

The distraction of the mounted officer at finding he had missed such a prize was so great, that he seemed ready to give himself up quite to despair, and Claude said then to him—

"I can't help thinking that you are losing valuable time. Hang it, man, they can't be above a mile off by this time. Why don't you and your twenty men go after them?"

"I will—I will."

"You will? It's all very well for you to say you will; but why don't you go at once?"

"Yes—yes; thank you, sir. Do you offer any reward for your watch?"

"Yes, twenty pounds."

"Very good, sir. Where shall we find you?"

"At the secretary of state's office in Whitehall."

Upon this the officer touched his hat, for he thought that in the gentleman in the coach he must surely have got hold of some official personage, with whom it would be just as well to be upon good terms as not.

"I will be off at once, sir," he said, "agreeably to your advice."

"You will do well," said Claude.

"Now, my men, come after me, like the devil himself!" shouted the officer



CLAUDE STOPPING THE PHANTOM FUNERAL.

"Claude Duval, Dick Turpin, and Sixteen-string Jack, are all three upon the road, only a little in advance of us, and if we rattle on we can come up to them. Forward—forward!"

"Good luck go with you," said Claude, "the further off you get. Hem! Well, ladies, I am happy to have freed you from your apprehensions concerning these fellows. You see, or rather you hear, I should say, that they are completely got rid off,"

"They are, indeed," said one of the ladies.

"And you do not regret it, madam?"

"Oh, no—no!"

"Nor any of you, I'm sure."

"Oh," said the old lady, as she managed adroitly to place a card, on which was her name and address, into Claude's hand, "I'm sure if you were ever to call upon me in London, I should be frightened out of my wits, that I should."

"Thank you, madam," said Claude, as with a smile and a bow, he got out of the coach. "I should be sorry to alarm you to that extent: so I shall not do myself that honour."

"The wretch!" said the old lady.

The others laughed, and Claude called out in a loud voice—

"It's all right, Dick and Jack. Come on, now. Ladies and gentlemen, we have the honour of bidding you all good day, and a very pleasant journey, indeed."

"Stop a bit," said Jack. "There's a phæton coming along the road, Claude, yonder."

"Very good. Let it come. Coachman?"

"Ye—e—es!" stammered the coachman.

"Drive on as fast as you can. Your traces have not been touched; but, remember, if you say one word on this side of Wycombe, whither I see you are bound, about me and my friends, you will be a dead man before the week is out."

"Oh, I won't—I wont!"

"Very good; now be off."

The coachman was to well pleased to get leave to drive off to delay about it; and as the cattle had had about twenty minutes rest when he laid the whip upon them, they set off at a first-rate pace, and the coach was soon out of view of Claude Duval and his friends.

There they stood in the middle of the road, and on foot, too.

"Well," said Turpin, "what have we made of this affair?"

Claude laughed.

"I have a pocket full of purses and watches," he said, "and an offer of marriage from an old lady."

"An old lady?"

"Oh, yes. Ha—ha! I have her card. But where is the phæton you spoke of, Jack? Has it gone?"

"No, there it is. Ha! it stops, and there seems to be some sort of parly going on with the driver of it. If we were but mounted, now, we wight make more, possibly, by stopping that phæton than we got from the passengers in the stage coach."

"There is not time to get our horses."

"Never mind. Here it comes again, and at a gallop, too."

It would seem as if the lady and gentleman in the phæton had had some apprehension that the three figures they saw upon the road might not be exactly desirable to meet, but that their coachman had advised them, as the men were on foot, to trust to the speed of their cattle; and so he lashed his horses into a gallop, and the carriage was whirled along at such a rate that the footman who was in the rumble behind looked scared, and held on to the back of the phæton with an immense kind of grin upon his face, as though he considered he was making great exertions to save his life.

"There goes his hat," said Jack.

"Yes—capital! What a hurry they are in, to be sure. There is one thing, though, that is pretty certain, and that is, that we cannot stop them as they go at the rate they are now going at."

"That's true. Out of the way."

Now, if the coachman of the phæton had been content with having lashed his horses into a gallop he might have done very well, but his fears or his unscrupulousness as to the use of the whip induced him to go on, and the cattle, no doubt began to think—for horses are quite sagacious enough to come to such conclu-

sions—that it was rather unfair to bang them when they were doing their utmost, and so they got out of temper and began to kick.

"Curse you!" cried the coachman, as he still plied the whip. "Go on—go on, you devils, will you?"

The horses came to a stand still as regarded drawing the phæton, and one of them amused himself by standing on its hind legs, while the other kicked out terrifically.

"Murder!" shouted the lady in the carriage.

"Help!" screamed the gentleman.

The coachman swore and lashed at the horse that stood up, till he got the end of the thong of his whip entangled in the head gear of the animal, and then he was helpless.

"Leave the cattle alone, fool!" cried Jack. "Do you want to drive the horses mad?"

"Murder! Help!" cried the lady and gentleman.

"Be quiet," added Jack. "Don't make that squalling: horses don't like it. Woa—woa!"

Jack got hold of the reins of the kicking horse, and gently patted him on the neck, and coaxed him till he was as still as a lamb, and then the other one condescended to stand upon four feet again, and Turpin patted him a little, so that in a few moments, by dint of kindness and a little attention, the two horses were as peaceabble and willing as possible.

"They will do, now," said Jack. "I will hold them, Dick, while you and Claude speak to the parties in the carriage."

"Very good."

"Now, my fine fellow," said the coachman, waving his whip over the heads of his horses, and Jack's head, too. "Let them go. I don't want you standing there any longer."

"Oh, don't you?" said Jack.

"No; be off, will you?"

Jack quietly took a pistol from his pocket and pointed it at the coachman between the heads of the horses. As he did so, and glanced along the barrel of the weapon, it was quite a sight to see the look, first of surprise and then of alarm, deepening into actual contortions, that came over the fat, meaningless features of the driver of the phæton. The whip dropped from his hands, and his mouth and eyes opened to such a width, that he looked quite an object. All he said was—

"Oh, lor—oh, lor!"

"Samuel," said the lady in the carriage, "why don't you go on?"

"Oh, lor—oh, lor!"

"What is the matter with Samuel?"

"I don't know," said the gentleman.

Claude Duval, by a glance at the position of affairs, soon saw what it was that so powerfully affected Samuel, and then stepping to the side of the phæton, he said—

"Sir, you should discharge a coachman who treats your horses in such a fashion as yours has done."

"That is my business," said the gentleman, with considerable haughtiness.

"Very likely, sir. I have just told you that it is."

"Go away, my good man," said the lady. "There is sixpence for your services; you can go and get some what's-its-name—dear me, it's what the low people drink."

"Beer," suggested the gentleman.

"Oh, yes, beer. Go and get some beer at on ce.That will do—that will do my good man."

"Pray, madam, who are you?" said Claude.

"You wretch, how dare you ask? This gentleman is the Bishop of Ripon."

"Oh, indeed. Why, I have heard of your lordship; you have embezzled more

of the money that was left to the poor and to schools, I do think, than any of your reverend brethren, so report says."

"Go along, fellow!"

"Oh, dear, no. Is this your lady?"

"Don't answer the wretch," cried the lady. "Don't answer him."

"But I will be answered," said Claude Duval, as he caught the bishop by the throat with his left hand, and placed the muzzle of a pistol at his head with the other. "Now, my lord bishop, who is this woman?"

"The Lord have mercy upon me!"

"The Lord may; but I will not, if you do not at once answer me the question that I have asked of you."

"She—she, is my housekeeper."

"Oh, indeed; and what was she before that?"

"She was, before that, Betty Aikin, the bar-maid at a tavern in the city."

"And so, Betty, the bar-maid, quite forgot that it was beer that low people were in the habit of drinking? Oh, Betty—Betty, you are the beggar on horseback, who rode over his old friends on foot."

"I'll scratch your eyes out!" cried the enraged Betty.

"And you are ugly, too," added Claude. "Ugly, and squint, and middle aged. Oh, my Lord Bishop, is this your taste? Oh, oh!"

Lady Betty thrust her hand into a pocket that was in the lining of the coach, and suddenly snatching out of it a pint black bottle, she made a blow at Claude Duval with it, and hit him on the cheek, so as to make the blood come.

"Take that," she said; "and now be off, or I will give you worse still."

"Betty—Betty," said Duval, with all the nonchalance in the world, "you are an insolent as well as an ugly female; but I will trouble you for your watch, trinkets, and money, and you, my lord bishop, for yours."

The bishop gave up his property without a word; but Betty fought and screamed, and tried to scratch to such a degree, that Claude was forced to call Dick Turpin, and then they lifted her out of the phæton between them, and accommodated her with a seat, which would have been very kind of them, if it had not been near the ditch by the road side.

"Now, Betty," said Claude, "be quiet, and give up your watch, and money, and rings, or in you go to the ditch."

"I won't—I won't! Oh, you wretches! I'll see you both hung with pleasure, that I will! I'll swear anything to hang you both! I'll——"

"Souse!" said Duval, and underneath went Lady Betty. "How do you feel now?" said Duval, when she emerged, covered with green slime, and half choked by the water. "How does your ladyship feel now?"

She gasped like a fish that is just pulled to dry land, and Turpin took the opportunity of disembursing her of a well-filled purse, and a gold watch and chain. There was a little set of tablets too, mounted with gold, that he took from her, and handed to Claude, who opening them, read upon the first page the following delicious memorandum:

"Tuesday.—Mem.—To place a yard of ribbon in Emma Gray's box, and then call in an officer, and say she stole it, and so get rid of her to prison. She is a deal too good looking, and the bishop looked at her yesterday."

"Did you write this?" said Claude.

"I did; and what then?"

"Dick, my boy, read it."

Dick did read it, and a flush of anger come across his face as he did so.

"What do you say to that, Dick?"

"Give her another souse," said Dick, and in a moment Lady Betty was under water again, and came up looking like some great drowned cow.

"Now," said Duval, "I am sorry to treat anything in the shape of woman in this way, Madam Betty; but there was no difficulty in seeing that you were a cold-blooded, selfish-minded, abandoned woman, and this horrid memorandum in your own tablets proves the truth of that opinion."

"Shall we give her another?" said Dick.

"No—no."

Lady Betty tried to scream, but her mouth was full of ditch water, and she could only make a gurgling noise. They lifted her up again, and flung her upon the bishop in the carriage, and then Claude Duval cried out—

"Let them go, Dick—let them go. That will do, Jack."

"Now, Mr. Coachman," said Jack, "if you please, be off."

The coachman was really too much frightened to drive; but Jack started the horses, so on they went, keeping the road very nicely of their own accord without any guiding at all.

"Our horses! our horses!" said Turpin. "I am getting anxious about my Black Bess, I can assure you."

"Come on, then, to the wood," said Jack.

"Be under no fear," said Claude; "we shall find them. The sweet herbage that is there in abundance will have proved a powerful means of keeping them to the spot."

"I hope so."

They all three now left the high-road as quickly as they could, and scrambling over the bank, they made their way among the trees, but to their disappointment, neither of the horses were visible.

CHAPTER CCCXLIII.

THE YOUNG LOVER IS TRUE TO HIS APPOINTMENT, AND CLAUDE COMMENCES THE CONVENT ADVENTURE.

The dread of the loss of their cattle was one which perhaps more powerfully affected the highwaymen than any other could by any possibility have done. Upon the possession of their horses might be said to depend their very lives.

Besides that consideration, constant association with the creatures begot a sort of affection for them, similar to that which the soldier in a long campaign feels for the gallant steed that has carried him often in safety through the din, and the smoke, and the danger of battle.

"By Heaven!" said Turpin, "I would not lose Bess for half the gold in England."

"Don't put yourself out of the way," said Jack; "you may depend she is not very far off."

"That remains to be seen. I shall soon find that out, although I dread to try the experiment."

"What experiment, Dick?" said Duval.

"I have a silver whistle here, the peculiar sound of which is so well known to Bess, that if she be within hearing distance of it, and can come to me at all, she will, and I can assure you that with her strength and agility it will not be a trifle that will keep her away."

"Sound your magic whistle, then, Turpin," said Duval. "Perhaps if the other horses are with her they may follow her to the spot."

"They may do so."

The spot upon which the three highwaymen were, was one in the very thickest portion of the wood, and so completely impervious to light that even at mid-day it would have been a difficult thing to see objects there with any degree of distinctness. The dead leaves of several seasons lay thickly upon the ground.

Dick Turpin took the small silver whistle that he had spoken of from his neck, and stooping low, so that the sound should travel as far as possible along the surface of the ground, rather than be dissipated amid the leaves of the old trees that covered the land around, he blew a long, low note.

Turpin continued to sound this note till his breath was exhausted, and then he put up the whistle, saying—

"It is of no use to use it twice. If she be within hearing, she will come at the first note."

"Ah," said Jack, "what is that?"

"What?"

"A sound like some one breaking some of the underwood."

"Ah, say you so?"

Dick Turpin flung himself at full length upon the ground, and placing his ear close to it, he listened for a moment or two in silence, and then he cried out in a voice of exultation—

"She comes—she comes!"

"Can you really hear her?" said Claude Duval.

"Oh, yes, quite easily. I know her tread, too. Ah, the whistle has done. The jade was only rambling about, after all, in search of the young grass. She is coming quickly."

"I only wish we had the like good fortune," said Jack. "Our horses don't understand the tune of—

"O, whistle, and I'll come to thee, my lad."

If they did, I'll warrant we should all be soon mounted and out of this confounded wood, for if we do stay here till night fairly falls upon us we shall find it no easy matter to get out of it, and our friend, Mr. Field, will begin to think that in trusting to our words he has been resting upon a broken reed, merely."

"Don't be uneasy, Jack," said Turpin. "I can hear the sound of other hoofs besides those of my bony black Bess."

"Can you really, though?"

"I can. Out of the way. Here she comes—here she comes.

"'Oh, my Bonny Black Bess!
By the glare of thine eye,
There is something that tells me
A traveller's nigh.
We'll cry to him 'Stand!' with a shout and a dash—
Pray, sir, please to hand out your watch and your cash.'

Ha! ha! here is the beauty. Here she is!"

Turpin's horse dashed through the thick underwood, and in another moment placed her head against his breast, and began to push him and caress him in something of the fashion of a pet cat.

"Oh you beauty!" said Dick, as he patted her on the neck. "Oh, you duck of a beauty! Did Dick say he would not lose you for half the gold in England? Bah! he ought to have said, he would not lose you for all the gold in England twice told!"

"It's wonderful," said Jack; "but the fact is, that Turpin's Bess must have told our two horses that they were wanted, for, lo! here they come."

"You don't say that?" said Claude Duval.

"Yes, Claude, and now the highwayman is himself again."

Claude Duval was well pleased to hold his horse by the bridle again; and from the ramble the creatures had had in the wood, they were as fresh and full of life as possible, so that they might at that time have been depended upon thoroughly in any enterprise that required steadiness, and endurance, and courage.

"Well," said Turpin, "here we are, not exactly like the babes in the wood, for we are in a little better case than they were; but here we are in the wood. What is to be the next caper?"

"Escape from our foes," said Jack. "They come!"

"Ah, say you so?"

"Jack is right," said Claude Duval. "I can hear them making this way through the underwood, although what sort of success they expect to have I don't know.

This is the way. As long as we keep some few hundred trees between us and then we shall do well enough."

"And as long as we keep our cattle out of danger, too," said Dick. "I am not going to part with Bess again in a hurry, I can assure you. Come on—come on."

There was no great difficulty in keeping on in advance of the noises of pursuit. It was pretty evident that a number of persons were employed in beating the wood, and in going through it in a body, no doubt, extending its whole width, for the purpose of dislodging whoever might be taking shelter in it.

All the highwaymen had to do, was to slowly retreat before their foes, and that they managed to do with great tact and decision.

Once or twice they heard the discharge of a gun; and once, by the peculiar rattling noise among the leaves of a tree close to them, they could guess that a bullet or two had found its way among them.

"I should like," said Turpin, "to give them a return of that compliment; but it is better not."

"Much better not, Dick," said Duval. "Whoever they may be who are hunting us through the wood, it does not follow that they are quite certain we are here."

"True—true."

"But if we fire, that is a question which would be set at rest in a minute."

"Yes," said Jack, "and along with it we should publish an advertisement, as it were, of our precise position."

"Oh, you need say no more," said Dick. "I won't fire, except they happen to hit Bess, and then I don't know exactly what possible inducement would be sufficient to prevent me from having satisfaction out of some of their thick skulls."

The sound of voices from the men who were coming through the wood with so much deliberation, came attimes upon the ears of the fugitives; but still their retreat continued without any untoward circumstance arising to mar its effect, and Claude Duval had a serious doubt if anything at all connected with them was the real cause of this search of a body of men in that direction.

He stated his doubts to his two friends, but they all agreed that, whether or not, it was better to go on, and they rather quickened their pace, as they got to the outskirts of the wood, where owing to the trees standing rather thinner, they were able to do so.

The sounds of pursuit through the wood gradually died away, and in a very short time the three highwaymen emerged upon a wide open expanse of open land, upon which the dews of evening were now falling fast, and enveloping it all in a misty mantle, that gave it the appearance of some vast ocean of vapour, for they could not see far enough to note the limits of the open space they were in, so it was left to their imagination, which under such circumstances always goes far beyond reality.

"We must get out o this," said Jack. "It will be on the increase rather than otherwise, and to lose your way in a white mist is just a degree or two worse than to lose your way in a wood, I take it."

"It is, indeed. Do you know the way, Jack?"

"Yes, so far as it is to the right."

"Let us take it, then, for I am thinking it is high time that we thought of keeping our appointment with our young friend, John Field, if we are to keep it at all."

"I would not break it for a thousand pounds," said Turpin.

"Indeed!"

"Oh, no. I expect some fine fun in that convent, I assure you."

"Well, there may be."

"I am certain that there will be. Something seems to tell me that that adventure will be one of the most delightful and varied of any that we have had

for a long time; and, in fact, I would not let it go by on any account, if I can help it."

"Well, we are in good time," said Jack, "and, besides, if we should even be a little late, our young friend, Field, may well imagine that it is possible enough something in our profession may have happened to detain us."

They now, as Jack advised, made their way to the right, and by keeping as close as possible to the hedge, they managed, notwithstanding the white fog, to get along pretty well without straying far from the right direction.

After a time they came to a stile, which conducted directly into the Acton Road.

The stile was a little hindrance, but Jack managed to break it down at last, and then the horses walked over its ruins, and they were in the road. At a short distance in advance they saw a bulky-looking object.

"A coach," said Turpin, "and it is drawn up to the side of the road. I will wager anything now that that is the vehicle that belongs to our friend, John Field."

"Not a doubt of it," said Jack, "and if he be there alrendy, he is in a fidgety state for our appearance."

"No doubt he is," said Claude Duval. "I thought that, after all, he would hardly let anything short of death detain him."

"Is it our man?" said Turpin.

"Oh, yes. I knew him at once, dark as it is. Come on—come. It is all right."

"And I knew him too," said Jack. "He has rather a peculiar way with his head, and a quick mode of moving it from side to side; there is no mistaking him."

The united opinions of Claude and Jack convinced Dick Turpin that all was right, and they all three rode up to the figure that they saw by the old beech tree, and so near at hand to the coach that had halted on the road.

As they got closer, the young lover, for it was indeed no other than he, darted forward, crying out in a voice of joy—

"You are true to your appointment. How shall I thank you?"

"We are, Mr. John Field," said Claude, "and let us hope that we shall be able to rescue your Alicia from her foes, to the confusion of Mr. White the attorney, and his rascally employers, the Beachem family."

Claude did not think proper to tell him that the elder Beachem was no more.

"Yes, and from the machinations of the present Father Garvey, and of the Abbess of Berrymead Priory," said Jack.

"My dear friends," said Field, "my heart is too full of gratitude to you to thank you as you deserve."

CHAPTER CCCXLIV.

THE FIRST APPROACHES ARE MADE TOWARDS AN ATTACK ON THE CONVENT.

THERE did not now seem to be anything which could at all stand in the way of the prosecution of the plan for rescuing Alicia from the convent at Acton, and we may truly say, that never had Claude Duval engaged in any enterprise which had given him so much satisfaction, as the idea of the good he might be doing upon this occasion.

From time to time, in common with all the world, he had heard much of the principles and practices of the Roman priesthood, but it had never before occurred to him to come exactly in they way of seeing, or being in any way mixed up with any special case in which they were concerned.

For all, though, that young John Field had told him, he had every reason to



THE COINERS FIND THE INSENSIBLE BODY OF JOHN FIELD.

believe that what continually took place in convents and nunneries far exceeded in atrocity even the tales that were told of them.

Hence was it, that curiosity, as well as an anxious desire to do all the good he could in the case, urged him on.

We need not say that Jack and Dick Turpin fully coincided in his views, and were resolved to aid him to the utmost.

It will be remembered that Claude had the letter of introduction to the Lady Abbess with which the lawyer had been provided, and, therefore, he considered that one half the difficulty of the affair was really over, since, armed with that letter, the gates of the priory would be at once opened to him.

Thus, then, was Claude and his friends, well armed, along with young Field, ready to do and dare anything in the cause of innocence—of the young girl, whom they fully resolved upon rescuing.

It will be remembered that Mr. Field had thought it prudent in this affair to get rid of Dennis, his sick servant, for more reasons than one, so that neither his ignorance, his blundering, nor his superstition, could stand in the way of a successful carrying out of the affair.

It was a comfort, too, to Claude Duval to think that there was nothing to conceal from the young lover but that he knew perfectly well to whom he was indebted for assistance, so that there was no necessity for Claude and his friends in what they should say to each other before him to keep a guard over their tongues, which, if he had not happened to be aware of their proper reasons and their profession, they would have had to do.

Even in the very dim light that there was from the sky, Claude could well perceive that the young lover was in a state of great agitation, so he said to him—

"Mr. Field, let me warn you of the necessity of keeping yourself quite calm and collected. Any precipitancy upon your part might ruin all our plans, and render the escape of Alicia from the convent all but impossible."

"Rely upon me," said the young man. "I will take orders from you; and whatever I may feel, you may depend upon my exercising a sufficient control over myself to keep quiet and not interfere with your judicious proceedings in my affairs."

"That is well. Believe that whatever we do is for the best."

"That I do and will with all my heart and soul. I hope, though, that you have a sufficiently good opinion of my discretion to trust me with all your plans?"

"It would be an insult to you not to do so, my good sir; so, now, I tell you that I think you and my two friends here must try to make yourselves as comfortable as you possibly can in this little wood, close to Hanger Hill, while I go to the convent and ascertain such particulars as shall enable us to act with some degree of certainty in the rescue of the young lady."

"Be it so. But how are we to know when our services are required by you?"

"You cannot possibly know except by my coming to you. Of course, much as I may despise the species of force that may be opposed to me in the convent, I do not hope or expect to be able to take Alicia by the hand, and bring her forth in spite of that opposition. I do not wish to drag her to liberty through a path of blood, although it is possible I may be able to do so; but I will make an attempt to do so by *finesse* what, if *finesse* should utterly fail, we will all do by force."

"I commend the view you take of the matter," said young Field, "and I feel that I could not possibly be in better hands than in yours, Claude Duval."

"Very good; what you say is a sufficient inducement to me to do my very best for you, so now let us go to the wood I spoke of, and there I must make some change in my outward appearance, and leave my horse to your care and that of my friends here."

To this young Field cheerfully assented, and there was one good effect that sprung from the quiet and calm tone in which Claude Duval spoke to him, and that was, that it calmed him down, and induced a much more agreeable state of his nervous system, which was a thing very much to be desired.

As they went the short distance across to the wood, which Duval had made mention of, Field said, in a voice that shook a little—

"You will take, let us hope, the very first opportunity you can possibly get to tell Alicia that I love her still as truly as ever, and that I am at hand to aid in her rescue."

"Be assured I will."

"And—and you will say to her that it is not from any shrinking from the dangers attending doing so that prevented me from being in your place, but that

it was from the conviction that the object in view was too important to make it a matter of mere feeling with me, and that I let you go first with the conviction that you would do better than I could all that had to be done."

Claude Duval could very well comprehend the feeling under which the young lover spoke when he made such a remark as this, and he replied to him with kindness and discretion—

"My dear sir, Alicia shall understand from me that the grand object is to rescue her from the species of prison in which she is confined, and not to show off anybody's heroism in particular. I will tell her that by waiting for me in the wood you are doing more towards her rescue than you could possibly do if you were in the convent. Will that content you?"

"It will."

"Then you may depend upon my saying it, because it is, in fact, just the truth; for, you see, you love her and I do not, so I can act with that calmness and caution which only springs from a friendly feeling, while you, loving her as you do, would be led astray to do some desperste deed in her favour by that very love."

"Ah! will you tell her that, likewise?"

"I will."

"I am for ever, sir, beholden to you; I feel happier and lighter of heart now than I did before I had this explanation with you, for, to tell the truth, there was a fire burning in my heart that Alicia might think me backward and luke-warm in her cause by not myself coming."

"Your feelings are natural enough," said Duval, "and do you more honour than shame, Mr. Field; but be assured that all will be right, and if Alicia is the sort of young lady you say, she will at once comprehend the explanation that I give to her."

Claude Duval, from the slight interview he had already had with the young lover, thought well of him; but the delicacy of sentiment and very natural feeling that he had expressed, raised him considerably in the estimation of Duval.

They now reached the wood, where it was thought proper that the lover and confederates should wait, while he, Claude, should go to the convent, to make the first advance in the business. That wood has in a great measure been removed, and only portions of it, with cleared spaces between them, are now to be found at Hanger Hill, near Acton; but at the time of Claude Duval it really was a respectable enough, in point of size, miniature forest.

Just as they all got fairly under the trees, an odd falling sound caused them to look up, and then a spot or two of rain that forced its way through some of the interstices of the overhanging boughs let them know that there was a shower overhead.

"This is a good protection," said Claude, "against both wind and weather. If I mistake not, there is rather a sharp shower taking place, and yet, how little we feel of it."

"Little, indeed," said Turpin, "and it strikes me that it would require many hours of rain to soak right through some of the old chestnuts. How cool and fresh the air is."

"It is," said Jack. "I like the feel of this kind of air. At night it is epecially invigorating."

"That," said young Field, "is because at night all vegetable substances give forth oxygen gas, which is the vital principle of the air we breathe."

"You are quite scientific, young sir," said Jack.

"No, I have no such pretensions, but when any fact in natural philosophy strikes me as being important, I seldom forget it."

"I wish I could say as much," said Claude Duval, as he dismounted, and took the bridle from his horse's head. "The fact is, the only branch of natural philosophy that I have lent my attention to much, is comparative anatomy."

"Compartive anatomy?" said young Field. "That is a very interesting study, is it not?"

"Oh, yes; when I see a pretty girl with a charming figure, and quite an enchanting face, I compare her in my mind's eye to some other one I have seen whose beauty may be none the less, but who may present some different characteristics in regard to formation. That is what I call comparative anatomy, and a very delightful study it is."

"No doubt," said young Field, with a smile; "it is the most practical kind of comparative anatomy I ever heard of in all my life."

"It's coming now," said Jack.

"What is?"

"The thunder-storm. Hark!"

There was a rumbling of distant thunder now, and the air felt hot and sultry as if suddenly it had been deprived of much of that vital principle which young Field had spoken of.

"Ah, yes," said Claude Duval, "we shall catch it I expect even here, and I don't think this is the safest place in a thunder-storm; but, after all, though they say that trees attract the lightning, how seldom it is that you hear of one being struck. I am quite ready."

"But you will wait till the storm is over?" said young Field.

"Oh, no, my good friend, I am too used to storms of all sorts to care much about them, and my experiences of the delightfully uncertain climate of England are such that I have long since made up my mind not to allow any vagaries of the weather to stop me in the furtherance of any actual business."

Waving his hand to his two friends, Claude Duval stepped aside and opened the vallise he carried usually lashed to his saddle.

CHAPTER CCCXLV.

THE LADY ABBESS IS QUITE PLEASED WITH CLUDE DUVAL.

THE object of Claude Duval was to get from the vallise such articles of clothing as would make him look less like a knight of the road, and more like a lawyer.

Jack, he was well aware, knew what was in the vallise better than he did himself, and he motioned to Dick to step aside with him as well, in order that he might say a few words to them prior to his departure, which it was just as well Mr. Field should not be in any way alarmed by hearing.

"Jack," he said, "while I speak, look me out the most sober and lawyer-like looking apparel you can."

"Yes, Claude."

"Thank you. Now, Dick, and you, Jack, listen to me. I don't know but I may find more difficulty in this piece of business than at first sight may be apparent. The principal danger I am in is being suspected, and by some sort of treachery decoyed into one of the infernal lock-up places, which I am pretty sure they have in all convents, and which we may take it for granted are pretty numerous in such an old place as Berrymead Priory, and there left to amuse myself with my own thoughts. Now, I don't mean to say that there are any serious chances of such a catastrophe, but yet it is possible such a thing may happen."

"It may indeed," said Jack.

"Or you may be assassinated," said Turpin.

"True, my boy, I may be so, and it is to arrange with you what you are both to do in such a case that I now speak to you."

"But how can we tell?"

"Thus. If I do not make my appearance in the wood, and upon this spot, by midnight to-morrow night, you may assume that I cannot come to you."

"We will."

"Oh," said Jack, "I don't like the affair at all, and really begin to think, Claude, that it is attended by too much risk."

"No—no. Don't say that, Jack. It is only common wisdom to provide against possibilities. Mind you, I don't think this probable by any manner of means. Such things may happen, and that is all."

"But if you come not by the time you mention, what are we to do?"

"That it is not for me to dictate, as you must be guided entirely by circumstances as they turn out. All I have to say is, that you may assume something has gone amiss with me if I am not here at the time I have mentioned to you."

"Very good, Claude," said Turpin.

"But it ain't very good," said Jack rather petulantly, "and I don't like it."

"My dear Jack," said Duval, "be comforted. I don't think, in the first place, that anything is likely to occur to me in the convent for which I shall not be amply prepared, and if it should, I have full reliance in the power of yourself and Turpin, assisted by Mr. Field, of whose ready co-operation with you I feel assured.

"And so do I," said Dick.

"Stop a bit," said Jack. "I have plan. We will all go to the convent at once, and the instant the outer gate is opened we will seize the first person we see, and then go on triumphantly, and take the place by force of arms."

"No—no," said Duval, "that won't do. You are delaying me, Jack, by not looking out the things I want, and for which I relied upon your judgment."

Upon this, Jack said no more, but got out a suit of clothes, which most effectually disguised Claude Duval, so that when he was attired in them, and had put on a cravat of fine cambric, and composed his features to a serious look, he certainly did not in any degree resemble a highwayman, although he looked more like a gentleman than a lawyer.

"Will that do?" he said.

"Capitally," replied Dick.

"It is a good disguise," said Jack, "but you don't look like a lawyer, Duval, and never could be made to do so."

"Never mind, this will do. I have the letter of introduction to the abbess, and my pistols all ready, so now I am off. Mr. Field, good-evening. I hope to bring you a good report of your affairs before long."

"Heaven protect, and aid you," said Field, with considerable feeling, as he now stepped forward, and shook hands with Claude Duval. Jack and Dick did the same, and in another moment Claude was off.

During the process of dressing himself for the occasion the thunder had repeatedly made itself heard in peals of reverberating echoes overhead, and once a vivid flash of forked lightning had seemed actually to play among the trees.

The rain, which had heralded in the storm, had ceased when the lightning became apparent, so that Claude in making his way to Berrymead Priory, had not to encounter the disagreebles of getting wet through, which he had only a short time before thoroughly expected.

With his natural knowledge of the country, Claude took but a short time to reach the corner of the lane at which the entrance to the old convent was.

To those conversant with the spot, it will be well known that the convent wall extends a considerable distance down a lane, as well as along the side of the high road, and that it is a wall of great strength, further secured by massive brick buttresses sloping to the road, and that it has all the appearance about it of great age.

It was at the corner, then, of this lane that Claude Duval paused, upon that eventful evening, and took a brief glance upwards at the scudding clouds and

the strange colour of the sky, before he applied for admission at the convent gate.

Two or three big drops of rain fell upon his face, and by the sound of the next peal of thunder, he felt convinced that the storm was passing over Acton rapidly, and would soon be gone from that immediate neighbourhood. The sky, however, in the north-west looked very strange and threatening.

"Well, let it thunder, and blow, and rain," said Duval, "it don't matter to me. I shall soon be housed, and I daresay I shall be glad enough to get out again, for there is something even now about the very look of this place that is enough to give one a cold chill to cast one's eyes upon it."

Duval looked carefully for some means of making his presence known at the priory gate, and at last he saw the iron handle of a bell. He laid hold of it and gave it a smart pull, when the dull, monotonous tone of a bell, with certainly a crack in it, immediately responded, and he waited with some degree of anxiety for the result of this first and important step in the business.

The French have a proverb that the first step in most affairs is the only difficult one, and in many affairs it is undoubtedly true, although not in all. Still in the enterprise he was one, Claude considered that if he succeeded in deceiving the Lady Abbess into the idea that he was the agent of the Beachem family, that would be the first step that would lead to success.

With such a feeling, he in a low voice repeated to himself the French proverb, as the tingling of the convent bell sounded in his ears.

After waiting above five minutes, and finding that no attention was paid to his summons, he rang again. Five minutes more elapsed, and still no one came, so that Claude began to suspect that there must be some other entrance at which he ought to apply, and that this one, although apparently the principal one, was really disused.

"Confound the place," he said, "I don't see any other gate at all. I will ring once more, and then give up this part of the wall, and take a survey of the rest of it."

The ring that he now gave at the bell was rather a sharp one, for he was impatient. It had an effect, for a voice suddenly said—

"Who rings?"

Claude started, for the voice was close to his ear. The fact was, that a little square wicket was opened in the gate, and that as he stood by it, it happened to be close to him,

"Who rings?" said the voice again.

Duval understood in a moment that he stood by a little opening in the door, and by putting out his hand he felt that a grating of iron bars was over it.

"I wish to see the Lady Abbess," he said.

"What Lady Abbess?" said the voice.

"The Lady Abbess of this convent. Have you more than one?"

"That is our business. You cannot see her. Who are you?"

"I am a visitor, who having rung three times, surely expects a civil answer."

"If you had not rung three times, you would not have had any answer at all," said the voice. "So many lunatics amuse themselves as they pass, by ringing at the convent bell, that we never take any notice of one or of two rings, but at the third we come to the gate."

"Oh, that is it; but who are you?"

"The portress."

"Well, I have a letter for the Lady Abbess, by which she will know that I was expected, and that I have real business with her."

"Give it to me."

"No, it is for herself only, I must give it into her own hands. I cannot part with it otherwise."

"Man," said the portress, in a cracked and passionate voice, "if you were to remain where you are till the day of universal judgment, you would not be admitted."

"But ——"

"Peace! Do not disturb the repose of this holy place. Go your way."

"No; I come from London, and I must perform my mission. If there be no other way of proceeding but giving you the letter, I must do so; but you surely will not keep me outside here till the abbess reads it?"

"Yes."

Claude Duval was now rather puzzled to know what to do, and he was silent for a few moments. If he refused to give the letter, he considered that, after all, he should do no good, while, if he gave it, although he did not like to part with it in such a way, it was possible enough it might answer all the purpose for which he brought it.

Suddenly, while he was thus cogitating, the little wicket in the door was shut with a sharp noise.

"Stop! stop!" cried Claude, as he struck it with his fist; "stop! I agree to your terms. Give me your assurance that the Lady Abbess shall have the letter forthwith, and I will hand it to you."

The wicket was opened again.

"Give it to me!" said the voice sharply.

Duval handed the letter sideways through the iron bars; and in another moment it was snatched from him, and the wicket in the door closed and bolted, for he heard the bolt shot into its socket.

"A pleasant reception, this," said Claude. "We shall see how it all ends."

CHAPTER CCCXLVI.

DUVAL DISCOVERS SOME OF THE SECRETS OF THE OLD PRIORY.

As the thunder storm had passed away, the rain clouds seemed to think that it was only proper for them to interfere, and to soak the earth and everything upon it as quickly as possible.

While Duval had been talking to the portress, he had got considerably rained upon; but now as he did not know how long it might be before he got an answer to his epistle, he stepped some few paces on one side, and got under a perfect canopy of overhanging ivy, which came over the top of the convent wall, and which sheltered him from the descending rain, except so far as a few splashes were concerned.

After about a quarter of an hour, as nearly as Claude Duval could guess, for it was too dark by a great deal for him to see the hands of the gold watch he had in his pocket, and which he tried to consult, he heard a voice say—

"Where are you?"

"Here—here!" said Claude, stepping up to the wicket gate—"here I am, and getting rapidly wet through."

"That is of no consequence," said the voice.

"To you certainly not; but to me I humbly suggest that it is not at all pleasant."

"Silence! Don't be chattering there. Is your name Block?"

"Block?"

"Yes, is it Block? The letter is signed 'William Block.'"

"Oh," thought Claude, "this is to catch me in some prevarication, and to find out if know the contents of the letter or not."

"You will excuse me, Madam Portress," he said; "but if the Lady Abbess has told you that the letter is signed Block, she has misled you."

"Who wrote it, then?"

"Mr. Beachem."

"Oh, indeed? But it makes mention of you as Mr. Block, and so gives you an introduction to the Lady Abbess."

"I beg your pardon," said Duval. "My name is White."

"Oh, White, is it? Dear me! what a memory I have got. You are a doctor, I believe?"

"No, a lawyer."

"Well, I said a lawyer."

"Oh, did you?"

"Of course I did; and you come to see a young lady named Fanny, so the letter seems to say?"

"Wrong again," said Claude, who was now fully alive to the Jesuitical cross-examination he was being subjected to, and could easily foil it, let it last as long as it might. "Wrong again, madam. The young lady concerning whom and on behalf of whose friends I am here, is not named Fanny."

"Indeed! What is her name, then?"

"Alicia."

"Oh, you don't say so? Well, you may come in; but, really, I don't think it is right to let you."

"You can leave it alone, then," said Claude, pretending to have lost all patience. "I am quite willing to go back to my highly respectable client, Mr. Beachem, and tell him the sort of reception that I met with here, notwithstanding his letter of introduction, which he said would smooth all difficulties. I am a professional man, and a respectable man, and I don't like to be treated in this way."

"Peace! peace!" said the portress, as she took Claude by the arm, and pulled him through the narrow opening at the gate. "Peace, I say! You do not know how cautious we are forced to be."

"About what?"

"Why, about whom we admit within these walls. If we were not to be ever on the defensive we should soon be very differently situated to what we are; but now that there is no doubt of who and what you are, all will be quite well, and you will find yourself capitally treated at Berrymead Priory. You ought not to feel offended at the precautions we are compelled to use to keep out improper persons."

"Well, there is something in that."

"There is everything in it. Why, this very Alicia has a lover whom we have been specially told to guard against. How did I know but that you might be some artful emissary from him?"

"Oh, but the letter!"

"Ah, that's all very well; but still the most extraordinary things do occur, and you might have obtained possession of it in some surreptitious manner."

"That's true," said Claude.

"Exactly so; and, therefore, it was quite necessary that I should try you to know if you really were aware of its contents. Come, all is right, now—I will get a light—come this way."

The conciliatory tone of voice in which the woman spoke, Claude thought was more disagreeable than the sharp, suspicious one in which she had addressed him through the grated wicket; but he played his part well by saying—

"Don't notice it, I beg of you. Of course, knowing that I was in the right, I did at the moment feel a little hurt by the suspicions that were expressed of me, but, upon reflection, I see the full necessity of caution."

"Of course, you do."

"Yes, and when, likewise, I come to consider that so pleasing a person as yourself conducted the cross-examination, I am the more inclined to think nothing of it."

"Oh, sir!"

"Hem!" thought Claude. "This horrid wretch is open to flattery. That is a useful piece of information."



THE COINERS READING MR. WHITE'S PAPERS TO YOUNG FIELD.

"I am quite sure you don't mean what you say," added the portress, as she gave Claude's arm a squeeze that almost made him cry out.

"Oh, yes, I do," he said.

"No, no—you fancy that I am handsome."

"It's no fancy—I am certain you are."

"And what, pray, can make you so certain, Mr. Flatterer?"

"The beauty of your voice makes me think that you must have a fair face. If that ain't a crammer," thought Claude, "there never was one told in this world."

"Ah, that's like all you men!" sighed the portress. "You do nothing but flatter us poor girls, till you ruin us."

"Oh, no—no!"

"But I say yes. However, we will talk about all that another time. I must now take you to the Lady Abbess, who anxiously expects you; and if she thought that I had said one-half that I have to you, I should find my way to one of the cells."

"The cells, do you say? Then, there are——"

"Hush! hush! Don't ask any question. It's much better for you to know nothing here than too much, I assure you. Whatever business you have to transact let it be done quickly, and then get away."

"I will follow your advice."

"But if—if you are inclined to come and have a little chat with me at another opportunity, you know, that if you tap with your knuckles, or with anything that will make sufficient sound for me to hear, at the wicket gate, always taking care that no one sees you, I will open it."

"Oh, what charming condescension," said Claude. "Dear me, what's that?"

Claude had nearly fallen over a step that was in his way.

"I ought to have warned you of the step," said the portress. "You had better stay where you are, now, till I get a light."

"Thank you."

Duval felt that he was standing upon some boarded place now, and that he was out of the open air. All was profound darkness for a few moments, and then there came a faint light, and the portress who had left him came back, carrying in her hand a small lamp.

By the light of that lamp Claude Duval saw that she was a wrinkled hag-like looking woman of about fifty years of age, and that she squinted fearfully as she leered upon him.

It was as much as he could do to conceal the disgust with which he looked at her, for in addition to her other charms, the small-pox had made fearful ravages in her face.

It did not appear, though, that this woman thought herself otherwise than very passable in her looks, if not absolutely charming, for when she saw Claude Duval looking at her she put on quite a simper, and cried out, with all the air of a young girl inclined to flattery—

"Really, now, how you do look at one—don't—oh, go away!"

"Charming creature," said Claude.

"Oh, you gay man!"

"No, I assure you I am not. But can it be possible that you give me leave at some other opportunity to call and see you?"

"It will be exceedingly imprudent of you to do so: but if you will, why, really I don't see how I can help it."

"Then, at some other opportunity I will avail myself of the generous permission."

"Mind you do. Heigho! you are not at all bad-looking."

"Thank you."

"Now don't come near me. I don't want any impertinence, though there is nobody here. Don't be kissing me."

"I won't," said Claude; "your commands are law to me. I shall take good care to keep my distance, you may be assured; and I have no doubt but that the Lady Abbess is getting furious at not seeing me."

"Oh, gracious, yes! Come this way. I had forgotten her at the moment; I am afraid you are quite a rake. But let me warn you of the Lady Abbess; for, between you and me, she is—oh, dear, that I should say it!—rather fond of the men."

"You don't say so?"

"It is a melancholy truth. Father Garvey is just at present her confessor—hem!"

"Oh, he is. I heard something of him from Mr. Beachem. A very holy sort of man is he not?"

"Oh, uncommon! But the Lady Abbess is rather jealous, and so he has a great deal of trouble, poor man!"

"Trouble? How so?"

"Oh, don't ask me, I beg of you. But she will persecute the nuns so, and more particularly those that Father Garvey likes the best."

"Oh, indeed; is Alicia among that number?"

"Yes; but of all the obstinate wretches that ever stepped, she is about the worst; but she will never see the sun shine outside the walls of this house again."

"Oh."

"Oh, dear no, she knows too much, so that's quite sufficient; but, mind you, when you see the Lady Abbess, don't seem to know anything, for you cannot think how desperately cunning she is, and when you least expect it, she is studying your looks, and putting artful questions to you."

"I will be upon my guard."

"Do so. Oh, you are a very nice man, but really are just a little—only a little—too—too——"

"Too what?"

"Too retiring and timid, if I may say so much."

"Dear me," said Claude, "that is not my general character at all—I quite wonder at your saying so. But where are we now?"

CHAPTER CCCXLVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND FATHER GARVEY DO NOT AGREE VERY WELL TOGETHER.

While the portress had been thus, in a low tone of voice, telling to Claude Duval a great deal more than she ought to have told him, and which she would not have dreamt of mentioning but that she was thrown off her guard by the fond belief that at last she had found some one who was enamoured of her, they had proceeded from the lodge entrance to the convent, along a peculiarly gloomy path of the garden, which was so completely overgrown by tall trees, that even in the daytime it must have been quite impervious to light.

The ground was well gravelled though, so that it was clean enough to walk upon, and perfectly dry.

After traversing this path for some time, they had come to what appeared like a low stone wall, and that was what had occasioned the inquiry that had come from Claude's lips of—"Where are we now?"

"Hush!" said the portress, in a whisper. "I come no further than here. You will find another of the sisters, who will now conduct you to the abbess. Be cautious and discreet, and rely upon my affection for you."

As she said this, the portress, unable any longer to conceal her gratification at making the acquaintance of Claude Duval, flung her arms round his neck, and embraced him, and spilt a quantity of oil from the lamp over him.

Most certainly, under any other circumstances than those then existing, in which it was a necessary thing, and might naturally tend to the success of the affair that had brought him to the convent, to be upon good terms with the portress, Claude Duval would have got rid of her by some very summary process; but as it was he put up with the embrace as well as he could, disagreeable as it was to him.

"I think I here some one," he said.

"Oh, gracious! No!"

The portress released him in a moment upon this, and disappeared down the dark walk with such rapidity that Duval was quite delighted to get rid of her.

Before he could take a thought of what he was to do next, a voice said in a low tone—

"Are you there?"

"Yes," said Duval.

"The stranger?"

"Yes—all right," said Duval, "I am Mr. White."

"That will do. Follow me."

"But I don't see you at all, or I would follow you."

"The door is open. Surely, it is not so dark but that you can see an open door-way from a dark one. Look well about you."

Thus advised, Claude Duval did look well about him, and he saw that in the stone wall that appeared to block up the further progress of the dark pathway, a low arched door was opened. Stepping at once forward, he passed through the doorway, saying as he did so—

"I see the door open now, and I will follow you, as I perceive that you are there, whoever you are."

"I am Sister Jude," said the voice.

Claude did not feel that his stock of information was very much increased by being told that it was Sister Jude who spoke to him, for he could see no one. After however, going a few steps along a narrow passage, a faint light dawned upon his senses, and still further on the light was sufficient to enable him to see a figure in a long gray dress with a black veil on the back part of her head, and, as he thought, on her face likewise, but in that he was mistaken.

The light came from a lamp that was upon a bracket before a little image of the Virgin Mary, that was fastened in some way to the wall.

Upon arriving opposite to the image, Sister Jude made a low reverence, and mumbled some prayer in a strange chanting tone of voice. Then she turned and looked at Claude, presenting to his view a face that, no doubt, had at one time been very comely, but which was now so very pale, and had such an expression of hopeless woe, that it was painful to look upon it, and said—

"You are not one of us?"

"I am not a Roman Catholic."

"It is strange that you are here, then. But that is no business of mine. I am the abbess's personal sister."

"What is the meaning of that?"

"Simply that I wait upon her."

"I understand you. I am, then, to be taken to the abbess by you?"

"Yes, such are her orders; and let me advise you—yet, no. It is better to say nothing."

"I beg of you that any advice you are kind enough to think of giving to me you will not withhold."

Sister Jude had altered her mind, and she made no reply to this appeal from Claude Duval, but walked off so quickly, that he had to run in order to keep up with her, seeing that she had got some twenty paces or so in advance of him.

"It is very cruel of you," he said, "not to finish what you were about to say."

The nun turned abruptly upon him.

"It is much more cruel of you," she said, in a low tone, that almost approached to a whisper, "to get me into danger of my life by speaking in such a strain to me, within the hearing of one who may resent it upon me."

"I did not know that."

The nun placed her finger upon her pale lips as a signal to him to say no more, and Duval was silent accordingly, for nothing could possibly be further from his thoughts or wishes than to bring distress or danger upon any of the miserable victims of the monastic institution. Such a vile and unnatural state of things he felt brought with it its own sufficient punishment to all who had anything to do with it. Claude Duval knew well that where there was not vice in a nunnery or a monastery that there must be wretchedness.

It is likely enough that there may be in such institutions some poor belated insane creatures, who may fancy that they are living quite in a state of beatitude;

but then we always find that the greater number of lunatics are those who are mad upon religious subjects.

Of such the real and true religious recluses are found. All others go into convents, either from the crimes which, to speak vulgarly, have made the world too hot to hold them, or because they have found out that there they may have an opportunity of leading a life of the most unbridled licentiousness.

Added to this, there are some positive prisoners, who have found out too late what the system is, but who are not permitted to escape to blazon forth to the world the iniquities they would fain shun.

No doubt this poor Sister Jude was one of this latter class, and the Lady Alicia would have been converted into one, but for the interference of Claude Duval and his associates.

But we must not anticipate. Our object in detailing this portion of the adventures of Claude Duval is to give the reader an insight into the conventual system, and so we go into rather more details than we have usually done.

Sister Jude now tapped gently against the panelled wall, and after a few moments the faint sound of a little handbell was heard.

"Come," she said. "This way."

She went on for about twelve steps, and then opened a door, immediately upon the other side of which was a thick green baize, that hung in many folds from the ceiling to the floor.

"Wait till you are told to enter," said the nun, and then, without pausing for any reply from Duval, she left him, and returned in the same direction from which they had come.

Duval listened, but could not hear the slightest sound on the other side of the entrance for the space of about three minutes, and then a voice, which came only in muffled tones to him, cried—

"Enter!"

The only way of entering was evidently to pull aside the green baize curtain, so Duval did so, although its numerous folds gave him some little trouble, and caused some time in setting aside. The moment, however, that he fairly removed the obstruction, the light that his eyes encountered rather dazzled him for a time, and he was compelled, as he stepped into a large and handsome room, to shield his eyes with his hands.

"Come in, Mr. White," said a voice. "I have been expecting you for some time. The last letter that I had from Mr. Beachem, led me to suppose that you would be here last night."

"Madam," said Claude, "I was robbed on the highway and delayed."

Duval's eyes had got now a little familiar with the strong light in the room, and he was able to look about it, as well as at the Lady Abbess of the convent.

The Lady Abbess was rather a tall, robust looking woman, of about forty years of age, with a high colour, that looked exceedingly like paint—she had very glittering teeth, which were rather prominent, and her hair, which was seen partially, was nearly black.

Take her for all in all, she was what people of vulgar taste generally call a fine woman.

She was rather richly attired in black silk velvet, and had a very rich lace veil over her forehead, but principally hanging down her back, nearly reaching to the floor.

The room which was occupied by the Lady Abbess was one well worthy of some little description; but it must not be supposed that Claude Duval had an opportunity of so minutely examining it upon his first introduction to the abbess. We merely say what we do of it for the satisfaction of the reader.

The room, then, was of large size, being very nearly square, and running about thirty feet in each direction. Upon two sides of it, it had windows, these testifying that it was at the corner of the house.

The ceiling was beautifully painted in some allegorical subject having reference

to the state of beatitude of the saints of the Catholic church, after they had given up the troubles and the turmoils of this life.

Upon the walls of this room hung some superb paintings, and there were likewise some richly carved old cabinets in oak and other woods. The floor was nearly entirely covered by a Turkey carpet, which looked as dingy as Turkey carpets usually do.

The draperies at the windows, of which there were six, were all drawn closely over them, and the light that had so dazzled Claude Duval at first, came from a huge lamp that was upon the table, and which just being about the level of any one's eyes, was anything but agreeable. That lamp was the only thing in the room which could be said to be in bad taste.

CHAPTER CCCXLVIII.

FATHER GARVEY APPEARS UPON THE SCENE AND THINKS CLAUDE DUVAL AN INTERLOPER.

Such, then, was the apartment in which the abbess at Berrymead received Claude Duval, supposing him to be the unscrupulous agent of the Beachem family, and one of the persecutors of Alicia.

Observing that Duval hesitated, and not knowing that it was from the effect of the sudden light, the abbess, who was seated upon one of the old, high-backed Elizabethan chairs, which are to be found in old houses, called out to him in rather a sarcastic tone of voice—

"I am glad to see you, Mr. White. Why—why, how is this?"

"How is what, madam," said Claude, bowing.

"Mr. Beachem said that you were a—a——"

"Lawyer, madam, I presume?"

The abbess laughed, and added—

"No. He said that you were anything but what you are, Mr. White. Why he surely must be blind to represent you as he did to me, as anything but a gentlemanly-looking man. Mind, he did not for a moment disparage your character, but he did not tell me that you were good-looking, as indeed you are."

"Really, madam," said Claude, "you quite flatter me by your kindness."

"Not at all—oh, not at all," said the Lady Abbess. "I hope that you will not think so for a moment; indeed it would quite distress me were you to entertain such an opinion."

"Then you are exceedingly liberal," said Claude Duval, "to entertain so kind an opinion of one who is a stranger to you."

"Oh, not at all. At the first glance it is impossible to mistake you for other than what you are."

"Indeed, madam?"

"Oh, yes; you are a man of the world, and a gentleman. I am only rather surprised that Mr. Beachem should so far have mistaken your character, as he appears to me to have done."

"Has he really done so, madam? Pray what has he taken upon himself to say of me? I hope you will tell me, and in asking you to do so, I beg to assure you that the information shall go no further."

"I may rely upon your honour?"

"Oh, perfectly; I hoped that you would see I was sufficiently a man of the world never to betray the confidence of a lovely and confiding woman."

The abbess nodded and laughed.

"I don't think," she said, "that I am often mistaken in my estimate of any one, and I feel quite sure that such is not the case in the present instance. I have a good opinion of you."

"That, madam, is all I require to make me quite happy."

The Lady Abbess looked at Claude and shook her head, and smiled again as she said—

"I don't know yet whether I ought to trust you; but I suppose, after all, that I must do so."

"You may depend upon one thing," said Claude Duval, as he returned the smile, "and that is, that if any good is to be got out of anybody it is by trusting them."

"You are a philosopher, indeed."

"Only in a small way, madam. But I do think that a little association with you would make anybody anything you choose."

All this time the Lady Abbess kept looking at Claude Duval in rather a peculiar manner, and he began to entertain a serious idea that she was mistrustful of him, and that, after all, she was not so easily deceived as he thought she would be. The thought gave Duval some little disquietude as regarded the success of the expedition he had come upon, but still, as he could not be quite sure about it, he resolved to carry on the same appearance he had started with as long as possible.

Claude Duval had ample reason to know in a short time that he was very much mistaken indeed with regard to the light in which the Lady Abbess regarded him; but we must not anticipate events which we are proceeding to record in the due order of their occurrence.

Duval would have liked to ask at once about the Lady Alicia, but he dreaded to appear to be too eager upon that part of the subject lest he should give rise to suspicion of his motives, if there were really none already, and if there were suspicions already entertained of him he dreaded to confirm or strengthen them.

Under these circumstances, then, Claude Duval was exceedingly discreet.

"And so," said the abbess, as if only giving utterance to the suggestions of a turn of thoughts that she had been engaged in, "and so you are a lawyer, are you?"

"I am, madam."

"Well, this is very agreeable."

Claude looked at her as though he would have said—"Pray, madam, have the goodness to explain yourself."

"You do not understand me," she said, "but what I meant was, that, situated as I am in this place, it is a very desirable and agreeable thing to know that there is a professional man like yourself who is not at all scrupulous about what sort of suit he engages in, and who likewise is so much a man of the world and, I may say, a gentleman, that one may be always glad to see you here."

Claude bowed, as he said—

"Madam, when first I engaged in this business at the instigation of Mr. Beachem I flattered myself that it would be a kind of introduction to you and to the convent, which would lead to pleasing results."

"You are right—you are right. I am delighted to see you. Come, sir, you don't like our convent wine."

"It is excellent—madam, I drink to the conservation of your beauty, and to our better acquaintance."

The wine, to tell the truth, was about the finest that he, Duval, had ever tasted, and he had not the remotest objection to indulging himself with a glass or two of it. He filled the glass for the abbess, but before she could raise it to her lips there came a mysterious knock at the chamber-door.

"Ah, who knocks?" she cried.

The door was opened, and an old nun just peeped into the room, and whispered something to the abbess.

"Well, let him come," laughed the abbess, "let him come."

The nun retired with a curtsey.

"May I ask who it is that you have given leave to come here?" said Claude.

"Yes, it is Father Garvey."

"A priest?"

"Yes, and our convent confessor. I do not know that your appearance here will give him any satisfaction, but that does not at all matter. He must take his chance of these things."

Claude Duval did not care to inquire more particularly into the meaning of what the abbess said. He had a shrewd guess upon the subject, and that was quite sufficient for him; moreover, the arrival of the confessor put a stop to any further confidential discourse with the abbess.

Father Garvey was a man about forty years of age, rather short of stature, but of a strong, well knit frame, as far as could be judged beneath his monastic dress, which hid the greater part of the figure.

The complexion of the holy father was dark, almost to blackness, and his black eyebrows met across his brow in a manner that gave him a strangely sinister look.

He made two steps into the room in what might be considered an easy and an unembarrassed manner; but then his eyes fell upon Claude Duval, and he gave a slight start; and, crossing his arms upon his breast, he bowed to the Lady Abbess.

"This is a friend," said the abbess.

"A friend?" echoed the priest.

"Oh, yes, I assure you, Father Garvey, that this is a particular friend of mine."

"Indeed."

"Will you allow me to introduce you to him?"

"Madam, I think that it will be as well if at the present time I decline that honour and pleasure. My mind is so full of holy meditations that I fear to disturb the current of thought by any intercourse with strangers. I was coming here to ask your opinion about a passage in the writings of the holy St. Chrysostom, which appears to me rather difficult to comprehend."

"Stuff!" said the abbess.

"Madam?"

"Stuff, I say! This is Mr. White, the attorney of Mr. Beachem. Are you now satisfied, Father Garvey?"

"You don't say so!" said the confessor, stepping forward with quite an altered manner. "My dear sir, how are you?"

"Pretty well, I thank you," said Claude. "But do not let me disturb your pious meditations about St. Chrysostom."

"D——n St. Chrysostom!" said the confessor.

Claude laughed; and the Lady Abbess handed Father Garvey a glass of wine, which he tossed off with as jolly an air as possible. Claude Duval was highly amused at this sudden change in the manner of the pious confessor, and resolved to bring him out as much as possible.

"Various circumstances," said Duval, "have delayed me, or I should have been here much earlier; but I hope that there will not be many difficulties in the way of proceeding with Alicia. What sort of mind is she in?"

"It is hard to say," said the abbess. "What do you think, Father Garvey?"

"Confound her!" said the confessor; "I don't know what to say about her. How very beautiful she is."

"Indeed, Garvey!" said the abbess; "you begin to admire her, do you? Well, I thought that some day you would leave off complimenting me, and take to some one who comes rather nearer to your taste."

"That is very strange," said the confessor, "for do you know that I always had the idea that some day you would see some one whom you would think much more of than you ever did of Father Garvey."

As the confessor spoke he looked at Claude Duval.

The abbess at the moment looked rather flushed, and seemed as if she meditated a passionate reply.

If her ladyship did at the instant feel hurt by the cool manner in which the confessor alluded to the fact which he had, with the tact of his calling, read in



JACK STOPS MR. AND MRS. DAY.

her eyes, that she was enamoured of Mr. White, the lawyer, she quietly abandoned the idea, and bursting into a loud laugh, she cried out—

"Well, done, Garvey—well done. I release you from all allegiance to me. Go with your sighs where you please."

"And I congratulate you, madam, upon finding one who is so much more worthy of your regard than myself."

There was just a slight tone of acidity about the way in which Father Garvey uttered these words; and, in fact, the abbess herself, although she had tried to laugh the affair off, was evidently not at all pleased that the confessor should be able so easily to give her up to another.

Claude Duval listened to this little interlude with mingled feelings of curiosity and disgust. He felt all the curiosity which any man would feel, at finding himself thus, as it were, behind the scenes of conventual life, and disgust at the profligacy that was spoken of so coolly, as though it were quite a thing of course.

"I interrupt you," said the confessor, rising.

"No," said Duval. "Oh, no. I hope to hear from you, sir, some account of the sort of humour that this rather self-willed girl, Alicia, is in. Will it not be desirable to lose as little time as possible in the matter?"

"No time should be lost. The property is to be divided into thirds, I think."

"Fourths," said the abbess.

"Well, thirds or fourths, I don't know exactly which; but I am to have my share, and the sooner I get it the better."

CHAPTER CCCXLIX.

CLAUDE DUVAL PASSES A NIGHT IN THE CONVENT.

The Lady Abbess looked rather spitefully at Father Garvey, as she said—

"I am afraid, my dear friend, that you are rather selfish."

"Only afraid, are you?" said the monk. "Oh, I admit the fact in toto; Every one for himself, I rather think, is a well understood motto in this place."

The abbess smiled, and turning to Claude Duval, she said—

"You must not judge of Father Garvey by what you see of him to-night, my good sir. He is very much put out of his way at something."

Claude laughed.

"I hope that the holy father," he said, "will soon recover his serenity; but in the meantime, permit me to hope that there will be no difficulties in the way of inducing Alicia to sign the paper that I shall lay before her, and to ask you what you think will be the best way to set about it,"

"That is the question," said Father Garvey.

"It is no question at all," said the abbess, as her face assumed a strange expression. "We have ways and means of overcoming more obstinate natures than that of the fair Alicia. I only hope that there will be found no person connected with this establishment who will be led away from the due exercise of his duty by a foolish pity for one, who must be forced into doing that which it is our intent that she should do."

"If by that speech you allude to me," said the confessor, "your fears are quite groundless, I assure you. I am an advocate for the greatest rigour being exercised towards the girl."

"Is that possible?"

"It is so, and I will assist you in any way in my power."

"Then," cried the abbess with triumph, "I know what has happened."

"What?"

"She as repulsed you!"

The countenance of the confessor got several shades darker, and his small dark eyes seemed to retreat deeper beneath his overhanging brows. He clenched his fist and struck it upon the table, and seemed about to give utterance to some violent speech, but even at the moment that he opened his mouth to utter the words, a second thought came over him, and bowing his head he was silent.

"It is quite enough," said the abbess. "I am assured."

The confessor was still silent, and the abbess then struck a small silver bell, and the old nun who waited upon her made her appearance.

"Sister Martha," said the abbess, "you will conduct the prudent Alicia to the gray chamber at once."

Sister Martha made a low reverence, and left the room.

"Come," said the abbess, rising, "we will all see this obstinate girl, and you

sir," turning to Claude, "can explain to her that by signing the paper which you are prepared to lay before her, she will be saving her life, and the life of the young man to whom she professes to have an attachment."

"You mean Field?" said Duval.

"I do. Can you tell us any news of him?"

"No, but Mr. Beachem is very much afraid that he is trying his utmost to find out where Alicia is."

"No doubt; but even should he discover that she is here, I don't think it is a piece of information that will very much assist him in his suit. But follow me, Mr. White, and you shall see this obstinate girl."

The Lady Abbess took in her hand a small silver lamp, and opening a concealed door in the apartment, she left it, followed by Duval and the confessor. Father Garvey crept up to Claude, and touched him on the arm.

"Well, sir?" said Claude.

"Hush! speak low. I only wanted to say, that if you had any notion of making friends with the abbess, and of coming here often, I have no objection."

"You are very good."

"Not at all. Alicia is for me. You understand that? When her mind, by a residence of some time longer in this place, is sufficiently subdued, she will easily yield to me. I have marked her for my own. And I won't interfere with you. Is that a bargain?"

"With all my heart," said Claude Duval.

"Agreed, then. I am glad we understand each other so well, but I, as a friend, beseech you to be careful. The abbess is a woman with the passion of a fiend."

"I thank you for the caution; but this conversation is imprudent just now, for she is straining her hearing to catch what she can of it."

"I have noticed that; but fear nothing. She is a little deaf."

"That is a good thing for us, then."

The abbess stopped at the door of a room which was at the end of rather a long narrow passage, floored with oak, and the walls of which were of the same material, highly polished.

The abbess touched a spring in the door, and it flew open rather sharply.

"Come in," she said, turning to Duval, "and don't believe one word of what Father Garvey has been saying to you against me."

"Madam, he said nothing against you. What he did say of you I feel myself constrained to believe. It was, that there was not a figure in the whole convent to be compared to yours, and he begged me to notice how truly majestic it was, which, however, he need not have done, for I could not fail to notice it without any prompting."

The abbess laughed, and shook her head, but it was evident that she was not at all displeased at the compliment.

"Capital—capital," whispered Father Garvey to Claude Duval. "You did that well."

"It was easy."

"Yes, but still it was well done."

Duval smiled to himself at the commendation of the confessor; but he had no further time to waste upon him as he was soon too much occupied with the proceedings of the Lady Abbess in the apartment to which she had conducted him.

The room itself was rather a small one, considering the size of the building in which it was situated, but it presented rather a curious aspect by being covered all over its walls by thick gray cloth, that hung in heavy folds from the ceiling to the floor.

There did not appear to be many windows to the room, as far as Claude Duval could then see, but it was just possible that there were, only that the gray curtains covered them up.

From the ceiling hung a bronze lamp, which cast a dreamy sort of light over the room, for it burnt but dimly.

In the centre of the floor was a small round table, and the other furniture of the room consisted of some three or four couches, and some few of the old high-backed awkward-looking chairs, such as were in the abbess's own room.

There was no one in this gray chamber, as the abbess called it, when she and the confessor and Duval entered it, but scarcely had the door with the spring closed behind them than another door opened at the opposite end of the room, and the long gray cloth hangings being pushed aside, Sister Martha appeared.

"Where is Alicia?" said the abbess.

"Madam, she will not come."

"Force her. There are surely enough of you to do that?"

"Yes, madam."

Sister Martha left the apartment, and Claude Duval turning to the abbess, said—

"Is this Alicia, then, so violent a young lady that she will not do what she don't feel inclined to?"

"No. Not violent at all. I am quite surprised at this message from her. She is delicate and gentle in appearance, and I did not expect much trouble with her."

"Those are just the spirits," said the confessor, "which, when once roused, you will always have the greatest trouble with. Ah, she comes!"

Claude Duval listened, and heard a clatter of voices, and a rushing of feet. The door again opened in the wall. Again the gray cloth was pushed aside, and four nuns appeared dragging along Alicia.

It could hardly be said that Alicia was resisting them, for she walked of her own accord; but still there was sufficient reluctance about her proceeding to show that it was a matter of force. One of the nuns had hold of her wrists, and the others pushed and dragged her forward into the room.

At the first glance at the lovely girl, Claude Duval felt that Field, the young lover, had very far from made any exaggeration in describing her beauty.

Alicia looked if anything a year or two younger than she really was. Her face was one of those pretty shaped ones which are rather wide across the eyes, and come delicately and sweetly small to the chin. It is a kind of face that is in nine cases out of ten spoiled by the chin being a trifle too long, which has the effect thus of giving a pointed expression to the lower part of the face; but such was not the case with Alicia. Her chin was sweetly rounded, and in perfect harmony with the rest of her features.

The soft and beautiful eyes were of the most charming blue that could be conceived, and she presented the rare contrast of very dark brown hair with those coloured eyes that really are only to be found in very fair people.

Claude Duval was quite charmed with the young girl; and yet it may be well supposed that, terrified and persecuted as she was in that convent, he saw her to the greatest possible disadvantage.

She did not at the first glance look to be above sixteen years of age; but after looking at her a little you could see that she was older than that, although all the charms of early youth were about her.

At the sight of the confessor Alicia shrunk back, exclaiming—

"No—no! Oh, no!"

"Silence!" said the Laby Abbess. "Leave us, dear sisters."

The four nuns bowed, and left the room. Alicia stood trembling, and evidently trying to keep up her courage.

"Child," said the Lady Abbess, "it is with pain that we hear you are still possessed with a spirit of rebellion."

"Rebellion!" said Alicia, and as she spoke her voice thrilled to the very heart of Claude Duval. "Rebellion, madam, do you call it to wish for life and liberty—to sigh for all that is pure and good in the great world that God has given to his creatures in lieu of all that is wicked and bad within these

dreary walls? Oh, no—no! It would be rebellion against nature were I to affect to be pleased to stay here. I demand my freedom."

"Human nature," said the abbess, "is always demanding much."

"And don't get it," said the confessor.

"Silence!" said the abbess. "Let me speak to this recusant."

The confessor bowed and drew back.

"Alicia," began the abbess, "do you not know that your fate in life is in your own hands?"

"No, madam."

"I thought not. Come, we shall all be good friends soon, I daresay. All you have to do is to sign certain papers that this gentleman will place before you; and then as soon as our rules will permit, without bringing discredit upon the convent, you will be free to leave it."

As the abbess said "This gentleman," she pointed to Duval, who, stepping forward, bowed to Alicia very profoundly.

"Another?" said the girl. "Oh, how many persecutors am I to find in this dreadful place?"

"I am not one," said Claude.

"Nor I," said the confessor.

"Nor I," said the Lady Abbess. "On the contrary, we are all your dear friends, Alicia, if you will permit us to be such."

"Oh, no, no, no."

"But we say yes. Of course, you are young and inexperienced, and all we desire is that you should profit by our better knowledge of the world. Come, now, I felt assured from the first moment that you came here that you would soon be on the best of terms with all of us. Let us see whether or not we cannot arrange all this affair to the satisfaction of every one."

"Hold!" said Alicia. "Do not be so hasty, madam, in supposing that as yet you have driven me mad."

"Mad, do you say?"

"Yes, mad, for that seems to be the object of what you call your conventual discipline; but Heaven may give me strength yet to resist you. I will sign no papers."

"But, Alicia?"

"No, no, madam, I tell you I will sign no papers at all. The object of them is to rob me of all that is of right my own, and with which I would render independent one whom I feel desirous to be so. You may kill me, but I will not sign any documents whatever in this house. I defy you all!"

CHAPTER CCCL.

ALICIA IS FOUND CONTUMACIOUS, AND DEALT WITH ACCORDINGLY.

THE confessor, as Alicia thus spoke, grinned maliciously; but the Lady Abbess looked the very picture of rage.

"Wretch!" she cried—"no; I am wrong."

With a wonderful command over herself the abbess at once changed her tone, and in quite a mild voice she added—

"Alicia, you speak under mistaken feelings, I feel well assured. It is quite out of the question to be able to explain to you the many advantages that will result to you from signing the papers that will be laid before you. But I can and will explain to you what you will suffer by your obstinacy."

"I will not yield," said Alicia.

"In the first place," said the abbess, "you will be confined in one of our cells, which are specially constructed for such sinners as you are. Of course, we shall all pray for you, but that is all we can possibly do. The light of Heaven will

never again shine upon you; and, in company with the rat and the toad, you will live and you will die!"

Alicia turned deadly pale.

"He whom you, with your girlish simplicity, think you love, will never see you more; but if he knew that you yourself had by your obstinacy here produced such a result, he would rather curse than reverence the memory of the lady that so treated him, and made it impossible that he could be happy with another."

"Oh, no—no!" sobbed Alicia.

"But I say yes!" cried the abbess, in a voice that rang through the apartment. "I say yes. Does he whom you affect to love only love you for the wealth that you so pertinaciously cling to? Is it that he may be enabled to live upon your money that he seeks your hand?"

"No—no, you don't know him."

"But I know you. Listen to me, girl. Suppose you had been poor—suppose it possible that you had had nothing to subsist upon but what thousands of others have, namely, the proceeds of your own industry—would you then have loved him?"

"I would—I would!"

"Would you then have refused to share with him his joys and his sorrows?"

"Oh, no—no."

"Then why do you now object to signing documents which will at once release you to do as you please, and yet leave you independence? We will not be trifled with. In a word, sign the papers that this gentleman will lay before you, or consider this to be your prison for life."

"Can this be possible? Am I in England?"

"Oh, yes. We can answer in the affirmative to both of those propositions. You will do well to consider your decision."

"I have considered!"

"And what is the result?"

"That I will not sign away that property which is mine own."

"Be it so."

The Lady Abbess advanced upon Alicia, and in her passion would have struck her; but Claude Duval was not going quietly to permit that, so he suddenly interfered, saying—

"My dear madam, I think that I can say something which will induce the young lady to consent."

"Oh, in that case—"

"No—no," said Alicia, "you can say nothing. I will not hear you."

The abbess was too much exasperated to say more to her, but clapping her hands together, she cried out—

"Where are ye, holy children—where are ye? Come to the aid of the fold. Come to the truth, and hide in darkness the heretic and the traducer."

The four nuns on the moment made their appearance, and one of them, who was the ugliest being that Claude Duval thought he had ever seen in the shape of woman, sprang upon poor Alicia like a tiger, and twined her long skinny fingers in the hair of the young girl, as she cried out—

"Oh, the sinner! Oh, the sinner! To the glory of the saints, the sinner shall perish for ever."

"And ever," said Father Garvey, in a deep sepulchral voice.

"Away with her," said the abbess; and then suddenly turning to Claude, she whispered, "we will soon frighten her into a compliance with our wishes. She don't know yet what our vaults are."

"Have you vaults?" said Claude, affecting to speak in the most indifferent possible manner to the abbess.

"Have we vaults? To be sure we have. I thought, Mr. White, you could have no sort of doubt upon that subject. Away with her—away with her at once!"

The other nuns seized poor Alicia, who, in that moment of despair, called out in shrieking accents—

"Oh, save me—save me! Henry Field, where are you now? Oh, God, look with pity upon me!"

"Away with her!" cried the abbess. "Away with the wretch!"

The nuns dragged Alicia from the room, and Claude Duval could hear her utter shrieks as they bore her away from the apartment through a number of narrow passages.

It had required all the strength of mind he possessed to enable him to resist the impulse to spring forward and cast his arm round the waist of the young girl, and defy them all. But reflection told him that to do so would be very indiscreet, indeed, for the result could only be that he would have to fight his way out of the nunnery, the topography of which he was profoundly ignorant, and that in his route, which might be wrong or right as chance might dictate, he would be exposed to every possible peril, and both he and Alicia would, in all probability, fall victims to his want of patience.

"You see of what materials," said the abbess, "our fair Alicia is composed, Mr. White."

"I do, indeed," said Claude Duval.

"Curses on her obstinacy! If by any possible means she could be induced to sign the papers, conveying her property from herself, she would soon cease to be of any trouble to us."

"You would really let her go then?"

"Let her go?"

"Let her go?" echoed the confessor.

"Oh, dear, no," added the abbess; "we are not in the habit of letting any on go, Mr. White."

"What would you do then with her?"

The abbess pointed with her finger to the floor, and the confessor nodded.

"I do not quite understand," said Claude.

"I have no objection to tell you," said the abbess, as she took a seat and began to fan herself after her exertions. "If she once signed the documents, which you know how to prepare, she would not live long. That is what I mean. But, curses on her, as long as she refuses to sign them, her life is too valuable to tamper with. That is the whole case."

"I quite understand it," said Claude; "and now permit me to ask of you the permission to see her alone. I have an argument that I can, I think, use with success, to induce her to consent."

"What is it?" said the confessor, with a short, dry cough.

"Ay, what is it?" said the abbess.

"I will tell you: I should not have mentioned it at all if I had not meant to tell you, and it is just this:—I suppose that she really does believe that if she were to sign that paper in dispute she would be let go free."

"I suppose so," said the abbess; "but if she does think that, it is a very great mistake."

"Doubtless; but what, now, if I were to see her alone, and tell her that I am moved to pity at her position, and would do all in my power to aid her; and that I would depose to the fact that she signed the paper under durance, and so vitiate the signature, but that she had better do so at once for the sake of freedom. Do you think that would do?"

"It might," said the abbess.

"And it might not," said the confessor.

"Which," said Claude, "is a very sapient remark to come from you, learned sir."

"Can we trust you, sir?"

"You have trusted me so far already," said Claude Duval, "that it is much better to go on than attempt for a moment to draw back. Besides, I rather

think that my interests are too much wound up with those of the Beachem family for me to act otherwise than in accordance with their interests."

"That is true," said the abbess, as she gave the confessor a look of intelligence, to which he responded with a nod. "That is quite true; and you shall have the opportunity you ask for, Mr. White, of making the experiment you suggest."

Claude Duval could hardly conceal his exultation at this success; but when he came to consider, there was a something about that look that had passed between the confessor and the abbess that he did not quite like.

"When shall it be?" he said.

"In a couple of hours," said the abbess. "By that time Alicia will have had some slight taste of the atmosphere of our cells."

"Good," said Claude. "That will, no doubt, place her in such a frame of mind, that she will be glad to welcome anything that looks like a chance of escape."

"Perhaps so," said the confessor, cunningly—"perhaps so."

"What," said Claude, "doubting again?"

"Sir, I did not speak to you."

"And I feel quite sure that I have no desire to speak to you; but I appeal to the Lady Abbess whether it will not be very desirable, pending the little experiment I wish to make upon the fears and credulity of Alicia, to take care that Father Garvey does not pay her a visit."

"He dare not now," said the abbess.

Father Garvey silently bowed his head, but about his lips there was a covert smile, and there was a twinkle of his eyes which looked like mischief.

The abbess led the way back to her own apartment, and Claude and the confessor followed; but when the Lady Abbess reached the door, she stepped aside, and motioned to Claude Duval to go in, and then facing the confessor, she made a very elaborate curtsey, and said—

"Good-night."

The confessor kept his countenance well, and holding forth both his arms, as if he invoked a blessing on the head of the abbess, he said—

"Good-night, holy sister. The peace of the saints be with you."

The abbess slammed the door of the chamber in his face, and then stamping with rage, she cried out—

"I hate him—I hate him!—Oh, how I hate that man! You can have no notion of how much I hate that man, Mr. White."

"He is not the most loveable person in the world," said Claude. "I don't wonder at your getting rid of him."

The abbess laughed at Duval in a peculiar manner, as she said—

"Before I send for Alicia and allow you to speak with her in private, which I intend to do, I wish to ask you some questions."

"I am quite willing to answer them," said Claude.

The abbess seated herself in a chair that was very elaborately carved, and motioned to Duval to occupy another close at hand; and then she said, with a tone of great seriousness—

"Father Garvey means mischief."

"To whom?"

"To you and to Alicia; but to you first."

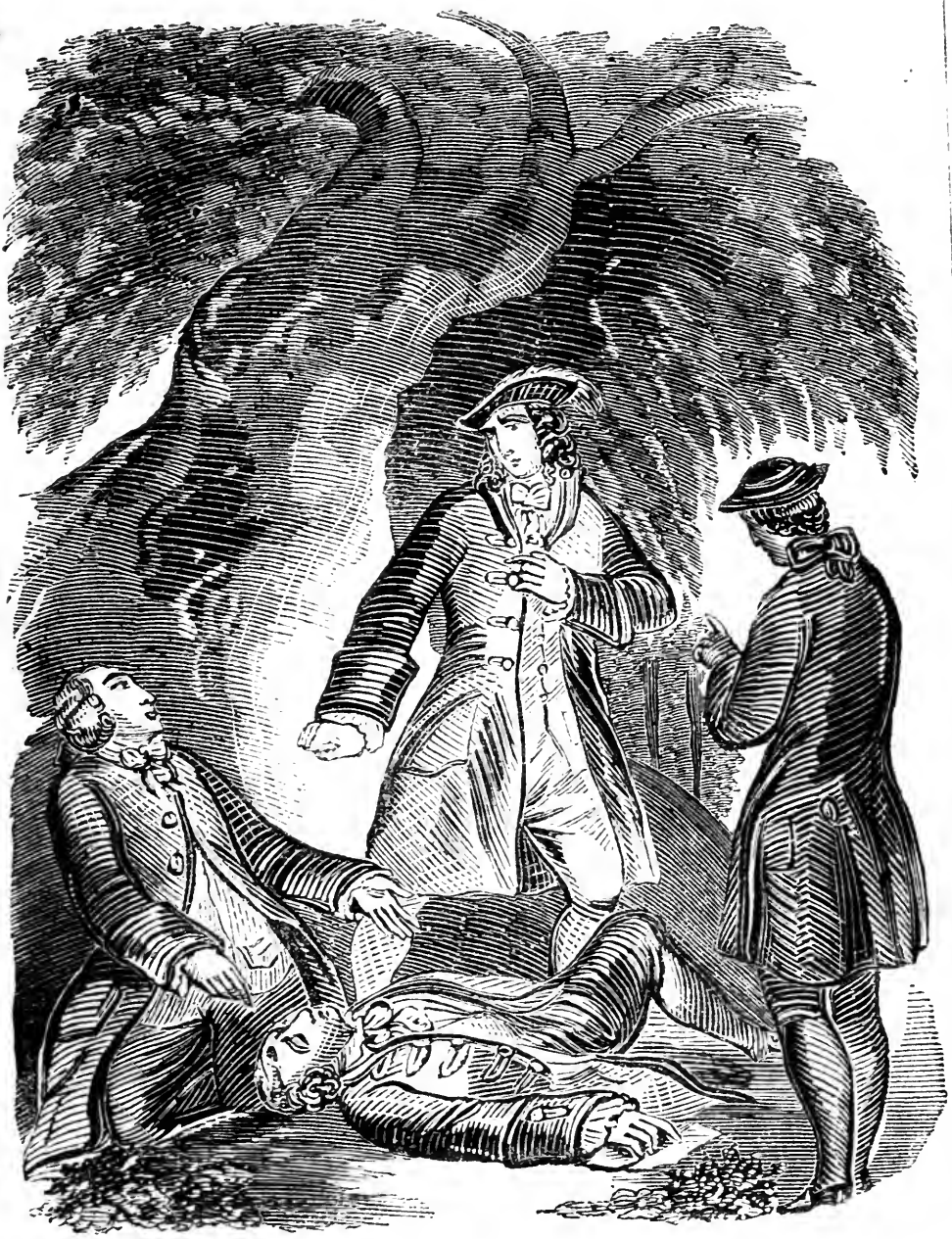
"He had better be careful."

"He will be careful, you may depend. He is a priest, and as such he never forgives an injury. He thinks that you have done him one, you may depend, and, therefore, he will not forgive you."

"What injury have I done to him? I never saw him before in all my life."

"Very likely not; but, you must know, that he does me the honour to admire me very much, and, I am sure, by the glance of his eye, that he is of opinion you have supplanted him in my regards."

"A broad hint this," thought Claude Duval, and then he said, aloud, "Madam,



THE DEATH OF SIR JOHN BEACHEM.

if I thought that indeed it were possible to hold a place in your affections I should begin to consider myself one of the happiest of men; but, alas, I fear that it is out of the question."

"Not at all—oh, not at all. But we will speak more of this when the affair of Alicia is disposed of. We must attend to that in the first place; but what I wanted to say to you with regard to Father Garvey was, that really it would be no bad thing if you induced him to leave the country."

CHAPTER CCCLI.

FATHER GARVEY VISITS ALICIA IN THE CONVENT CELLS.

CLAUDE DUVAL looked a little surprised at these words from the abbess, for how it was possible that he could induce Father Garvey to leave the country he could not for a moment conceive.

"How can I so far influence him," he said, "as to get him out of the country?"

"Easily."

"Well, with all due submission to you, madam, it certainly appears to me that I am about the last person to whom he would listen upon this occasion."

"Not at all. If a person should be removed from any particular spot of earth, whether they be taken from it to another, or carried upward, or placed beneath it, they will be to all intents and purposes equally removed from the country."

"If placed beneath it?"

"Yes."

"I think I understand you."

"I know you do. Hark you, Mr. White, if you think that my favour and my friendship and countenance are worth the having, you will have to get rid of Father Garvey, or he will get rid of you."

"I am very much obliged for the hints you give me upon the subject," said Claude Duval, "and shall take good care of myself accordingly."

"You must do more—you must take care of him. Listen to me. It is the intention of Father Garvey to visit Alicia in the cell to which she is by this time conveyed."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am as sure as if he had told me. I saw it in his eye; so you need not doubt it. Now, I want you to follow him, not only to hear what he will say to the girl, but to give you an opportunity of disposing of him. After you have accomplished both these purposes, you can come back to me in this room, and I shall be glad to see you, and to send for the girl for the purpose of your trying your plan to make her sign the papers."

Claude Duval was secretly delighted at this arrangement of the abbess's, since it well enough chimed in with his own views of what it would be highly desirable to do with regard to the present posture of affairs. The only difficulty that struck him at the moment consisted in the fact of his total ignorance of the interior of the convent.

"I will in all things obey you," said Claude; "but I fear that I hardly know how to set about it."

"How mean you?"

"I mean, that I am a stranger to the topography of the convent, and, therefore, if I were to start this moment upon the expedition to find Father Garvey, I could not do so."

"All particulars of that chamber shall be placed in your way; but you must promise me that you will kill him."

"I will."

"Upon your soul?"

"Oh, yes, upon my soul—if he won't be quiet by any other means," added Claude to himself.

"Then I am satisfied," said the abbess. "Take this key—you see that there is a set of wards at each end of it. One or other of those wards will open any door in the convent. I cannot particularise which will open which; but it will not consume much time to take the other, if one should fail. Now follow me."

"With pleasure," said Duval, as he took the key, which was a very ancient one indeed. "I feel as if I should like now to do what I daresay I shall not be

able to resist the doing, and that is, to follow you for the remainder of my life."

"Are you serious?"

"I am, indeed."

"How can I prove that?"

"I don't think there is any difficulty. In the first place, you see, that I have eyes in my head, and in the next you can easily look into a mirror, and then you will see yourself; and I would ask you, then, how it is possible for any one blessed with sight to do other than admire you?"

The abbess patted him upon the arm, as with a smile she said—

"I think it a happy chance that brought you here. I assure you I feel that we shall be very great friends. Follow me now. I am anxious to get all this affair over, which cannot be considered to be the case till both Father Garvey and Alicia are no more."

The compliments which Claude Duval had paid to the personal charms of the abbess had had the effect of completely winning her heart, and she looked upon the handsome attorney, Mr. White, as she thought him, as a lover whom she valued more than any she had ever known.

Her anxiety to get rid of Father Garvey increased each moment, and she hastened to place Duval in a position that would enable him to satisfy her that the confessor was no more.

Claude followed her out at another door than that through which they had before passed from the room; and after crossing a corridor, which contained a few pictures of saints, and which was dimly lighted by a lamp that burnt before a statue of the Virgin, the abbess turned abruptly upon Duval, as she said—

"The key."

"It is here," he replied, "but I hope you will give it to me again, for I regard it as a proof of your confidence."

"Assuredly," she replied. "You shall have it again, quickly enough. I am only about to convince you of its usefulness, by opening a door with it."

By the dim rays of light emitted by the lamp in the niche, where was the figure of the Virgin, the abbess now sought for a small door, which was so cunningly contrived in the wainscot of the wall that if one had not known it had been there, it might be passed a thousand times, and the keyhole, which was hidden by the ornamental portion of the frame of a picture, would never have met the sight.

The abbess turned the key in the lock, and a tall narrow door opened in the wall, showing beyond it complete darkness.

"Follow," she said. "Follow me, and fear nothing."

"With you I cannot fear anything," said Claude, "but to lose you."

"That is a mistaken fear."

Claude found that after proceeding only a couple of paces through this door in the wall, he came to some stairs, and he rather shrunk back, as he said—

"Are we to descend far?"

"No, only four steps."

"Is that all?"

"It is so. Come on. There you are at the foot of the stairs. Now wait a moment, for I must be guided by my hand, since all here is in darkness."

A sudden sound made Claude Duval start. It was the door that they had passed through, which had closed with a snap. It was intended to close at once, when let go, but the hinges were rusty, and the spring in the same condition, no doubt, so it had taken some time to close.

"It is only the door," said the abbess. "I ought to have closed it. Ah, here is the keyhole—all is well. Do not utter a word, unless I tell you that you may do so with safety."

"I will obey you."

Another door now was opened by the abbess, and Claude Duval felt a rush of cold air upon his face, which was really very pleasant, after the confined atmos-

phere he had been for some time breathing, for the interior of the convent altogether was closely shut up, so that but little fresh air circulated in it.

Duval would fain have said, "Where are you now?" but as the abbess had enjoined silence upon him, he thought that it was better to keep quiet, and he said nothing at all, but strove to pierce with his eyes the mass of gloom that was before him.

The abbess did not speak, but she took him by the arm, and led him forward a pace or two, and then he heard her closing the door behind her, so that it should not make any noise in so doing.

Gradually he began to be able to see a little about him, and then he became sensible that he was in some rather large space, in which there was a dim reflected light from somewhere, but he could not tell where it came from.

"Hush!" said the abbess, very softly. "Stay here till I come back."

"Yes," said Duval, in a similar low tone of voice.

She left him, and each moment he could see more clearly about him, and he became certain that he was in the chapel of the convent, and that he was not far from the high altar, which was a little to the right of him.

Whatever reflections and cogitations this change of place might have given rise to in the mind of Duval, was put a stop to by the voice of the abbess, who said in a canting, hypocritical tone—

"Is there any holy sister here to whom I can afford consolation and advice? If so, let them speak."

A deep groan proceeded from a corner of the chapel; and then a voice said—

"Holy mother, I am here—Sister Ann. I am repeating the prayer of penance."

"Did Father Garvey enjoin thee?"

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"It is well I sought you. He desires that you now retire to your cell to finish the penance prayer. Go at once."

"I go—I go," said the voice.

Through the misty light Claude Duval saw the tall form of somebody in black glide past him, and then all was still. The nun had left the chapel, so that the abbess was free to act as she thought proper.

"Mr. White?" she said.

"Here," replied Duval.

"Come this way. Hem! Can't you see me?"

"No."

"Then you will shortly. I am afraid to turn the lamp, which now sheds most of its beams away from the chapel. You can be guided by my voice. Be careful of the steps that are before you."

Duval, guided as she had said by the voice of the Lady Abbess, walked forward and ascended what he supposed to be the steps of the altar. In a few moments she held him by the arm, as she said—

"I can see you well enough."

"And I you now," said Duval. "My eyes are getting accustomed to the obscurity of the place. Is this a chapel?"

"It is. I find that you can see that much. Speak low; for although I have every reason to suppose that I have removed the only person who was in this place, yet it is impossible that I can be quite certain upon that subject."

"Thank you for the caution," said Claude Duval. "I will hold it in mind. And now will you tell me why I am brought here?"

The abbess laughed strangely, as she said—

"You don't fancy it is to say your prayers, do you?"

"Hardly that," replied Claude.

"Well, then, it is that you may be enabled to follow your foe, the confessor, and my foe likewise, as I know well he is. In order to get to the vaults, in which Alicia is a prisoner, he must pass through this chapel. He will have a

light, as a thing of course, and that will enable you to see him, and follow him. Wrapt up as he will be in the object that brings him here, and not at all suspecting that he is followed by you, he will not be very suspicious; but still, despite that, I advise you to be very cautious, as, before you kill him, I wish you to hear every word that he says to Alicia."

"I understand you."

"Of course you do. Your professional experiences are such as not to deaden your conception of such little matters as these, and I feel quite certain that you will execute what you undertake with due discretion. There remains now but one other subject to settle."

"What is that, madam?"

"How do you propose to yourself to take the life of the confessor? Are you armed?"

Duval did not choose to tell the Lady Abbess that he was amply provided with arms, offensive or defensive; for it did not look very lawyer-like to be in such a state of readiness for a fray, so he merely said—

"I think, if I once get hold of him by the throat, that he will find a very considerable difficulty in getting away again."

"No—no, that will not do."

"Well, madam, I am open to any suggestion that your better experience may enable you to make to me upon this subject."

"Take this."

"What is it?"

"A poniard. It will not fail you, you may depend. I think, that after you have heard all that there is to hear, you had better at once step up to the confessor and leave this in his back."

"I daresay that would do."

"It would be sure to do, and nothing is easier. I tell you, that I hate the man, and must and will be rid of him. I shall think the better of you if you aid me in this business; but if, at the last moment, as I know people are apt to do, you falter at it, I will do it myself at the first opportunity that offers."

"Make yourself easy," said Claude Duval. "I will dispose of the confessor."

Duval made this promise to the Lady Abbess, but he certainly had no sort of idea of carrying it out in the way she dictated. That it would be very desirable to get the confessor out of the way, Duval fully felt; but he shrank from assassination, and left it to good fortune to point out some other mode of disposing of the very pious and holy Father Garvey.

CHAPTER CCCLII.

DUVAL FINDS THE WAY TO THE VAULTS OF THE CONVENT.

The dagger with which the Lady Abbess so kindly furnished Claude Duval for the destruction of the confessor, was, in good truth, a most murderous weapon, and Claude, as he passed his hand along the blade, felt that it would very speedily, indeed, accomplish the object of the Lady Abbess's even in the most unskilled hands.

There is very little doubt but that if he had let the abbess know how very much averse he was to the use of such an implement, she would not have been at all particular about giving him a taste of it; but Claude Duval took care to keep that state of things to himself.

It did not take him much trouble to thoroughly understand the abbess. She was one of those women of wicked passions, who have always some friend and lover for the time being, but who are always ready to throw him aside for a new one who might strike her fancy at the moment.

The death of the old lover was, then, the very best and most ready mode of disposing of him ; and what so politic as to employ the new one upon such an enterprise?

It was very probable that Father Garvey might have disposed of his predecessor, and, no doubt, he would have had much less scruples about the mode of doing so than Duval had.

The little conversation that had taken place between Duval and the abbess was conducted in very rapid whispers, so that it did not take long in coming to an end, and then the abbess said to him—

"Now, you quite understand me. When you have done all that you have to do, you can come to me in my own room ; or suppose I say, that I will be waiting for you in the corridor through the two secret doors ?"

"That will do," said Claude, "provided I can find the doors."

"That you will do easily, knowing the position of them. There is yonder lamp which you can take possession of, as it will aid you on your return. Here is the key that I before gave you."

"A thousand thanks. And now, madam, I beg that you will consider your orders as obeyed to the letter."

"Be it so."

The abbess glided away like a ghost, but where she went to Claude could not in the obscurity of the chapel take upon himself to say. He thought in his own mind, that it was highly probable she had some other mode of getting to her own apartment than by the secret doors leading to the corridor.

Situated as he now was, Duval became perfectly alive to the slightest sound which should be indicative of the approach of the confessor. He had a fear that Father Garvey might glide into the chapel, and pass out again without being seen, and that made him so anxious, that he started at the slightest noise that occurred within the convent.

This state of things lasted a considerable time, till a strange rattling kind of sound came upon Claude's ears, which for a few moments rather confused him, till the idea occurred to him that it was rain upon the roof of the chapel. By listening intently, he thought, too, that he could hear the roaring of wind among the trees in the convent garden.

"A rough night," thought Claude.

Like a star amid the obscurity of the chapel, Duval suddenly saw a faint light at the farther end of it, and he crouched down upon the steps of the altar, to watch its progress.

Slowly marching up one of the aisles came a dim figure, the outlines of which were so very indistinct, that Duval could not take upon himself to say whether it was the confessor or not ; but he was soon satisfied.

As the figure approached, the star-like light that it carried shed a dim radiance around it, and then as it once paused, and the little flame of the hand-lamp was allowed to steady itself, it burnt much more clearly, and Father Garvey, attired in his gown, with the cowl partially drawn over his face and head, stood revealed to the gaze of Duval

It appeared by the attitude of the confessor, that he was listening to the sounds that were indicative of a storm without.

During the few moments that he did so pause, Claude Duval had a good look about the chapel, as well as at the priest, for the light that Father Garvy carried each moment burnt with a clearer flame.

The convent chapel was in good truth a rather gorgeous place. The appointments were all in the highest style of florid gothic art, and from the glance that he, Duval, took at the altar that was close to him, he could see that it was quite a blaze of gold and velvet.

Duval, however, was too anxious to look well at the confessor, and to watch him and his movements, to waste much time in studying the appointments of the chapel, although he would have been well pleased to have done so.

After muttering something to himself, as the wind roared and shrieked over the chapel roof, the confessor glanced at his lamp, and came slowly on.

Claude was afraid that he was on the point of coming up the steps of the altar to the very spot where he stood, and he thought it desirable to creep behind the altar; but before he could accomplish that movement the confessor turned aside, and walked up to a portion of the wall of the aisle.

Duval watched him anxiously.

The confessor placed the lamp upon a little bracket that was fastened to the wall, and then Claude heard a rattling sound, like that which might be produced by a key in a lock, and then in a very mysterious kind of way the confessor suddenly disappeared, and all was darkness in the chapel, save a faint kind of reflected halo, that came from the spot where the confessor had so suddenly and strangely disappeared.

Deeply interested at all this, and fearful of losing sight altogether of Father Garvey, Claude crept forward as noiselessly as he possibly could towards the place and then he soon got a solution of the apparent mystery.

The bracket upon which Father Garvey had placed his lamp was fastened to a small iron door which he had opened, so that by the act of opening it the lamp, had been carried inwards with the door, as that was the way it moved.

The confessor himself was just upon the threshold or the top of a small, narrow flight of stairs, as Duval afterwards saw, and was in an attitude of listening intently with his hand up to his left ear.

A corinthian column that was close at hand, and which formed one of the supports to the arched and richly ornamented roof of the chapel, now afforded to Claude Duval a very convenient place of hiding in, and by just peeping round its convexity a little he could watch the proceedings of the priest.

After listening in this way for any sound that might come up from the subterranean passage beneath the chapel, the confessor put his head out into the sacred building again, and listened for about the space of a minute in that direction.

To hear more acutely he had thrown the cowl back from over his head and face, and as the rays of the lamp fell upon him, Claude Duval had a good view for once in the way of the undisguised features and aspect of a man who probably never, except by such an accident, was seen by human eyes unless he was playing a part that was pleasing to his real feelings.

Such an expression of frightful, satyr-like sensuality upon the face of any human being Claude had never seen. The low forehead—the thick lips—the strange, rolling eyes, and the general expression of the priest's face, were those that are given in some of the paintings of the old masters to the grinning heads that are represented peeping through clefts of trees, or peering down far amid masses of luxuriant foliage at some nymph reposing, and seeking a bath in some refreshing stream in the depths of a forest.

Claude Duval shuddered to look at the man, who, by the ignorant and the bigotted, was, no doubt, esteemed quite a holy person.

But here we would not have our readers mistake us, and suppose that in recording the fact that Father Garvey, who lived some hundred years ago, was a real type of the Catholic priesthood. On the contrary, we believe, and we know that there are many highly intellectual and excellent men belonging to that fraternity; but what we do mean to show is, that the conventual system permitted the existence of such men as the confessor, and of such woman as the abbess.

Having satisfied himself that, beyond the sound of the rain upon the roof of the chapel, all was still, the confessor turned again, and taking the lamp off the bracket, he descended a few steps further, so as to be clear of the door, and then closed it.

A double darkness seemed to fall upon the chapel.

This was a state of things, of course, which was not at all calculated to frustrate Duval's views, so he at once stepped forward and felt for the key-hole of the

little iron door. For a few moments he was rather puzzled to find it, as a loose piece of ornamental iron hung over it; but as he felt that yield to his touch, he guessed at once that it was only a shield to the key-hole, and in another moment he was carefully trying the key that the lady abbess had given him in the lock.

A pang of disappointment came across the mind of Claude, as he found that the key, instead of opening the door for him, turned round and round in the lock without exercising the slightest influence on it. At the moment, he forgot that it was a master-key that he had with a set of wards at each end of it; but it was only for a moment that this lapse of memory took place, and then he rapidly turned the key.

The lock yielded in a moment, and the little iron door opened.

Claude Duval now felt all the necessity of caution for more reasons than one. In the first place, Father Garvey was, no doubt, perfectly acquainted with all the intricacies of that underground portion of the convent; and so, if he had any suspicions that he was watched, might easily elude him, Claude.

In the second place, if he were only once to discover that his visit to Alicia was found out by the man whom he believed to be his enemy, there was no knowing but he might take the life of the innocent young girl to avenge himself.

For these reasons, Claude Duval was as cautious as it was possible for any human being to be, as he proceeded upon the ticklish and somewhat perilous adventure.

Even as Father Garvey had projected his head from the narrow passage on the other side of the secret door to listen in the chapel, so did Claude Duval project his head from the chapel to listen in the secret passage.

All was still.

A new dread, however, soon came over the heart of Claude Duval, and that was, the possibility that, while he was being so over-cautious in listening that the priest did not suspect his presence, he, Garvey, might reach the victim of the persecutions of the convent, and torment her with his insolent addresses, without he, Claude, being able, amid the intricacies of the place, to find the cell.

No sooner did this notion find a home in the heart of Duval, than he hurried forward at once after the confessor.

Two steps from the entrance to that mysterious region there commenced a flight of stairs—so narrow and so steep were those stairs, that only one person could descend with anything like ease at a time, and that one required to be specially careful how he went on lest he should slip from the narrow step he trod upon, in which case, the probability of his falling all the way was very strong, indeed.

Claude was very careful; but he had the disadvantage of being in the dark, so that he shuddered with a strange sort of dread as he went step by step down there, as it were, into the bowels of the earth, and still found no termination to the steps.

He regretted much that he had not begun to count the steps from the top; but now it was too late to do so, and the idea of going back for such an object as that was not to be thought of.

Down, still down went Duval, till he made sure that some fifty feet at least had been descended from the level of the chapel floor, and then he felt that he was no longer on the stone steps that he had wished so devoutly at an end.

He drew a long breath of relief.

"At last," he whispered to himself—"at last I have reached the foot of this staircase; but where is the confessor?"

That was, indeed, a question, for the place in which Claude Duval now found himself was profoundly dark, and no confessor was to be found at hand.

The floor was evidently of earth merely. No doubt it was hammered down hard



CLAUDE DISGUISES HIMSELF FOR HIS EXPEDITION TO THE CONVENT.

and flat; but still it was only earth. The air was very cold, and at the same time there was a strange sickly odour about it that laid hold of the senses of Duval, and seemed to deprive him of one half his strength.

"If one should chance now," he thought, "to faint in such a place as this, there would be no further hope. Death would be certain. I must not think of such horrors."

By an effort Claude shook off the strange feelings that were crowding about his heart, and he listened intently.

CHAPTER CCCLIII.

THE HORRORS OF THE CONVENT VAULTS TRANSCEND CLAUDE'S IMAGINATION.

As Claude Duval, in a crouching attitude at the foot of the long dreary stairs, listened for any sound that might enable him to guess the whereabouts of the priest, he suddenly heard a pattering kind of noise.

At first he could not make out what it could mean; but as he listened he felt convinced that it was the fall of water from some great height in drops into some pool that it had formed.

That afforded him no indication of the way which the confessor had taken, and he was about, with the hope that chance might direct him, to proceed cautiously forward, when there came a rushing sound, and he felt something pass over his feet.

Some unmistakable squeaks from rats engaged in a fight with each other convinced him that what the abbess had said of the reptile inhabitants of that region was by no means an overdrawn picture.

And yet, much as Duval detested those creatures about him, he felt it almost a relief, amid the stern solitude of that place, to find aught in the shape of life there.

"I will proceed," he said to himself. "Surely I shall hear something of the confessor. This place cannot be so very large."

At that moment there came a dim flash of light on the scene, and from a long vaulted passage to the left of where he stood, Claude heard the sound of hasty footsteps.

The light increased each moment in power.

That this was Father Garvey, for some reason or another, on his return to that spot, Duval could not for a moment doubt; and as he did not wish just then to encounter the priest, he glanced around him for some place of shelter

The vaulted passage along which the confessor was coming, went past the end of the staircase, and so right on into an obscurity which Claude could nor penetrate with his eyes.

Upon rather the impulse of the moment, than from any reflection that that would be the best thing he could do, Claude ran down the darkest portion of the passage, and finding that there were small gothic doors upon each side, he pushed at one of them.

The door gave way, and Duval fell headlong down a height of about three feet, on to what felt like damp straw.

Fearful that the noise of his fall might alarm the confessor, Duval would not move, but he listened with all the intensity in his power for any sound that might enlighten him as to the state of affairs in the passage he had left.

The gothic door that Duval had pushed open, and then fallen through, was not above twenty paces from the foot of the stairs, so that when the confessor passed at that latter point with his light, a faint ray or two of it found its way to where Claude lay.

By that faint ray, he could just see that he was in a little vaulted apartment about twelve feet square, and that there was a wide bench in one corner on which was standing a jug, and a piece of stale bread; the floor was covered with straw in a very scanty manner; the place had evidently been used as a prison for some unfortunate. The confessor either heard, or fancied he heard some noise, and proceeded cautiously to look all around him, holding the lamp in his hand above his head, and endeavouring to pierce the gloom that reigned in that place. He approached the passage which Claude had just traversed, and began to examine the cells in a very cautious manner, and if he had continued his search as he began it, without doubt he must have found Duval; but he did not.

"I certainly heard the noise of something like a heavy body falling; but

perhaps it was some of the old plaster giving way. I do not like searching these vaults," he said.

As he spoke, he turned slowly round; and Claude saw, or fancied that he saw him tremble as he did so.

"The fellow is a coward, after all," thought Duval.

"I am certain I heard some sound from here," added the priest; "and yet, what or who could it possibly be? Not the abbess, surely? and she and I only could visit these places at such an hour as this."

With a wild rush, a whole legion of large grey rats now darted past the confessor, and fled screeching and squalling along another passage to the right.

"Curses on the vermin!" he said. "So it was the rats, after all, that once more have filled me with fears in this place? If I came oftener, which, thank the fates, I do not, I suppose I should get a little used to them. Confound them! Well, well, it was better to come back and know what it really was before I went to the cell of Alicia."

With these words, the confessor slowly moved towards the direction from whence he came.

As he went, Duval could still hear him, amid the intense silence of that place, muttering to himself—

"Yes; she shall be mine—mine only! We never yet had in our [illegible] these walls any one to be compared to her in beauty. Wonderful—wonderful!"

Claude scrambled out of the dungeon, the floor of which was so much lower than the passage which led to it.

"Is it wonderful?" he said to himself. "I will let you find out that there is something more wonderful, still, in the whole proceeding than the beauty of Alicia. I feel quite obliged to the rats for making disturbance enough to bring the holy father back again to this spot, for now I can with ease follow him."

Nothing could be easier, now, guided by the light that Father Garvey carried, for Claude Duval to follow him along the narrow passage he was pursuing.

It was astonishing now with what complete security the confessor seemed to proceed. The discovery that it was the rats that had made all the noise appeared so completely to satisfy him, that it is doubtful if anything but a human voice would now have had the effect of inducing him to turn his head.

This was all, so far, in Claude's favour.

The passage was about sixty feet in length, and then it suddenly widened out into a large gloomy looking vaulted apartment, which was some thirty or forty feet across it in one direction, that is to say, opposite to the end of the passage, while right and left it was quite lost in the darkness, so wide was it in both of those directions.

The confessor paused.

Claude Duval now hoped that his perseverance in following Father Garvey would be crowned with success, for it was evident the priest was near to the cell he meant to visit.

Turning round slowly the confessor held up the light, and took a keen glance around him. Then he muttered—

"So! this is the place that they all shudder at, and pretend is haunted—haunted with the spirits of the nuns and the novices who have here come by death, and of the children who have perished in the well. Haunted! Ha! I fear not these idle tales of superstition, not I."

A deep groan sounded audibly from out of the intense darkness; but whether it came from the right or from the left Duval could not say.

The confessor appeared to be equally unable to fix the locality of the sound, for he looked about him rather wildly, and then uttered a cry of terror as he sunk almost to the damp floor, and trembled excessively.

"Serves you right," thought Duval. "The more frightened such a rascal as you are the better."

"What was it?—what was it?" said the confessor in a thick and husky whisper. "I thought I heard a something. Oh, what was it?"

All was still again as the grave.

"No—no!" he added, "it was only imagination, or the rats again—yes, the rats again. Oh, fool—fool that I am to allow myself to be thus played upon by my over-acute senses. It is nothing—oh, it is nothing!"

He rose to his feet again, and looked rather anxiously at the lamp, which was burning but dimly.

"It is the bad air here," he muttered, "that affects the flame of the lamp. I will go to the cell of Alicia at once. I must take her out of this place, for it is paying too dear a price even for her sweet society to visit her here."

Again the dismal groan came upon the dusky air.

The confessor did not utter any cry this time; but he shrunk back, and Claude could see his eyes glaring into the obscurity far away to the right of where he stood.

"The well—the well!" he said. "Surely it comes from the well. No—no! Death only is there. This place should be still as death, for what is it but one great grave?"

With a shuddering horror the priest now looked about him, and then passing his disengaged hand across his brow, he muttered—

"Let me think—oh, let me think. What other inhabitant of this gloomy region is there beside Alicia?"

After a few moments' thought he exclaimed—

"Oh, fool that I am to forget! the young girl from Ostend is here, to be sure—she who would not consent to receive the fond embraces of the Prior of St. Mary's. Ah, yes, how could I forget! She is but a child, too, to utter such groans as that. Her cell is yonder, and she is left to perish, I suppose."

The confessor seemed now, as he looked in the direction of the cell he mentioned, to be consulting a little, but the result was what might have been expected, for with a toss of his head, he said, suddenly—

"Well, let her perish; Alicia engages my attention now; and, besides, there is no comparison between then, and there would be just as much trouble with one of them as with the other."

With this speech the pious man strode onwards down towards the deep gloom that lay to the left of where he had been standing and looking about him.

"You scoundrel," thought Duval, "I will follow you now for the sake of Alicia; but I am glad you have given me information that there is another victim in this place, for before I leave it I will rescue her likewise."

Never had Claude Duval felt greater satisfaction at the prospect of the good that he might do in the carrying out of any of his adventures than he did now at the idea that by coming to the convent to save Alicia he might be the means of likewise snatching another human being from the terrible fate that awaited her.

Following the confessor, now, rightly but silently, and being himself in the deep shadow of the place, while Father Garvey was plainly visible by the lamp that he carried, Claude saw him at length pause at a portion of the wall of the open space.

That open space, to which the narrow vaulted passage had led, deserves something like a description.

Imagine a space of about thirty feet in one direction and in the other of more than a hundred. The floor is partly earth, beaten very hard, and partly covered with flat red tiles. The roof is somewhere about twenty-five feet in height. In fact, this place was as nearly as possible under the floor of the chapel.

Around the walls appeared at intervals low arched gothic doors, and it was to one of these that the confessor now directed his attention, and, no doubt, there was the cell of Alicia.

The heart of Claude beat rapidly.

"Now," he thought, "I shall indeed, knowing where this fair young creature

is imprisoned, have a chance of rescuing her from priestly tyranny—a chance do I say? Oh, I will take such special care that it shall be a certainty."

The confessor now rattled his key in the lock of the cell door, but it was hard to open, and he had to place his lamp upon the floor before he could manage to turn the key, since it required the strength of both his hands to do so.

Then it was evident he was very careful, lest he should defeat his own intentions, and break the key in the lock, so that it was about half a minute of suspense both to him and to Claude Duval before the harsh grating sound of the rusty wards of the lock, as they yielded to the power of the key, came upon their ears.

"Done at last," said he.

He stooped and picked up the lamp from the floor before he opened the door of the cell, and then, with his right hand he opened it wide, and holding up the lamp, he cried—

"Girl! girl! Are you here? Speak!"

"Mercy!" cried a faint voice.

"Good," said the confessor, "good," and he at once crossed the threshold of the cell.

CHAPTER CCCLIV.

FATHER GARVEY FINDS AFFAIRS ANYTHING BUT PLEASANT.

In one moment, Claude Duval was at the door of the cell into which Father Garvey had stepped, with such a feeling in his mind of perfect security from all interception.

The door had partially closed after the priest, so that it only remained open about six inches, but that was all the better for Duval, as in the darkness he could stand close to it and look into the cell, without much chance of being seen by the confessor.

And after all, now, Duval did not a great deal care whether he was seen or not, for he had accomplished the principal object of his visit to that underground region in finding out where Alicia was imprisoned, and beyond a little curiosity to know what the holy father might want to say to Alicia, he had nothing to do now but to lay hold of him, and dispose of him, not as the lady abbess had intended, but in some way that would at all events keep him out of harm's-way for a time.

The cell in almost every respect was like the other one in which Claude had been. If possible, it was a trifle smaller, and the roof was a little lower.

The lamp that the priest carried was ample light for such a small place, so that everything in it was as clearly visible as possible, so that Duval had no difficulty whatever in being a spectator of all that occurred.

Oh, how little did the terrified and agonized Alicia dream that almost within arm's length of her was such a protector as Claude Duval!

In the farther corner of the cell there was Alicia—pale as death itself, and half reposing upon some straw that was on the floor. The beautiful young creature held out both her hands as though their weak force would be sufficient to keep from her the confessor, and there was upon her face an expression of the most terrible dread.

The priest looked at her in silence for some moments, and then in a thick, husky voice, he said—

"Girl! why do you regard me with such looks?"

"Oh! have mercy!"

"Mercy! What have I done that you should doubt my mercy? Why am I here? Of course I come to save you."

"To save me?"

"Most assuredly. Do you think that I could, by any possibility, permit the

abbess to murder you ? Do you think that I, a man, could feel towards you as an angry woman would ?"

"I do not understand you," said Alicia. "If your words are not a mockery —if you comprehend them in the same sense that I do, you will let me go forth from this dreadful place."

"Well, and why not?"

"Can I hope so much?"

"It is just what I came for."

"Oh, I will bless you if, indeed, you have repented of the past and will

"Tell me exactly what you wish."

"Only liberty. All I wish is that you would let me leave the convent. Give me leave to feel that I am free, and I will then find some one to befriend me. Place me in any street in London that you like, and leave me to my own fortunes."

"Indeed! Perhaps you would change your religion ?"

"Religion? Is it for you to talk of religion?"

"Certainly. I am a priest—but, at the same time, I am a man. Do you think that because I am a priest I have neither eyes nor other senses ? Do you think that because I am a priest I do not see that you are beautiful, Alicia?"

"Then—then—" again she moaned—"oh, is this keeping your promise to set me free ? No—no, it is the old talk."

"Silence! girl. I will set you free unknown to the abbess—likewise to all in the convent. I came here for that very purpose. You shall find that there is one, at least, who will not let you pine in such a place as this."

Alicia only looked at him now, but she made no reply to him. She had too good reason to doubt the sincerity of his statements.

"Listen," he continued. "I intend, by the power that a full and complete knowledge of this place, and the possession of a key which will open all its several doors, give me, to take you out of the convent before day dawns."

"Can this be possible ?"

"Yes, upon conditions."

"Conditions ?—Oh, what conditions ?"

"You shall hear. They are not hard ones—on the contrary, they are such as ought to present themselves to you in the most delightful and glowing colours."

"I will listen," said Alicia, sadly.

"For some time past," said the confessor, "I have been tired of my residence in England, and I have sent letters to Rome to get myself removed to some other country. They have been answered to the effect, that if I so liked, I might take up my residence at Lisbon. You, no doubt, are well aware that that city abounds in all that can delight the senses. The climate is beautiful—the wines are charming—the women!—Hem! I don't mean that; but I mean to say that a residence in Lisbon will be a very agreeable change."

"Go, then," said Alicia; "and take my prayers with you, if you release me before your departure from this place."

"That I mean to do; for upon your release will depend my departure altogether."

"I do not understand you."

"Fair girl, I make you the offer of being the companion of my flight to Lisbon. When there, I will introduce you as my niece. Most priests have a niece; and nobody is so ill-mannered as to make any further inquiries about such a personage. Your life will glide away in tranquillity and pleasure. What say you? Is the condition a hard one ?"

"It is such a one that I cannot express my indignation at. I prefer death to such degradation."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, yes; and I now only pray that Heaven will take me to itself, and save me further suffering."

"Rash girl, you know not what you say. Beware!—oh, beware!"

"Of what? I have nothing to beware of but the wild anger of the abbess, who so transgresses the commands of that Heaven she affects to serve, as to persecute where she should protect."

"It is not of the abbess that I bid you beware."

"Of whom, then?"

"Of me. I am all-powerful! I tell you, girl, you are at my mercy."

"Your mercy? That is a quality you do not possess; so it cannot come into question."

"Very good," said the priest. "Then you consent, of course?"

"Never!"

"Pho! pho! You see, girl, that I am not at all angry at this little coquetry on your part, for it only adds a zest to beauty, as sauce does to some delicate dish. I will just tell you, though, what would be your fate if I were not to save you from it."

"I know it."

"Oh, no, you don't. Did you never hear of the well?—the convent well, I mean?"

Alicia shuddered. She had, indeed, heard of the well, for the old nuns had threatened her with death by being cast down it frequently upon finding that she was not willing to consent to what the superior desired of her.

"You need not answer me," said the priest. "I can see that you have heard of it."

"If death is to be my fate," said Alicia, clasping her hands and looking upward, "it is easier and better than the degradation to which you would consign me."

"Stop a bit; you reckon too quickly. The abbess, before you were consigned to the well, would amuse herself by submitting to you such punishments that you would wish for any death to escape from them; and, besides, I would ask you what is to hinder me from by force achieving that result which you will not from love accord to me?"

"Oh, Heaven send me succour now!"

"Heaven? Stuff! Do you fancy that the age of miracles, if there ever was one, is to be restored specially upon your account? Why, you must be mad, girl."

"Still I have a hope that, as Heaven looks down into this dreary cell, and sees the danger that I am in, something will yet happen to aid me—yes, to deliver me."

"Despair of any such circumstance; you are here wholly and entirely in my power. Your cries—your shrieks would not be heard here; or if they did faintly reach the ears of some shrinking nun, she would but cross herself, and with a prayer to the Virgin compose herself to rest again."

"Is there no humanity in this place?"

"No; but there is plenty of piety."

Alicia sobbed, and wrung her hands:

"Girl," added the confessor, "I begin to perceive that you are now awakening to the hopeless character of your position. Surely it is better to be friends than foes with me. Come, let me clasp your wondrous beauty in these arms. I want you to rain soft kisses upon my lips—I want to hear you tell me that you love me; and you shall do so. Resistance is all in vain. You may shriek—howl—pray, or rave as you please, but still you are mine, and mine only. Ha! ha! You are weak, and I am strong."

"Help!" shrieked Alicia.

"If you please, sir," said Claude Duval, as he stepped into the cell and placed his hand on the shoulder of the confessor—"if you please, sir, I beg to object to this little proceeding."

Had a thunderbolt suddenly fallen to his feet, the confessor could not possibly have been more thoroughly confounded than he was at this most unlooked-for

interruption. It so staggered him, that after one cry of surprise and fear, he stood like a man turned to stone for a few moments.

The hand of Claude Duval was still upon his shoulder, and with a calm, keen look, he looked into the face of the audacious priest.

Poor Alicia, who had really thought that her last hour had come, for to outlive disgrace was a thought she could not for one moment entertain, still remained upon her knees in the corner of the cell, and with her arms uplifted to Heaven, appeared to implore that divine mercy, which alone could save her.

Alicia, no doubt, at this moment, could not conceive that the lawyer, and friend of the lady abbess, as she thought Claude Duval to be, could possibly come there as her champion. It rather appeared to her at that moment that his appearance was part of the plot against her peace.

This state of quiet into which the confessor was thrown, was not likely to last very long. It was but the calm which is too often a prelude to a storm.

CHAPTER CCCLV.

CLAUDE DUVAL VISITS HIS FRIENDS, AND ARRANGES A PLAN OF PROCEEDINGS.

If anything, as a mental faculty and exercise, is paid more attention to than another with the Catholic priesthood, it certainly is that presence of mind which, however estimable a quality it may be in some situations, may in others be denominated nothing but brazen impudence.

The holy Father Garvey had not had that essential portion of his education neglected. He was a Jesuit! That, we opine, is sufficient evidence of the fact.

But the circumstances into which the holy man of God was now thrown, were quite perilous. If the affair had been one of an ordinary character, he might have preserved his equanimity; but it will be borne in mind, that his passions were concerned in the matter at present on the tapis, so nature get the better of the force of education and culture, and with a howl of rage, Father Garvey awoke from the sort of trance that had come over him, and turned upon his assailant.

"Wretch! Villain!" he cried. "What do you here? But why do I ask?—why need I ask? This shall suffice."

As he spoke, he drew from some sheath that held it elevated, so that the handle was towards his hand, a dagger of about eight inches in length. It was, in truth, a most murderous and formidable looking weapon.

Making a strange circular movement with it round his head to give force to the blow, he aimed it at the neck of Claude Duval, with the full intention of despatching him.

It was well for Claude that he was quick of eye and agile of limb, or he might there and then have fallen beneath the steel of the murderous priest. As it was, he, with an agility and precision that few men could have compassed, caught the descending arm of the confessor by the wrist and gave it such a wrench, that, with a yell of pain, the would-be assassin dropped the dagger to the floor of the cell.

"Be careful," said Duval. "Another such attempt will cost you your life. Do you understand me?"

As he spoke, Claude took from his pocket with his disengaged hand a pistol, and quite heedless of the confusion he created among the teeth of the confessor, he dashed the barrel right into his mouth, and held it there.

"One touch," added Claude with the same imperturbable calmness with which he had spoken all along—"one touch to the trigger of this pistol, and your brains are scattered on yonder wall. How do you like the prospect?"



CLAUDE AT THE PORTER'S GATE OF BERRYMEAD PRIORY.

"M urder!"

"Oh, no, it would not amount to murder. If ever in this world there could be a justifiable homicide, this might be called such."

"Mercy!"

"Hold, Sir Priest! How dare you, who knows no touch of such a god-like quality, ask for mercy?"

The confessor was silent; but a fit of trembling now took possession of him, and he could hardly support himself upon his feet. From that moment Duval saw that even his vindictive spirit was for the time broken by abject fear, and he did not consider that there was anything further to apprehend from the

confessor. Taking the barrel of the pistol from his mouth, then, Duval pointed to the opposite corner of the cell to that where Alicia still knelt, and in a voice of command, he said to the trembling confessor—

"Go there."

"Yes—yes. What do you mean? Who are you?"

"Obey me. Kneel! That will do. If you value your life, you will be still."

The confessor shrank to the corner of the cell pointed out by Duval, and knelt down. In such an attitude Claude felt that it was not very likely he could be suddenly dangerous; for unless he had fire-arms it would be quite impossible for him to make any aggressive movement unobserved.

All this scene, which we have had to describe in its details at some length, happened with great rapidity. So much so, indeed, that Alicia had scarcely time to ask herself if it could be possible that the man who had been introduced to her by the abbess as the agent of the Beachem family could really be her friend or not.

The panic of the confessor, and the whole of the scene that had taken place between him and the attorney, as she thought Claude Duval to be, was too real and natural to be a piece of acting, and she had looked upon the latter part of the affair with mute wonder.

Having, though, disposed in some sort of the priest, Claude Duval at once turned to Alicia, and said to her—

"Alicia, let me as soon as possible say sufficient to you to induce you to trust me. I am your friend—I am the friend of Mr. Field, who loves you, and my errand here is to protect and to save you."

With a cry of joy, Alicia rose, and springing forward, she, with a childish confidence that was irresistibly enchanting, flung herself into the arms of Claude Duval.

It was but for a moment, though, that the extatic feelings of the young girl at finding Heaven had indeed raised her up a friend in such an emergency got the better of her prudence and her womanly reserve. She disengaged herself from the arms of Claude Duval, and burst into tears.

Claude could very well guess the state of feeling that she had now fallen into, and with all the delicate courtesy of tone that he knew so well how to assume, he said—

"Alicia, calm your fears. You may well imagine that I am one who can be well trused by your lover, or he would not have consented to allow me to come upon this errand alone. Do not weep, I pray you. This should be the beginning of joy, not of tears."

"Oh, yes—yes, it should!" she sobbed; "but when the poor heart is full, it must find relief in tears. Save me—oh, save me from that dreadful man, and from this terrible place. Save me, and I will pray for you, and bless you while I live."

"Hush! All shall be well. But you must have a little patience, yet, Alicia, and it is necessary in the first place to get rid of this encumbrance."

As he spoke, Claude pointed to the confessor, who, thereupon, with a deep groan, fell flat upon his face, for he construed those words of Claude's into nothing less than a sentence of death against him.

"Spare him!—oh, spare even him!" said Alicia.

Claude approached close to her, and whispered in her ear, so that the priest should not hear him, saying—

"I would not soil my hands, nor afflict my soul by his murder for the world. If he remain non-resisting as he is now, he is safe enough from me at present; but it will be necessary and highly proper to secure him somewhere where he can do no mischief either by detailing what has taken place here to others, or by taking active steps himself to thwart us in our future proceedings."

"Dear friend what do you purpose doing with him?"

"Placing him in one of the cells and leaving him there for a time a prisoner. I have from his own lips heard that neither cries, nor shrieks, nor prayers, have

any effect upon the inhabitants of the convent when coming from these dreary cells; so upon his own showing he will be safe enough. You have no objection to his being so located?"

"Oh, no—no. But tell me—is he quite well and happy--Mr. Field, I mean?"

It was with downcast looks that Alicia ventured to ask this question concerning her lover, and Claude Duval could easily imagine how many more she would gladly have given utterance to, but that maidenly reserve held her back from so doing.

"Well, in bodily health, doubtless he is," said Duval, "but happy he is not since you are from him."

"Oh, no—no; but—but——"

"What doubt is it that hangs upon your lips?"

"He might himself have come to my rescue."

Claude smiled as he replied—

"And so he would, but I prevented him."

"You prevented him?"

"Yes, for his own sake as well as for yours, I would not let him come, and I will tell you the reason. Love, Alicia, is a feeling that in its intensity swallows up all others. It would have been out of the question for him who loves you as Field does to come here and play the part that I have played and that I still have to play, for your rescue. His feelings would have overcome him on the instant that he saw you, and you, too, if you had suddenly been introduced to a room in which you saw him as you saw me, could you have so far restrained your feelings as to seem to know him not?"

"No—oh, no."

"So I could have sworn, Alicia. Do not, then, for one moment blame your lover for not himself coming here to manage your escape. I prevented him from so doing."

"I owe you the more thanks. You have convinced me that you have pursued the best course. But what do you propose now?"

"Stop! The confessor."

Father Garvey upon hearing himself now spoken of, uttered a deep groan, and piteously looked up. Alicia understood what Claude Duval meant, which was, that they should put him, the confessor, in some place of safety before they proceeded further in their plan of escape, or even before they spoke further of the mode by which that desirable end was to be accomplished.

"Come, holy and accomplished sir," said Claude Duval, as with his foot he stirred up the attention of Father Garvey, "I will trouble you to rise and follow me forthwith."

"Have mercy upon me! What good will it do to you to take my life? You have conquered me, I freely admit. Oh, be just and merciful to me, now! If it be your wish to leave the convent with this young lady, only say so, and I will smooth the way for you. I will take you past all the dangerous places, and see you safely in the open air. But do not—oh, do not slay me, I beg of you!"

"Follow!"

"Mercy! mercy! Oh, Alicia, bid him spare me! To you I appeal! You are gentle and good. You do not wish to see blood shed, or to know that it is shed."

He tried to take hold of her hand, but Alicia shrunk from him with horror.

"Abstain from appealing to her," said Claude Duval. "Recollect the character of your answers to her, when only a short time ago she appealed to you, and you thought that no help was nigh. I wonder that with all your priestly cunning you are foolish enough not to draw such a parallel. Follow me at once!"

"Yes, yes—oh, yes! I will follow you; but you will yet spare my life? Help! help! mercy! Oh, murder! Help! mercy!"

The confessor lost all self-control, and shrieked aloud.

CHAPTER CCCLVI.

FATHER GARVEY HAS A TASTE OF THE CONVENT CELLS, WHICH HE DOES NOT ADMIRE.

THE sound of the cries of the confessor echoed through the open space outside the cell; and notwithstanding he had himself assured Alicia that no cries, however loud, that might be uttered in that place would reach any ears in the convent, and that if they did, such sounds would be paid no attention to, Claude Duval was afraid that the racket and confusion he made while the fear of death was so strong upon him, would be fatal to the future plans of himself and Alicia.

Under these circumstances, it became necessary to let the half-mad wretch know that his life was safe.

Clutching him by the throat with a force that at once stopped his cries, by nearly stopping the whole of his breath—for Claude Duval felt quite certain that there was no other mode of quieting him—he spoke calmly and deliberately—

"I would not soil my hands nor my conscience by taking your life. That is safe; but you will, for security, occupy one of the cells for a time. Do you understand that?"

"I do," said the priest, in half-choked accents.

Claude then took his hand from his throat, and permitted the half-strangled wretch to breathe again, when, casting himself at the feet of Duval and Alicia, he cried out in abject accents—

"Oh, what clemency—oh, what tokens of mercy is this! How can I possibly thank you both sufficiently for my life—how can I say or do enough to thank you?"

"Silence—silence!"

"Nay, but I will tell you all. You cannot escape the intricacies of the convent. All the routes that lead from it are too well guarded for you to escape. There are several men employed by the Jesuit Committe who keep guard, and there are some of the old nuns who know the use of fire-arms. It will be impossible for you to leave the place except you encounter the whole convent. You will be crushed in the attempt if you had twenty lives unless you take me with you."

"No."

"Yes—oh, yes! With knives and with every kind of weapon that they can possibly use the nuns will oppose you. You will have to fight women—you will have to slay them. You cannot leave the convent without giving the alarm, for there are alarms in the shape of bells and of explosive substances, so placed that you must disturb them. Do you wish to fight your way through a mass of alarmed women—do you wish to kill them? Oh, no! But you will save yourself all this if you take me with you."

"No."

"Yes—oh, yes, let me advise you—let me implore you!"

"Not another word. Follow me. Alicia, do you take the light; I shall not feel at ease till I have this fellow under lock and key."

The confessor gathered enough from the tone in which Claude Duval spoke to feel that it was quite useless to urge him further, and so, despite his horror at being shut up in one of the cells, he had to reconcile his mind to it as best he could, and he only shook his head now and then as he followed Claude Duval and uttered deep sighs.

Duval took good care to let Alicia go first for fear the rascally priest should be seized by some sudden feeling of desperation and seek to take her life, thinking possibly that, after all, by so doing he could not be making his own situation worse than it was in reality.

In this way, then, they left the cell, and Alicia held the light as high as she

could, so that Claude Duval might get a good look at the open space from which the cells opened.

"There is one," said Alicia.

"Yes," replied Duval, as he pushed open the door of the cell, "this one will do. Now, holy and pious sir, walk in."

"In—there?"

"Precisely."

"But—but—you will not——"

"Will not what?"

"Lock and bolt and bar the door, surely, if I give you my sacred word of honour, and further fix that fast and strong by oaths, that I will not stray from this cell till you say I may do so. You can trust me."

"What! trust a priest? Oh, dear, no. Walk in."

"Not yet," said the confessor, and turning sharply, he fled across the open space with great speed.

"We are lost!" cried Alicia.

"No," said Claude. "Wait where you are."

On the moment Duval dashed after the priest; but the latter would probably enough, considering the intimate knowledge he had of the locality, have got off, but that he turned his head for a moment to see where was his pursuer. That movement decided his fate, for he ran against one of the columns that held up the roof, and recoiling with the shock, he fell to the ground.

In another moment Claude Duval was upon him with a shock that nearly killed him.

"So, holy sir," said Claude, "you would escape, would you?"

"Oh—oh! Oh, mercy!"

"Rise, man, at once."

"I cannot."

"Try it. Oh, you cannot, or you will not. Well, we shall see if we cannot find some mode of helping you."

Duval looked around him, but could see no means of annoying the holy father ready at hand; so he drew from his pocket a pistol, that had attached to its barrel a spring bayonet with so very fine a point that nothing could resist it.

"Try and get up now," said Claude Duval, as with the point of the bayonet he gave the confessor rather a sharp touch or two about the region of the ribs.

The glibness with which the sharp point of the little bayonet slipped through his clothing, and some couple of inches of his flesh, had a most startling effect upon the priest, and he sprang to his feet with a speed and dexterity worthy of a tumbler.

"What the devil is that?" he said.

"Oh, nothing particular," said Claude, as he gave him another touch with the bayonet that made him cut a most extraordinary caper. "Nothing particular; but I am rejoiced to see you so much better."

Laying hold of him now firmly by the back of the neck, Claude Duval led him along till they came to the door of the cell, and then by the aid of a kick that was not to be resisted, he sent him right away to the farther extremity of it.

To close the door, lock it, and put up the heavy iron bar across it, was the work of the next half minute, and Father Garvey was at all events for some time out of the way of doing any further mischief.

Alicia, during the short race that had taken place after the runaway confessor, had remained trembling by the cell door. She felt that if the priest made his escape, that there would not only oe no hope for her, but that, in all human probability, he who had ventured to that dismal place to rescue her would not escape from it with his life. It was, therefore, a great relief to her to see the confessor brought back so quickly, and in such good custody.

When he was, however, fairly thrust into the cell and the door was fastened,

Alicia felt able to breathe freely; and looking with eyes swimming in tears in Claude's face, she said—

"The grateful feelings of a life will not be sufficient even to repay you for what you have done for me."

"Don't think of that," said Claude. "What I wish now to see to is your escape; and, in the first place, tell me if you have been long enough here, or if you have seen enough of the mysteries of this convent, to come to any opinion regarding the truth or falsehood of what, in his fright, the confessor said about the difficulty of leaving the convent?"

"Alas! it is true."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes, I have every reason to be sure of it. The one person in all this establishment who uttered many words of sympathy to me, told me the same thing; and I fear she has suffered for it."

"Who is she?"

"A young girl, a novice, who feels that happiness is not to be obtained here; and that the vices of the conventual system, even if it were properly administered, far exceed any good that can possibly accrue from it. Alas! I tremble to think what has become of her!"

"What do you suppose has become of her?"

"She disappeared."

"Disappeared? Stop! That puts me in mind that I have an idea some one is in one of the cells close at hand to this one. It may be your young friend, for all we know."

"Oh! if it should be, what a joy it will be to me to rescue her from death and despair!"

"Come on, Alicia; we will see to this at once. This way. And now while I am here, I will not leave one of these cells unsearched; and, if I can help it, there shall be no victim of Catholicism left in this terrible abode but those who are obstinately foolish enough to stay in spite of reason."

At this moment the confessor kicked loudly upon the door of his cell; but so thick was the door, and so heavily plated with iron on both sides, secured by nuts and screws, that the blows, although, no doubt, they were given with great force, only sounded hollow and muffled.

"He thinks I am gone," said Claude. "It will be, perhaps, as well to undeceive him on that head."

Duval, in order to let the priest know that he was still there, gave the door a great kick, and then all was quiet within the cell. It was tolerably clear that the holy father had an opinion it was better not to provoke his captor too far.

"Now, Alicia," said Claude Duval, "let us commence an examination of the cells; and when that is concluded, we will consider what is best to be done in the way of escape."

The cells were easily got at; but in none of them did they find any prisoner, till they came to one from which there issued a scream, as of some person in great agony, as Claude took down the iron bar that held the door shut.

"Some one is here," said Claude.

"Oh, yes, yes! If it should be Margaret, how happy I shall be that she, too, will be rescued by you from this dreadful place."

"Is Margaret the name of the young novice who spoke kindly to you?"

"Yes; oh, yes."

Claude Duval flung the door of the cell wide open, and then a voice cried out in a tone of pain—

"Oh, spare me!—spare me, I beseech you! Only let me go forth into the world, and I will say nothing of the terrors of this house. I swear that much to you by all that I hold sacred!"

"Margaret—Margaret," cried Alicia, "it is I! Oh! come forth and let me embrace you, my dear friend, and weep that you have suffered for my sake!"

Claude Duval took the light from the hands of Alicia, who then sprang into

the cell, and folded a young girl in her arms, who sobbed aloud from joy at finding that it was not the abbess or the confessor who had sought her cell.

"Oh, Alicia, Alicia," she said, "it was old Sister Bertha who listened to what I said to you, and then informed the abbess, who ordered me to be imprisoned in the cells. But how is it that you are able to come to me?"

"I owe that dear privilege to this gentleman," said Alicia, pointing to Claude Duval. "He will save us both, and rescue us from this place."

"I will try to do so," said Claude. "But time's precious. Let me ask of you both again if you think that it would be possible for us to leave the convent now at once without observation?"

"No—no," they both said.

"By force, then, could it be done?"

"Ah, no," said Alicia. "I think not. We could help you but little; and the vindictive rage of the elder nuns would make each a fury."

"Well," said Claude, "listen to me, then, both of you. By exerting a little patience, I can bring a force into the convent which will put all resistance out of the question. Can you bear with this place for a few hours longer, while I go for such aid? I have no less than three friends upon whom I can fully rely. The abbess, as yet, thinks me in her power; and all I have to do is to make to her a sufficient excuse to leave the convent, and then come back again with my friends over the wall of the garden. I think I can induce the abbess to tell me how that can be done with safety. What is your reply to this?"

It was not without some reluctance that Margaret and Alicia agreed to this arrangement of Duval's; but it did not require much reflection to convince them both that he was quite right in it, and that it was far better to suffer a little further the inconvenience of being in that dismal portion of the convent than to sacrifice possibly all chances of escape.

Besides, as Claude Duval at least found it, it was hardly possible for them to do otherwise than adopt his views.

"You have only both of you," he said, "to tell me that you prefer risking everything in an attempt now at once to leave the convent to any delay, and I will try it. I am well armed. I can provide each of you with fire-arms, and we might possibly succeed."

"No, no," said Alicia, "we will wait."

"We will wait," said Margaret, as she embraced Alicia, and hid her sweet tearful face in her bosom. "God bless you, dear friend, and prosper you. We will wait in patience."

Claude Duval felt deeply affected by the conduct of these two young girls in such cruel circumstances as they were placed. The manner in which they had such great confidence in him, a total stranger to them, would at any time, even if he had not had the precise resolution to do, have inspired him to do wonders in their defence.

"Trust to me, implicitly," he said. "I will soon return to you both, you may depend; and until I do, I recommend you to make the time you have to pass together as light as possible by such discourse as will engender hopes of happy days in store."

"We will—we will."

"Do so; and now farewell for a time. The lady abbess, if I did not soon make my appearance would, I feel convinced, seek me even in this spot."

This was an idea that so much alarmed Alicia and her young friend, the novice, that they were both as anxious for Duval to go as they had been for him to stay.

CHAPTER CCCLVII.

THE LADY ABBESS IS QUITE DELIGHTED WITH DUVAL'S CONDUCT.

Go at once," said Alicia. "We will not attempt even to thank you for what you have already done; but the time may come when, with minds more free from the shadow of present evils, we may be able to do so."

Claude, with an assuring smile to them, waived his hand; and then, with the lamp in his hand, without which he felt that he could never have found his way to the chapel again, he took his route back to that portion of the conventual edifice.

It was sorely against his feelings and inclinations to leave those two young creatures in so gloomy a region; but the more anxious he felt for their release, the more he decided that it should depend wholly upon himself.

The reasoning by which he brought himself to temporise with this adventure, and to act with a greater degree of caution and forethought towards danger than he had ever done in his life before, simply arose from the full consciousness he had that if he, unaided, were to attempt the escape of the two young girls, and if he was to be killed in that attempt, their fates would be sealed.

Such a contingency might happen if he were to make the attempt alone; but if there were several with him, the death of one would not be a death-blow to the whole party.

This was the feeling with which he now made his way back to the convent chapel, and to the lady abbess, to give her a report of his proceedings as regarded the holy father confessor.

That that amiable lady was waiting with no small amount of impatience for news of the death of the confessor, he did not for a moment doubt.

At any other time, alone as he now was, and without the dread of any interference with his life and liberty, Claude Duval would have been glad to have taken the opportunity of examining more minutely the underground place in which he was; but he felt that the very existence of the two young creatures who had placed implicit reliance upon his honour, and his exertions, were at stake, and therefore he would not, although sorely tempted so to do, tarry by the way.

"I may yet have," thought he, "another, and a still better opportunity of discovering some of the mysteries of this monastery, and if I do I will take good care to avail myself of it most thoroughly."

As he passed the mysterious looking well in the court-yard adjoining the cell, he cast down it a shuddering glance, and he thought how convenient it must be to such an establishment to have such a place in which to get rid of the remains of those who become obnoxious, either by their obstancy in clinging to their earthly possessions, or by their virtue to the authorities of the convent.

With such thoughts as these busy at his brain, Claude Duval made his way rapidly towards the flight of steps that led up to the chapel of the establishment.

Nothing happened to disturb the even tenor of his way, as he went, and he reached the little door that opened into the chapel, close to one of the confessionals without hearing a sound.

To open the door was the work of a moment, and then he was about to step into the chapel, when a hand was laid upon his arm, and a voice cried to him—

"Hush! Not a word."

It was the voice of the Lady Abbes.

Before Claude Duval could reply, a loud shriek burst upon the still air, and then as the Lady Abbess pulled him into the chapel, and without any ceremony dashed him headlong into the confessional, he saw a flash of light, and heard the confused tread of feet.



CLAUDE, DISGUISED AS A LAWYER, INTRODUCED TO THE LADY ABBESS.

It was a moment or two before Duval could make up his mind as to how much or how little, he was fully interested in what was going on; but in the course of a short time he found out pretty well what was proceeding, although the cause of it was to him a mystery.

There was a piece of gauze over one of the panels of the confessional, through which no one could see from without, because to do so was to look for light into the absolute darkness of the confessional; but nothing was easier than for Claude Duval to see through it, from the obscurity of the place in which he was into the chapel; it was quite light now from the flare of some half dozen torches.

The scene that presented itself to him was now a most wild and singular one.

Advancing from the further end of the chapel, through a doorway which connected with a passage that lead to the cells of the nuns, came about twenty of the elder sisterhood, dragging with them a young novice, whose age could not have been above nineteen. Among all that dragged her along, Claude Duval could see none of the younger sisterhood of the convent,

The Lady Abbess stood upon the steps of the altar, and kept calling out in perfectly demoniac accents,—

"To the cells with her! To the cells with her! She is possessed by a fiend! Drag her along! To the cells! She shall never see the light of day again!"

The young girl shrieked aloud, and then some of the old nuns about her dealt her several blows upon the face with their fists, and others tore her cheeks with their nails.

They seemed delighted, did those old hags, who no doubt had been compelled from their vices to retire from a world that would no longer tolerate them, to have it in their power to inflict injury upon that young and helpless creature.

Without being so fair and engaging in her beauty as Alicia, this young girl was still of very prepossessing appearances, and delicate form. It was quite out of the question for her to do any good by attempting to defend herself against the host of foes that surrounded her.

And yet with the feeling of desperation which, no doubt, the knowledge of the fate to which she was about to be to consigned engendered in her mind, she struggled to the extent of her ability against the old nuns, and several of them were hurt in the great squabble.

"Drag her along!" screamed the abbess. "Oh, fools that you are! will one girl, a mere child, get the better of you all?"

Upon this the old hags surrounded her like furies, and in a few moments there was hardly a rag of clothing left upon the novice.

"Mercy!—Oh, mercy!" she cried.

"That will do," said the abbess. "Place her in one of the cells, and we will see how she looks and thinks at this time to-morrow night. We will give her twenty-fours for reflection. Ha! ha!"

"Help!—Oh, help!" screamed the girl.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Lady Abbess. "You would hardly believe it, my dear sisters, but this child came to me and demanded to be let out of the convent, and to go to her friends; because she said she had been hidden in the chapel, and had seen me in here with a man, and had heard me say strange things to him."

"Oh, mother!" cried all the old nuns.

"She is mad!" said one. "Mad!"

"Yes, dear sister Margaret, she is mad," said the Lady Abbess; "but if she got out into the world, the are people—enemies, I mean, of our holy faith—who would pretend to believe her, particularly wretches connected with newspapers, so drag her along."

"Oh, Heaven!" cried the young girl; "is there no hope? Is there, indeed, no hope for me in this world."

"None," said the abbess.

Oh, how gladly would Claude Duval, if he could have but for one moment thought it prudent to do so with reference to the safety of others as well as that of the young girl herself, have rushed out of the confessional and told her that he would protect her; but the idea of having, single handed, to fight the whole convent was too much of a good thing, and he kept quiet from the conviction that he would be able soon to rescue this young novice as well as Alicia and her young friend.

The abbess herself descended from the elevated station she had taken on the altar steps, and opened the door leading to the vaults.

"Away with her," she cried, "away with her!"

The nuns dragged the girl along, but what with the ill-usuage she had received

and the exhaustion consequent upon her struggle, she fainted, so they had to carry her through the doorway, which they did with as little care of whether they hurt or not as if she had been a bundle of hay.

As the young creature was carried through the door-way the abbess struck her several blows with her clenched hand, and stamped with rage at the idea that she had been retorted to by one so young and so bold.

Gradually the old nuns, with the girl in their charge, disappeared down the staircase, and then all was still, and the abbess after one hasty glance around her opened the door of the confessional and said, in a low tone of voice—

"Mr. White—Mr. White?"

"Yes," said Claude, "I am here."

"Come out then and leave the chapel, you know the way?"

"Where to?"

"To my room."

"Oh, yes, I think I do, my charming madam."

"Stop."

"At your pleasure. What would you say?"

"I cannot control my impatience to know if Father Garvey is at all likely to trouble us more?"

"Not at all. You may take my word for it, madam, that you need be under no uneasiness at all regarding the pious father."

"What? You then accomplished your purpose in the vaults?"

"I did."

"You are a man after my own heart—go at once to my room, I beg of you. The night is still young, and I will come to you soon. I do not want the old nuns to see you here. Oh, what a narrow escape I have had."

"As how?"

"That abominable novice, she actually saw you here, and heard all that passed, and if it had not been for her own simplicity she might at some inopportune moment have escaped, and so brought, by her tales, ruin upon us all."

"What a pity!"

"A pity! It would have been destruction worse than death itself to me. But fortune has favoured us, Mr. White, and all is well. You shall tell me all that passed."

"Nay, you know that best."

"You misunderstand me. I allude to Garvey's visit to the cells. Oh, the villain! How well I knew that he would make such a visit. But go to my room now at once and wait for me there. You will find the way; I must stay here till the sisters come up from the vaults again. Go at once, for I hear them."

Duval felt that it was anything but politic to remain longer in the chapel, for of all things that he had now to dread, so far as the safety of the persons in the vaults was concerned, was that the abbess should have any suspicions concerning his intentions.

"I go," he said, "and await you with impatience."

"You will not have to wait long."

Claude Duval glided past the altar, and, without much difficulty, he found the door in the wall which led by the secret and circuitous passage to the lady abbess's room.

The determination of Claude Duval was now made to leave the convent as quickly as possible, and seek his friends, informing them of the state of affairs there, and getting them to make such arrangements with him as should enable him and them to make a vigorous systematic attempt to rescue the unfortunates who were in the vaults.

That there were three now to rescue from that horrible state of imprisonment Claude Duval knew, and that there might be yet more to be found was a likely enough proposition, reasoning upon the facts that he already knew.

With such thoughts he hurried to the abbess's room.

CHAPTER CCCLVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL LEAVES THE CONVENT AND REPORTS PROGRESS TO HIS FRIENDS.

It was not very likely that in the state of mind he was now in Claude Duval would pay much attention to the little disagreeables of the narrow passage in which he found himself after leaving the chapel by the secret door at the back of the altar; but he found himself in the course of a few moments amid such a cloud of dust, and so completely enveloped in spiders' webs, that he paused in surprise.

"Surely," he thought, "the lady abbess comes much too often along this passage for it to be in this condition."

The further he advanced the more untrodden and strange did the place appear, until at length he found his course arrested by a door, such as he was quite certain he had not seen before.

This at once led Claude Duval to the conclusion that he had taken some wrong turning, and had wandered away from the route that would lead him direct to the room of the abbess.

Such a state of things under existing circumstances was not exactly what he could have wished, although as regarded the grand notion of making what discoveries he could in the convent it might be all very well.

"I must retrace my steps," said Duval, "for this will never do. If anything more than another will arouse the suspicions of the abbess, it will be not finding me in her room when she herself repairs to it."

It was not difficult at all to get into the right track again. Claude Duval found that he had, without thinking of it, taken a turn to the left instead of going straight on, and so found his way into that unused portion of the secret passage that terminated at the door which had aroused him to a sense of his error, and barred his further progress.

The other portion of the passage was clear enough from any of the encumbrances in the shape of dust and spiders' webs with which the unused portion was so filled up, and in the course of a few moments more Claude Duval was in the abbess's room.

It is frequently from some trifling mistake, though, that we elaborate a new idea, and so now was it in this instance with Claude Duval. He thought it highly probable that the door he had come to, and which had stopped his course in the direction he had inadvertently taken, might possibly, if it were opened, disclose some other of the secrets of the convent.

"I will not forget that there is such a door," he said, "and I can reserve the knowledge of it for future consideration."

Being now alone in the abbess's room, Claude Duval had an opportunity of looking about him, which, had she been there, he could hardly have availed himself of with such facility.

He was quite surprised when he came to look closely at the furniture and fittings of the apartment to see the amount of wealth and luxury that it really contained within its not very large dimensions.

The chairs were inlaid with plates of gold, silver, and pearl, and the hangings were all of the most rich and costly description. Upon a beaufet in one corner there were cups and tankards of gold and silver, and upon every table and shelf in the room there was quite a crowd of little objects of art and taste, all of the most costly character.

"These are the spoils of monasteries," said Claude Duval to himself. "I wonder whether it would be safe now to lay hands on a few of these relics of the past?"

There was one square box of solid gold that struck the eye of Claude Duval.

In the centre of the lid of it there shone a ruby of great size and beauty, and an inscription upon the side of the box was as follows—

"HERE ENSHRINED IS A NAIL OF THE TOE OF THE HOLY ST. ANTHONY."

"Confound his toe," said Claude Duval. "I should like the box very much. Ah! I hear a footstep."

The panel in the wall opened, and with a flushed countenance the abbess made her appearance in the room.

"Oh, you are here?" she said.

"Certainly," replied Claude. "The way was short and easy. You expected me here, did you not?"

"To be sure I did. I am fatigued."

"Pray be seated," said Claude Duval, as he very politely handed her a chair.

"Thank you. My malediction light upon that wretch!"

"What wretch, may I ask?"

"Oh, you saw her. The novice I allude to, who is now safe in the vaults. Ha! ha! She will not be very likely to see daylight again."

"Serve her right, too."

"You really think so, Mr. White?"

"Of course I do. The girl is a fool."

"Ah, she is—she is. Why, Mr. White, I do, indeed, begin to think that you are a person after my own heart."

"I am sorry for that."

"Sorry—sorry?"

"Yes, that you only begin to think so. I really had hopes that you had settled that in your mind to your complete satisfaction a long time ago."

"Well—well, perhaps I have; but what made you call the novice a fool?"

"Just because I think everybody is a fool who sees the way to any enjoyment, and don't at once take advantage of it. She saw that if she had chosen she might have led a placid enough life here; but with her stupid prejudice, which, forsooth, she will call virtue, she would not do so; and behold what is the result."

"True—true," cried the abbess, clapping her hands together. "You are a dear man, Mr. White."

Claude Duval bowed in reply to the compliment. Of course he had said what he had for the express purpose of making the abbess thoroughly and entirely trust him, so that he might with a greater certainly succeed in defeating her in her abominable cruelties and deceptions.

"Go to that beaufet," she said. "You will see a long-necked bottle there with some yellow wax round the cork."

"With all the pleasure in the world."

"It is some of the finest wine in the world even now. You will find glasses there. I feel that I want something to refresh me."

"No doubt of it," said Duval, as he coolly knocked the top of the neck of the bottle off against the edge of the table, and then poured out a glass of rich sparkling Burgundy for the lady abbess, and a glass for himself—"I have no doubt you are fatigued."

"I am, indeed."

She drank the wine at a draught; and as Claude Duval felt quite sure that no trick in the way of drugging was played with that bottle, at all events, he followed her example.

The wine was truly delicious.

"This wine," he said, "merits all the encomiums you can possibly pass upon it, madam."

"No doubt of that. I expect that it is exceedingly fine. But now tell me how you sped with Father Garvey. Keep nothing from me. I would like to hear all that passed."

"I can have no motive in concealing anything from you. You shall hear all, and I think you will then admit that no one can possibly have more disposition than I have to do you all the service you can require of me."

"Go on—go on."

"You gave me a poniard, and you told me to follow him. I did so follow him, and as I went I had twenty opportunities if I had chosen to embrace them of compassing the rascal's destruction."

"Why did you not—oh, why did you not?"

"I thought it more consistent with your wishes and your intentions that I should follow him and see what he was about. I knew that at any time I could at once spring upon him and do the deed."

"Ah, true; that was quite right. I had forgotten. My head is rather in a whirl to-night. Go on."

"I followed him, then, to the gloomy passage at the foot of the secret stairs, and then he traversed a rather large open space."

"Yes—yes; I know it well,"

The abbess shuddered as she spoke, and Claude Duval continued—

"He reached the cells or dungeons, call them what you will, and opening one of them he began a threatening discourse with Alicia."

"Ah, as I suspected. The villain!"

"I listened for a little time, just sufficient to hear from him the most atrocious calumnies against you, and the vilest proposals to the young girl; and then at the moment that he was threatening her with force I interfered."

"You killed him!" cried the abbess, springing to her feet; "tell me that you killed him!"

"Why he would not be quiet, and, under such circumstances, I can safely say that he lies in one of the cells now, and will trouble you no more."

"'Tis well: I breathe freely now."

She resumed her seat again, and then, after a few moments' silence, she said, suddenly—

"Did you speak to Alicia?"

"I did."

"Ah! and what did you say to her?"

"Bearing in mind the object of my visit here, and the duty that I owe to the Beachem family, I thought it was a good opportunity of asking her to sign the deed that will divide her fortune equally between the church and her dear relations."

"Well, so it was. What said she?"

"I think from what she said, and from the fright she experienced by the threats of Father Garvey, that we shall succeed with her; and the sooner we place the documents before her the better."

"This very hour! Do it now!"

"There is only one little objection."

"Objection! What objection—what possible objection can there be?"

"Just this, that I have not the deed with me. Do not look surprised. It is not far off; I left it, I find, in my travelling vallise at the inn at Ealing where I put up before coming on here to the convent. My own feeling is that the best thing I can possibly do is to go now at once and get that important document, and lay it before Alicia to sign, while fright at Father Garvey and gratitude to me occupy her mind."

"This is very provoking," said the abbess.

"It is so."

She played with her fingers up on the table, and looked at Claude Duval for a few moments in silence, and then she said—

"Well, well, it cannot be helped, now; go you must for this deed. The Beachems are too good friends to us for us to neglect their interests. I think with you that the sooner the girl is made, by fair means or by foul, to sign the deed, the better."

"Decidedly so."

"And then, Mr. White, I do hope that you and I will understand each other, and that your visits here will be as frequent as your wishes may dictate."

"I should stay here altogether, then," said Claude, "if that were to be the case."

"Ah, flatterer!"

"No, indeed, I do not flatter. But I may truly say that the man who can really tell himself that he has awakened an interest in the breast of such a person as yourself, with such a world of attractions, may well feel flattered."

"Are you sincere?"

"Oh, on my honour!"

"Well, then, go and get the deed, and then—oh! come back to me as soon as you can, for the time will feel very long till I see you again. Now that I have got rid of that detestable Father Garvey, you do not know how truly I feel for you."

"Yes," thought Claude, "you have, as you think, got him murdered, and you are willing that I should step into his situation. I quite understand you, my lady."

CHAPTER CCCLVIII.

THE LADY ABBESS IS COMPLETELY DECEIVED BY CLAUDE DUVAL.

UNDER no other circumstances than those now present would the lady abbess of the convent have been taken in by Claude Duval; but it is no uncommon phenomenon in human nature for the passions completely to blind the judgment for a time.

The fact is, she was, we were going to say, in love with Claude Duval, only that we feel it would be a desecration of the word, love, to apply it to the coarse and despicable vices of the abbess.

No doubt, however, can exist but that it was the existence of the strong feeling of partiality for Claude Duval that had the effect of making her the easy victim of the deceit that was being practised by him.

Although she had given him leave to go to Ealing and get the deed, yet she did not seem to like him to go out of her sight; and, with quite a die-away sort of look, she said—

"You will soon be back?—you will really soon be back, now?"

"Certainly I will. Of course."

"Ah, you are a dear man!"

"Thank you. I will go at once; because, you see, the sooner I do so the sooner I shall be back."

"Yes, of course—of course. I assure you that all the advantages that the late Father Garvey possessed you shall possess."

"That is very delightful to think of," said Duval.

"Ah, yes, you would say so if you knew all."

"All? Do I not know all?"

"I don't think you do. Father Garvey was not a priest."

"Indeed?"

"No. But he was a friend of mine, and you may be that friend, too, if you like."

"If I like? Ah, can you doubt it?"

"Very well; then, you will understand that when all this affair of the Beachems with the girl, Alicia, is settled, and you come here regularly three or four times a week, which I hope you will, I shall introduce you as the confessor of the novices and the young boarders."

"Oh!"

"You understand me, don't you?"

"Hang me if I do," said Claude Duval.

"Oh, how dull you are! As their confessor, you know, you will have so many nice little opportunities of gathering accounts from your situation; and in the way in which you can impose penances, and so on, you can, if you are so minded, rather enjoy the situation and the power you will possess—eh? Do you understand me now?"

"Well, I think I do."

"You think you do? Bah! you know you do. Well—well, we will talk of all that another time; but if you like, you can have good sport in a convent. Father Garvey had."

"Lucky dog!"

"Poh!—poh! Now go and get the document which you ought to have had with you, and be back again as quickly as you can. Stop! I have a thought."

"What is it?"

"Why, I will put you in the way of reaching this room without the necessity of ringing at the outer gate of it, leaving word with the portress, and any one that you may meet, that you are here."

"That will be a great advantage," said Claude; "and I assure you, that such a mode of reaching the convent will have the effect of increasing the number of my visits threefold."

"Will it, indeed? Then I am glad I thought of it. Follow me, now, and I will show you the way. It is a route that has not been used for some time now; for although Father Garvey knew it, he took a superstitious fear of it, and of late—I mean for the last year or so—he always came by the regular porter's gate. You, I don't think, are the sort of man to be afraid of a ghost, are you?"

"Certainly not."

"Follow me, then. This way."

The abbess led the way, carrying a lamp in her hand, into the same passage that led to the chapel; but instead of going there, she turned off into the very same portion of the passage into which Claude Duval so recently had turned by mistake.

Upon reaching the iron door which had stopped his further progress, she said—

"Your key which I gave you will open this door. Have you it about you?"

"Certainly. I would not part with it on any account."

"Try it, then."

The lock of the iron door from disuse was rather rusty and difficult to turn; but in a few minutes Claude Duval succeeded in opening it, and the door creaked upon its hinges as he opened it. All seemed involved in impenetrable darkness beyond it.

"There is a staircase," said the lady abbess. "Follow me, and mind how you go."

She preceded Claude Duval, and he counted that they descended no less a number than thirty stairs, and then they came to another door very similar to the one which was at the head of the steps.

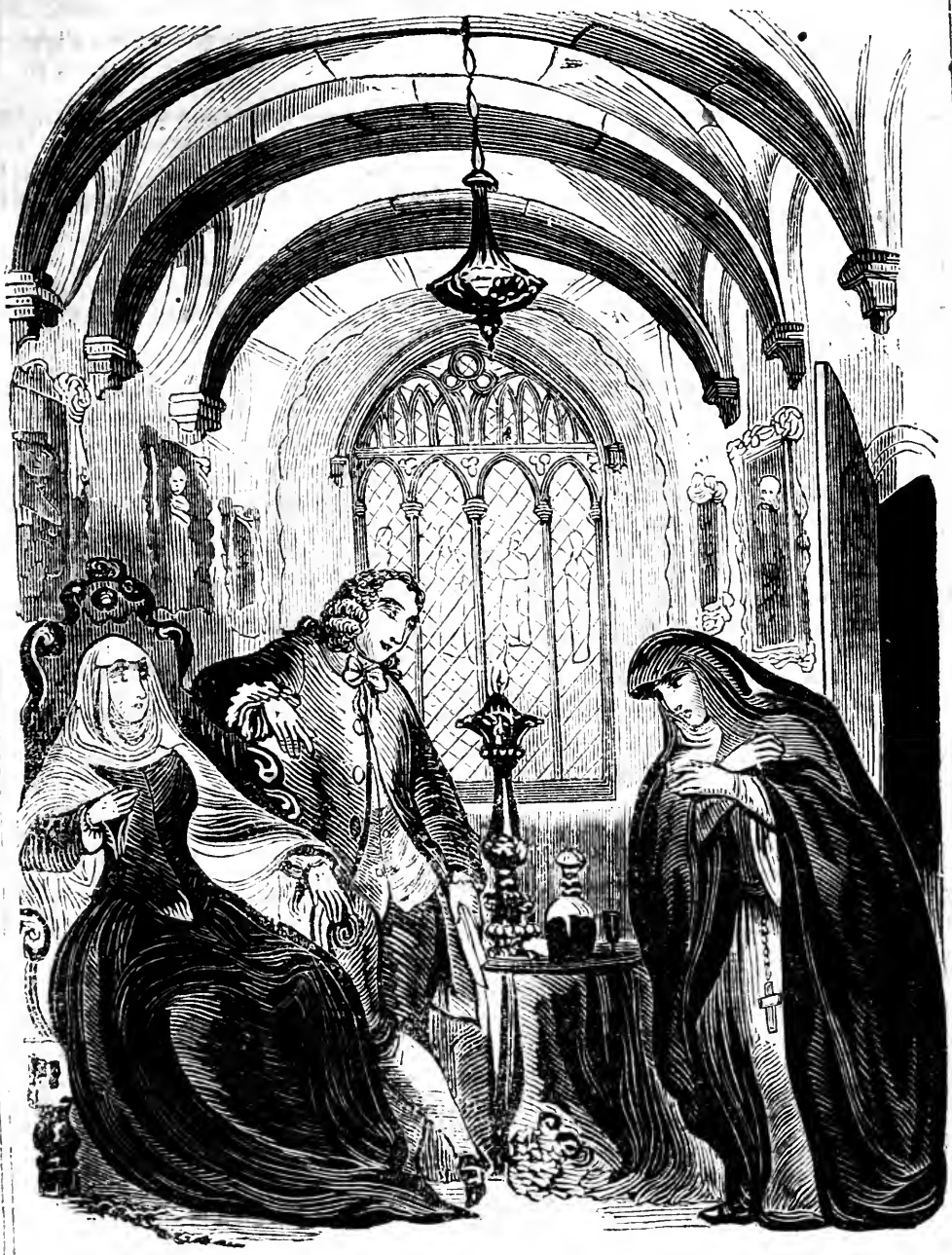
Claude Duval opened this door likewise with his master-key, and then a sudden rush of cold air blew out the lamp.

The darkness was most excessive at that moment; but the abbess said in a low tone of voice—

"Wait a little. This darkness is the gloom of contrast. When we get a little round to it you will see pretty well enough about you. I ought to have left the lamp in the passage."

"Where are we?" said Claude.

"In the convent garden now. You will have to go along one of the gloomiest walks of it, and it will lead you to a portion of the wall, over which you will be



SISTER MARTHA RECEIVES HER INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE LADY ABBESS.

able to get with ease, and it will conduct you to a lane. By turning to your right there you will reach the high road again with ease."

"This, then, will be my route?" said Claude.

"Yes; but let me impress upon you the necessity of not straying from it upon any account, for if you do, you will be destroyed!"

"Destroyed! How?"

"There are pitfalls, and there are traps and spring guns; so that certain death would be the result of any one unacquainted with the route attempting to get to the convent in this way."

"I will be careful."

"And they do say," added the abbess, with a shudder, and with a slight change of tone—"they do say—but that is all a delusion—that at times an apparition has been seen in this gloomy portion of the premises."

"You may depend," said Claude, "that it was the guilty and the cowardly fancy of Father Garvey that occasioned such an appearance."

"It may be so."

"At all events, I am not afraid of it; for I swear to you that if a legion of ghosts were to take up their stations here, nothing of the sort should prevent me from returning to the convent as quickly as I could with what I go now to seek."

"Hush! speak lower. I wonder how I shall find my way back in the dark? It is very provoking to have let the light go out."

"I can relieve you from that difficulty," said Claude Duval. "I have the means of relighting it about me."

"Ah, have you so?"

"Yes, some phosphorus matches, which I luckily have, will put that difficulty at rest. Where is the lamp?"

"Here—here."

Claude Duval lit the lamp for the abbess, who took care to place it on one of the stairs out of the draught of the open door.

"I thank you for this accommodation," said the abbess. "I own that I have no liking to traverse any of the gloomy passages of the convent in the dark. You are better provided than I expected."

"It is a great satisfaction to me," said Duval, "that I am able to be useful to so very charming a person."

"Go to—you don't mean what you say, I'm sure!"

"Indeed, but I do. Let me, however, go as soon as possible for the deed that I want, if it be only for the one reason that I shall the sooner be back again."

"Go, then—go."

"Will you not show me the way?"

The abbess hesitated a moment, probably from the distaste she had to come back again alone through the dismal garden walk in the dark, but it was only for a moment, and then she said in a firm voice—

"Yes, I will see you safe to the garden-wall. Come on with me. This is the way we must take. Do not deviate to the right or to the left more than you can possibly help, for there is danger in so doing."

Claude Duval did not implicitly believe all that the abbess said about the pit-falls, and the steel-traps, and the spring-guns in the convent garden. As regarded the guns, they would require the charge to be too often removed in consequence of the damp that would get to the powder to make it at all probable that they were used in such a place, so he looked upon the whole as a fable, though he did not say so to the abbess.

The soft rain that had so recently fallen had made the vegetation in the convent garden smell exceedingly fresh and pleasant, but the path upon which they were was so completely covered in, that it would have taken a rain of many hours' duration before it could have found its way to it.

On one side of this path there was a row of cypress-trees, planted very closely to each other, and of great height. On the other side there were elms, together with some very fine specimens of the mountain ash, and the branches of both species of trees had been artificially bent over towards the cypresses, so as to form quite a canopy overhead.

It was beneath this all but impenetrable shade, then, that Claude Duval slowly paced with the wicked and unscrupulous abbess of the convent.

The abbess had been right in saying that the intensity of the darkness was owing to the sudden contrast from the extinguishing of the light, for every moment enabled them to see better about them, and by the time they reached the

convent-wall there was no longer any difficulty in distinguishing large objects, at all events, one from the other.

"This is the spot," said the abbess. "You will find that there are branches removed in some places and protruding in others on this side of the wall, which will enable you to reach the top, and when you get there, you will creep along till you come to the trunk of a chestnut-tree. Do you attend?"

"Yes. The trunk of a chestnut-tree."

"Exactly. When you get to that spot you will find that there is the same mode of descending the wall to the lane."

"Which way do I take the route to the chestnut-tree? Right or left?"

"To your left. I was rather confused, or I should have told you that. Now, go on as quickly as you can, and believe me I shall expect you with impatience."

"Not more so than I shall look forward to my return."

"How long do you really think you shall be now?"

Claude Duval thought there would be no great difficulty in getting back with his friends in an hour from that time, but he did not by any means wish the lady abbess to be upon the look-out for him, so he said after a little consideration—

"I do not think it possible for me to be upon this spot again in less than two hours and a half from now."

"That is a long, long time."

"It is, but I cannot help it. May I hope that you will sit up till my return?"

"I shall certainly do so. What is the time now?"

Even as the abbess spoke, the church clock at Ealing struck the hour of one. Claude Duval had thought it later, and he was agreeably surprised to find that it was not so. The fact is, we are accustomed to think of time with reference to incidents that take place in it, rather than to its actual progress; but the events which have taken us some time to detail as taking place in the convent, had in reality proceeded with great quickness.

"It is but one, you hear," said Claude Duval, as he approached the wall, and began its ascent; "you may expect me before four at the latest."

"I will be here at this spot," said the abbess, "at three, and I will wait for you from that hour; so you, knowing that, will be quicker if you can."

"I will. Farewell for the present."

Claude Duval obeyed the directions of the abbess, and in a few moments he was quite safe in the lane that ran along the side wall of the garden of the convent.

CHAPTER CCCLIX.

DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE CELLS OF THE CONVENT.

THE fact which the abbess had taken care to announce, that from the hour of three she meant to be upon the spot where she and Duval had parted, waiting for him, had in one sense all the effect she intended it to have, namely, in inducing him to make greater speed.

She did not think, though, that that speed would be for the purpose of getting back again a full hour before the time mentioned.

After a glance around him, to be certain that he was going in the right direction, Duval set off at a swinging kind of trot. He knew that, in the long run, he should get over the ground that lay between him and his friends much easier at some such pace as that than as if he had made a violent rush at once, and so lost breath and strength in the effort.

Nothing occurred to interrupt Claude Duval in the least, and he reached the outskirts of the cluster of trees where he had left his little party in perfect safety. Just as he did so, a voice called out—

"Who goes there?"

It was the voice of Jack, and Claude immediately replied to it—

"Hilloa, Jack, is that you?"

"Ah, it is Claude!" said Jack. "A thousand times welcome back again, and in safety too."

"Yes, Jack, all's right. Where are the others?"

"Close at hand."

"That will do. Lead me to them. There is no time to lose, I can assure you now."

"This way, then," said Jack. "I was keeping watch here, that was all."

"For anything special, Jack?"

"Why, I hardly know what to say to that, Claude. The fact is, that servant of Mr. Field's has been here, and had a quarrel with his master, who sent him off, and I don't like the fellow."

"Dennis, you mean?"

"Yes. That is his name. He don't seem at all to like what he suspects is going on."

"Confound his impudence! Upon what ground does he presume to dislike it?"

"That I cannot tell you; but I meant, if he tried to interfere with us any further, to give him a hint that he would get into danger by so doing, if he did not mind what he was about."

"And so he will too. In good truth, I would not advise him to be too troublesome."

Young Mr. Field and Dick Turpin were close at hand, and Claude Duval was very soon with them. He rapidly related all that had passed at the convent, and then added—

"You see from this there is no time to lose."

"You saw my Alicia?" cried Mr. Field. "Oh, tell me, did she look ill? Was she dying?"

"Dying? Nonsense! What put that into your head, Mr. Field?"

"I thought—that is, I am afraid—that—that—"

"Come, come, you must have no fears. I assure you that all will be well, if you will come with us."

"Take me where you will, so that it lead to Alicia, and I am with you, even if death were certain to be my doom afterwards."

"There will be no occasion, my good friend, for any such sacrifice, I assure you," said Claude Duval. "I have every reason to believe what I sincerely hope will come to pass, and that is, that you will soon see your Alicia quite free."

"Oh, joyous thought!"

"Well, it is so. But now listen to me, all of you, and don't say one word till I have finished my story."

They listened with silent attention to what Claude Duval said now, as though their very lives had depended upon every word that fell from his lips, and then, with the feeling strongly upon his mind that there was really not a minute of time to throw away, Claude Duval, with wonderful perspicuity and strictness, related the heads of all that had happened at the convent.

At its conclusion young Mr. Field made a spring forward, and clasped Claude Duval in his arms, exclaiming—

"My friend, my brother! oh, how can I ever hope to repay a hundredth part of the deep obligations that I owe to you!"

"Don't think of it," said Claude; "it is not worth thinking of in that way."

"You are too good—too generous!"

"No at all, Believe me, that it is a great pleasure to me to rescue Alicia and he other victims of priestly and conventual tyranny and oppression from the

dreadful state in which they are in the convent; so now, without any more ado about it, let me beg of you all that you will follow me."

"We will—we will."

"Hush!" said Jack. "Ah, I have you."

Jack made a dash among the trees, and there was a howl as of some one in great distress and trouble, and Jack called out—

"No, you rascal, you don't get away from me quite so easy, I assure you. Come on—come on, or must I provide you with a pistol bullet in your head?"

"Oh, good jontilmen," said a voice, "have mercy upon me, I'm as innocent as a babby that's never to be born."

"Why, it's Dennis again," said Mr. Field.

"Confound him!" cried Turpin, "what the devil shall we do with that fellow? He positively haunts us."

"And for no good, I expect," said Claude Duval.

"Here he is," said Jack, as he dragged Dennis forward, "here is the rascal who, I suspect, has been playing the spy upon us all along. Now, Mr. Field, I have but one piece of advice to offer you regarding this man."

"What is it?"

"To hang him out of hand at once. I feel quite certain if you don't something serious will happen all through his pig-headed stupidity and his treachery. Hang him, say I, and then he will be off your mind."

"I don't know what to do with him, but I'm afraid hanging him would not have the effect of taking him off my mind."

"I'm afraid not," said Claude.

"Oh, master," whined Dennis, "it's yourself that knows I'm the faithful Dennis, any way, and my ancestors were kings of old Ireland, bedad an' sure they were, and it's meself that would scorn the dirty action."

"I don't see that, Dennis, when you have not scorned to disobey my orders and to turn spy."

"Is it disobey your orders that I did?"

"Surely so. Did not I tell you to go to the Lion Hotel at Charing Cross and there to wait for me?"

"The Lion was it, sir?"

"You know well that it was, you rascal."

"Faith, sir, then wasn't I going to that same Lion when this pretty-looking gentlemen came at me like a tiger and stopped me?"

"But you were hiding and listening."

"Is it listening you say, sir?"

"To be sure I do, and you know you are guilty."

"Is it guilty you say, sir?"

"This is insolence," said Claude Duval, impatiently; "I cannot and will not waste time upon this fellow. I have quite made up my mind that in the affair we have in hand he cannot be connected. The only thing we can do with him short of taking his life is to tie him up here until we come back."

"Oh, sir, and sure you wouldn't think of tying up the faithful Dennis? It's myself that will go with the master, and fight like a bravo!"

"Fight the priest, do you mean, Dennis?" said Turpin.

"Is it the praste you say, sir?"

"I do."

"Glory be to the saints and the pras te! I shouldn't like to fight the praste. It isn't the praste that can do anything wrong. If I said or did anything against the praste, bedad he'd may be put the curse upon me, and then what would I do?"

"Just so," said Claude Duval. "Secure this fellow, Jack, as effectually as you can. I must be off. I am getting mad at the delay."

Dennis raised a howl as Jack tied him to a tree in such a manner, that escape, unless some one came to his aid, was out of the question, and then saluting him

with three or four hard slashes across the back with a riding whip, Jack said—

"Now, Dennis, if you wish to preserve yourself in a whole skin you will be quiet, and wait here till we come back, for so sure as I am a living man, if you make any disturbance I will hunt you out and shoot you."

"On, on," cried Claude Duval. "Follow me."

They all darted from the wood now, and left Dennis to himself, who after making all the efforts he could to free himself, and finding that by so doing he only made the rope with which Jack had bound him sink deeper into his flesh, he set to blubbering like a great school boy.

"Oh, dear, if I could only get away; but I can't. It's the blessed praste that they may do a mischief too. What if he did go to the young lady, and wish to be kind to her? He was the praste! What if he does take just the drop too much of wine? He is the praste! What if he does put them as won't do just what he wants 'em into a cell, and keeps 'em on bread and water, and now and then drops one or two of them into a well—isn't he the praste? The Lord be good to him! Sure, judgment will come upon them if they meddle with the praste!"

Such was Dennis's idea of the power and the influence of the priesthood of his creed; and we doubt not but that even now, when knowledge and civilization have made such rapid strides among all other classes of the community, the besotted ignorance and degraded subserviency of the lower order of Irish to their priests remains much the same as it did in the time of Gentleman Jack.

We do not mean to say but that there are good priests. We know that there are men in that capacity who are a credit to human nature, and the blessing of all around them; but they are the exceptions unfortunately; and as in the case of absolute monarchy, which is the very best form of government under the sun provided you can get a good and exalted despot, so is it the most hazardous, on account of the rarity of such characters.

For good or for evil, the catholic priesthood wield an awful power. Pity it is that the evil seems so largely to predominate, that the lesson taught to human nature by it is, to trust no human being with any such authority lest it be cruelly abused.

The reader will pardon us for this little digression, as the subject seemed in an imperative manner to call for it; and we now resume our narrative in its regular course.

Having so recently threaded the road from the convent wall to the little wood in which he had left his friends, Claude Duval was well qualified to take them back to the convent again by the most favourable route.

His impatience to get back again had all its effect upon those who were with him, and it was astonishing in how short a space of time they got back to the lane, from one side of which rose the wall of the convent.

They were rather better pleased with the soft rain that now fell, and with the dense clouds that obscured the sky, than as if the night had been one of clearness and of beauty, for the dingy aspect of everything had the effect of completely enshrouding them in obscurity.

"There is the wall," said Claude Duval, "and I think we are close to the spot at which it will be quite safe to scale it."

Duval led the way, and with that strength and agility for which he was so remarkable, and which upon more than one occasion had surprised his foes, and had the effect of saving his life, he sprang up to the low-hanging branch of a tree, and catching it, he in another moment stood upon the convent wall.

"Bravo!" said Turpin.

"Hush! hush! I can now help you all up. You come, Mr. Field, if you please."

Young Field did not want for strength or agility; but still, without the aid of Claude Duval, he might have found it rather a troublesome job to get to the top of that rather high wall.

In the course of a few moments they had all reached the wall's top, which

was sufficiently wide to let any one stand upon it with ease. Claude found the part where the abbess had shown him that a descent might be made, and a minute more saw the party in the garden.

CHAPTER CCCLX.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS REACH THE CONVENT IN SAFETY.

"So far all is right," whispered Claude. "Now, don't move either of you hand or foot, till I reconnoitre the way a little."

Bearing in mind what Duval had told them the abbess had said of the means taken to prevent intruders from making their way through the garden, they did not think this excessive caution of Duval's to be at all necessary, but rather regarded it as quite proper; so there they stood like statues, while he crept cautiously on.

Of course, Claude's object was to get into the same path that he had traversed with the abbess, for he did not wish to lose time in the garden, as the secret passage that led to the chapel was what he wanted to reach.

"All is right," he said. "We are in the path. Come on."

"D—n it, what's this?" said Dick.

"Hush! not so loud, Dick. What is the matter?"

"Something is round my leg."

"Be quiet, then."

Claude Duval lit a match, and stooped down, shielding it as well as he could from the rain, and then he saw that a piece of copper wire was twisted round Turpin's foot; but it was easily removed.

"You may depend," said Turpin, "that this belongs to part of the abbess's man-traps, and, thank the fates, the apparatus must be out of order, or I might have suffered."

"You kept the path, Dick?"

"I can't say I did. An infernal great frog or toad, as large as a dinner-plate, crossed my feet, and I naturally set my right foot on to the grass edging of this flower-bed, and that did it, I suppose."

"No doubt of it. Come on, and be more cautious, I beg of you, Dick, and never mind the frogs or the toads. The rain has brought them out, no doubt, in the old garden."

"So it seems."

They now went on for some short distance, and Claude Duval was congratulating himself that all would be well, when a voice said suddenly—

"Hush—hush!"

Claude stopped, and so did the party behind him.

"Is it you, Joseph?" said the voice.

"Yes," said Claude.

"Dear me, what a cold you have got."

"I rather have."

"Well, Joseph, you can't come into the buttery to-night, although it has some splendid pie and cold game in it. The fact is, that the abbess is up still, and seems as restless as the very devil, she does."

"Oh," said Claude.

"So you must go, Joe; but mind you come to-morrow night. Don't stop now, I beg of you, for I don't know what the abbess is about. She seems half out of her wits to-night. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Claude.

"Well, you have got a cold!" said the voice.

They heard a light footstep make its way rapidly in the direction of the convent, and when it was safe to speak, Claude said—

"So, it seems that others of the holy sisterhood, besides the lady abbess, have their little indulgences."

"Of course," said Turpin, "nobody ever doubted that fact in connection with convents. We may thank the rain, and the wind, and the darkness of this night, Claude, for your being mistaken for Joe somebody."

"Yes, combined with that sort of feeling of security which is the product of long impunity. I have no doubt but that the lady who spoke to me never dreamt of the possibility of it being any one but her Joe."

How cold, and sloppy, and dreary, the convent garden now was. The rain dropped from leaf to leaf until it reached the lowest stratum of them, and then with melancholy splashes sought the soddened ground.

Now and then, a bird, disturbed from its roost in some old tree by the wet, would fly staggering and uncertain-like across their path, and occasionally a gentle wind would stir the old tree tops, and scatter particles of water in all directions.

It was a night admirably adapted for the expedition Claude Duval and his party had come upon, on account of its many discomforts.

The old convent clock struck something, but the wind at the altitude of the clock-tower appeared to be restive and shifty, so that the sounds were vague and confused, and some of them, no doubt, did not reach the ears of Duval and his friends at all; but by calculation of time he well knew that it could not be yet near the hour for the lady abbess to expect him.

The uncertainty of the path they were pursuing—the report from Claude of what the abbess had said of unknown dangers being on all sides of them, and strange sighing sounds that the wind made now and then among the trees, all combined to infuse an odd feeling into the minds of the quiet little line of figures that crept so noiselessly along the garden path.

They looked more like spectres than living people at that solemn hour and in that strange place.

It was, probably, upon the constitutionally serious character of Jack that the greatest effect was produced; but he did not let the feeling show itself in any way that could interrupt the progress of the expedition.

The pathway in which they were became more and more gloomy, and Claude Duval felt confident that they had got to that part of it which he had noticed when he was with the abbess, and where the tall trees interlaced their branches overhead, and prevented the least vestige of the sky from being visible, and must, even at mid-day, have converted all below them into an impenetrable shade.

"Are you sure you are in the right track?" whispered Jack.

"Quite, Jack."

"That is well. And your key, Claude?"

"I have it here. We are now quite close to the mysterious little door that opens into the secret passage of the convent. I will try to do without a light if I can; but I rather think I shall have to ignite a match to enable me to find the key-hole."

"It may take some time to do so."

"It may; and I don't think that there will be any danger in it."

They now suddenly emerged from the dreary pathway in which they were, and came upon a small open space close to the building, which, amid the darkness of the night, in consequence of having its outline so completely blended with that darkness, looked of uncommon size.

"This should be the place," whispered Claude.

After feeling about the wall for some time, he feared that he might be a long time finding the door that he had to open with his master-key; so, as every moment was now valuable, he determined upon risking the faint light of a phosphorus match.

It would be very unlikely that any one would be sufficiently upon the look-out to see it, so Claude at once ignited it; and then he saw the little low-arched door in the wall.

"This will do," he said, as he placed his hand upon the key-hole, and threw



ALICIA REFUSES TO SIGN THE DEED.

down the match. "Now, my friends, silence as profound as death must be the order of the day, for in another moment we shall be within the convent."

The master-key that Duval had did its duty, and the little door in the wall slowly creaked open upon its seldom used hinges.

"Come on," whispered Duval, "I will leave the door close shut, but not locked, remember, and I will as we go on leave all the doors that I open in the same state, and then if anything should happen to me in the event of a tumult you will require no key to aid you in escaping in this direction."

"Don't think of that," said Mr. Field. "I for one will live or die with you, my friend."

Neither Dick nor Jack said a word. It was not exactly the time of day for them to make any protestations to Claude Duval. They both felt that he knew them too well to need any.

They all passed into the little secret passage, and Duval closed the door, but did not lock it.

"Now," he said, "before we go a step further I think it will be as well that we determine upon what we are to do if attacked by a host of these hags of women, who in this establishment lead a life of vice, and who think that they are called upon to obey the orders of the wretch who presides over them."

"I have been thinking of that," said Dick, "and I for one, if it can be at all avoided, don't like shooting a woman, let her scratch ever so."

"Nor do I," said Jack.

"But," added Dick, "I recollect what was once done in a case where an attack of women took place."

"What was it, Dick?"

"Pistols were loaded with powder, well rammed down with a good hard bit of wadding, and it was found that every one whom we fired at went down at once, and gave herself up as shot."

"Let us do it, then, with some of our arms. It will be well, though, to keep about us some pistols properly loaded."

"No doubt of that, for there is no knowing what may happen, and it is as well to be on the safe side."

Dick Turpin and the others now loaded each a pistol with rather an overcharge of powder, and rammed in very hard a bit of leather instead of a bullet, so that it would hit any one a good rap, but not in reality do any fatal injury. They then considered themselves prepared for any contingency that might occur.

It was quite impossible that darkness could be more intense than it was now as they entered this gloomy passage leading to the convent chapel. Claude Duval now paused for a moment, and spoke in a very low tone to his friends.

"Remember," he said, "that in the course of our progress now we shall pass within half-a-dozen paces of the abbess's room-door, and, therefore, that any sound coming to her ears will assuredly have the effect of bringing her out to see what it is. I don't mean to say that even then her appearance would have the effect of putting a stop to our plan of operations, but it might delay us."

"We should have to quiet her," said Jack.

"Yes, Jack, we would do that, but we don't know exactly what means she may have of giving an alarm to the rest of the convent; and what I specially wish to avoid is, a conflict with the nuns."

"Just so," said Dick; "it would be all kicking and scratching, you may depend upon it."

"Come on, then," said Claude. "I think you understand me now. All you have to do is to follow me in single file, and each of you to tread as lightly as he possibly can, so that his footfall may make no perceptible sound."

In this way, then, they went into the dreary passage, which led round by the route the abbess had shown to Duval to the chapel of the convent. Claude considered that it still, with all the delays that had taken place on account of Dennis and other matters, wanted an hour to the time when the abbess would be expecting him to make his appearance with the deed.

What might not be done by four determined men in an hour? And by such men, too, as those who were now within the convent walls. If the abbess had but had the least idea to whom she had opened the secrets of her establishment, she might well have trembled for its future stability.

But it was passion that had blinded that woman, who, under ordinary circumstances, would never have been deceived by the slight plot that had been brought to bear against her.

It she had not taken the unnatural liking that she had to Claude Duval, she would never have so far stultified her reason as to think that all was right in the

way that it was going on; but when we find that she could go the length of asking Duval to take the life of Father Garvey, so that he should not be in the way of her new amour, we may judge how far gone the abbess was in the criminality of her passions.

CHAPTER CCCLXI.

THE RESCUE OF ALICIA AND THE TWO NOVICES, AND THE FATE OF DENNIS.

The necessity now for preserving the most cautious demeanour, if they would be successful in what they were meditating, was impressed strongly upon the minds of all those who were with Claude Duval upon this momentous occasion.

He had told them that in the course they would pursue they would have to pass so near to the chamber in the actual occupation of the lady abbess, that the least noise might have the effect of calling her forth to challenge them.

Claude went first, feeling his way as best he could, for he was afraid to have a light, lest some wandering ray of it should reach the abbess's observation; and yet he found it exceedingly difficult to get on with anything like facility without one.

Nevertheless he went on as best he could, and reached the foot of the flight of steps which he had before counted, upon the occasion of descending them in company with the abbess.

It was then only that Claude turned, and whispered softly—

"Be cautious. Here are stairs."

"Descending?" asked Turpin.

"No—no—they ascend."

"All's right, Claude. Go on."

"Hush! hush!"

The stairs were passed, a door was opened, and then Claude Duval felt certain that he was in the winding passage, which, in a very short time, would lead him close to the door of the abbess's room.

"Caution! caution!—much caution, now!" he whispered.

They all understood him and made the best possible reply they could to him by obeying the injunction in silence, and then on they went, till Duval suddenly found something in his way, over which he fell.

If he had not been going so exceedingly slow, with his hands stretched out before him, he certainly must have fallen; but, as it was, although he made a slight noise, it was not sufficient to give anything like an alarm.

Feeling, however, convinced that there was some obstruction now to his progress which it would not do to tamper with in the dark, Claude Duval, although he was very much averse to such a course, felt that he must have a light.

The hope he had was, that as the abbess would not be sitting in the dark, she would not see any ray from the little match which he proceeded to ignite, since it would present no contrast to the light in her own room.

"Dick!" whispered Claude, "there is something in the way."

"The deuce there is!"

"I am going to light a match just for a moment."

"Ah, do so."

The phosphorus match lit noiselessly; and when the wood-work was in a flame Claude saw that a stool was placed exactly in the centre of the passage, with a large glass goblet upon it. The goblet had been only slightly moved by the touch he had given to the stool; but another such slight touch would have sent it to the floor, when it must have made quite noise enough in breaking to alarm the abbess.

There could be no doubt but she had placed that obstruction in the way of

Claude's return in order that, without the trouble of waiting for him, she might be let know when he was near at hand.

"Cunning enough, but it won't do," said Duval, as he placed the goblet close to the wall, and put the stool out of the way.

"Does she suspect you?" whispered Mr. Field.

"I think not."

"And I hope not."

"Come on, now—the match is out; and, whether she suspects me or not, we will rescue those whom we came here to save."

Claude Duval, while he had had the phosphorus match alight, had taken a glance in advance of him, and had been quite convinced that there was no further obstruction to his progress, so now he advanced in the dark with much greater confidence than before.

A few moments sufficed to enable him to reach the turn in the secret passage, which would bring him past the panel in the wall of the abbess's room.

To get past that point was everything, for when once that was done, every step would take them further from the chances of any interruption, and nearer to the gloomy cells in which, with more or less patience, rested the victims that they had come to save.

"More caution still," whispered Claude, for he was fearful that not being cognisant of the exact spot where the danger lay, one or other of those he had with him might say something.

Claude started back a step or two, for suddenly a gleam of light shot across the passage.

"Down!" he said.

They all crouched down to the floor, and then the panel in the wall of the abbess's chamber was opened about eight inches or so, and she looked out.

The gleam of light did not come from any lamp she carried in her hand, but from the tall candle that was burning upon the table in the room.

Claude Duval could see her face quite plainly, and her hand, as she held the edge of the panel with it.

"All still," she said, "all still. He comes not yet, but he will come. I am foolish to expect him so soon, or to be so very anxious about him. No doubt he will come, and he mentioned to me the shortest possible space of time that would elapse before I saw him again. I must be patient—patient. All is still."

She closed the panel.

What a relief it was to Duval when he heard the click of the spring of the panel go into its place again, and saw a very thin pencil of light that shone through a crevice, and just revealed where the panel was; nothing was observable of the opening in the wall.

"An escape," he said, in a whisper, "quite an escape. Come on now slowly and surely—come on."

They did not dare any of them to speak to him, but they had not advanced many paces when they heard, or thought they heard, for they could not feel quite sure about it, the faint ringing of a bell as if a long way off.

Claude paused and listened intently, for something came across him to the effect that that ringing of a bell had something to do with the affair he had on hand.

Not many moments elapsed before he was convinced that it not only had something to do with it, but that the something was of great importance.

The abbess's voice came rather sharply upon the silence of the night, being only on the other side of the panel, as she said—

"What is it now? Am I never to be left to myself? How dare you intrude upon me at this hour?"

Claude Duval and his party remained as still as death itself to listen to what might now take place in the abbess's room.

In a very bumble voice, indeed, some one replied to the imperious abbess, and

the tone in which the reply was made was so low, that neither Duval nor any of those who were with him could catch the purport even of the words.

When the abbess again spoke, however, in her full, round, commanding voice, there was no sort of difficulty in catching every word she uttered.

"A man wants to see me?" she cried. "What do you mean by disturbing me about him? Who and what is he, pray, that I am to be roused even from my devotions at such an hour as this to see him?"

Again the voice said something in reply in the same low tone as before, and which Claude Duval was very much annoyed to find that he could not catch; but the abbess was kind enough to relieve him from that difficulty, for she cried out in an angry voice—

"Speak up, idiot! Am I to trouble myself to listen to your whimpering?"

"Thank you," thought Claude.

Upon this command, the person who had brought a message to the lady abbess spoke up clearly enough, saying—

"Holy madam, I don't pretend to know who it is at all, nor do I take upon myself to say that you ought to have been disturbed; but Sister Mary thought that it was worth while bringing the message to you, as it might be important."

"Well—well, what is it?"

"A man, then, at the outer gate, who says that his name is Dennis, wishes to see you in order to tell you that there is a plot going on for the purpose of taking a novice from the convent this very night."

"Absurd! What plot? What novice?"

"He declared that he would not tell any one but yourself, or a priest."

"A priest? Why, what sort of a man must he be who waits for a priest before he can make a confidence? Who and what is he?"

"He is an Irishman, and by his language belongs to the lower order of society."

"Stuff! I won't see him."

"Very well, holy mother. I will have him sent away from the gate at once."

"Stop—stop! A plot to take away a novice? Stop a moment. Can it be possible? No—no, surely no—it cannot be. What am I to think? This foolish communication has the effect of distracting me, whether it be true or false. Did he give no further information than what you have told me?"

"None whatever."

"But you say he is an Irishman. Could you not manage to get from him what he has to say without my being troubled with him?"

"I fear not, holy mother. Like the rest of his class, he makes up for the want of education and its advantages by the possession of that low cunning, which is taught to him, and to such as he, from their earliest infancy."

"You are right there. I don't think that there is anything—I don't think that there can be anything in this pretended communication that he has to make to me; but, still, there are circumstances which make it desirable that I should run no risks just now, so I will see him. I have still half an hour to spare," muttered the abbess to herself, as the attendant left the room.

When the abbess was alone, she paced the room to and fro for its whole length—and that was no trifle—with disordered steps. It was quite evident that the communication which had been made to her had had the effect of distracting her mind very much, and, probably, of giving her doubts of the good faith of the Mr. White of whom she had thought so much.

"What can it mean?" she said—"what can it all mean? A plot for the escape of a novice from this convent? Oh, impossible! We are too well protected here. But, yet, I will hear what this man has to say. It is possible that his arrival here may be the beginning of the plot."

The abbess stopped short in her peregrinations to and fro in the room as this idea struck her. It was not a very unnatural one, considering all things.

"Yes," she added, "there may, indeed, be a plot, and this man's arrival here

the commencement of it. He may be in disguise! Ah! let him beware! Let him attempt, by finesse, to gain any purpose here, and I think he will find me a match for him. I will hear him, and then woe be to him if I suspect him even!"

CHAPTER CCCLXII.

DENNIS MAKES ALL THE MISCHIEF HE POSSIBLY CAN IN HIS INTERVIEW WITH THE ABBESS.

THIS inopportune visit of Dennis at the convent was to Claude Duval and his party one of the most serious cross accidents that could possibly have happened to them. It was of the utmost importance, too, that they should find out how much Dennis knew of the projected escape from the convent of Alicia, for the amount of that knowledge would be a good index of the amount of his powers of mischief.

Feeling, therefore, that there was but little time to spare in the matter, and that each minute that Alicia and the other young creatures who were imprisoned in the cells beneath the convent must seem as hours of anxiety and suspense, yet Claude Duval was assured that he could not do better just then than remain where he was, and endeavour to find out the full extent of the powers of mischief of Mr. Dennis.

The angry and excited way in which the abbess was now again marching to and fro in the room gave Claude Duval an opportunity of speaking to his friends without the fear of being overheard, for the abbess made by far too much noise by her perambulations, and was by far too much occupied by her own thoughts and muttered suppositions, to hear a cautiously-uttered whisper or two on the other side of the panel in the wall.

"Turpin," whispered Claude Duval, "where are you?"

"Here, Claude; and Jack, and Mr. Field are close to me. We can all hear anything you have to say."

"Did you all hear what passed in the abbess's room?"

"We did, indeed."

"Then such being the case, I hope you will agree with me that the best thing we can all of us do now is to wait a little, and hear the end of it."

"Not a doubt of that," said Jack.

Mr. Field sighed deeply, and Duval hearing him, said to him—

"It is with very great regret, Mr. Field, that I council any delay in your and in our proceeding. If I acted just up to my own feelings in the matter without thought, I should go on at once and seek Alicia in the cells beneath the convent; but reflection tells me that it will be much better we should know what is the amount of information your man, Dennis, possesses, and what is the amount of credence given to it by the abbess."

"You are right—you are right, Duval."

"I am glad you think so, and I don't think you would say so if you did not think it."

"Indeed, I would not. My reason tells me you are right, although you may easily imagine that my feelings are a little at war with that conclusion."

"I can easily imagine it, and I assure you, sir, that you shall not find me delay one moment longer than necessary."

"Hush!" said Turpin, who had placed his ear close to the panel. "Her ladyship, the abbess, is going to give us some further information."

The fall of a glass in the abbess's room at that moment attracted the attention of Duval and his friends, and then they heard her say—

"How nervous I am to-night. I tremble so that I cannot even hold a glass. Who is there?"

The voice of the attendant now sounded upon the ears of the listeners, saying—

"The man is here, holy mother."

"Admit him, but do you remain close to the door in the passage yonder, so that you may have no difficulty in hearing my bell if I should sound it."

"Yes, holy mother."

There was a slight bustle at the door of the abbess's room, and then the listeners heard Dennis, in a whispering manner, saying—

"Oh, by all the holy saints, and isn't it a mighty great thing for me to have the honour of an interview with your mightiness. The saints be good to us all! Amen! amen! amen!"

"Silence."

"Yes, ma'am, if you please, ma'am, it's silent I'll be. I come of a silent family, ma'am. The Ballgudries of Tipperary, ma'am. Saints look down on us!"

"You profess our holy faith?"

"Surely, ma'am, yes, I do. What the priest says is right, ma'am, so you see it saves a poor man a world of trouble, you see, ma'am."

"That is true. You take quite a correct view of the case. And now, they tell me that you know something of a plot to take a novice from the convent."

"Faith, then, I do, ma'am. They say that this convent is no better, ma'am, than it ought to be, but what's the odd's as long as it is a holy place, ma'am? And sure if the prastes, and the abbesses, and the likes of yourself, ma'am, choose to do anything by way of a little amusement, it's all right with the saints and the holy people, you see, ma'am, and it isn't for the likes of me to say black is the white of your eye, you know, ma'am, an' I'm quite sure that no luck comes from going to thwart the praste or the ladies of the convent, ma'am. That's what I think, ma'am."

"Your thoughts do you credit so far as they go; but tell me, who is the novice you suspect is to be taken from the convent?"

"It's Alicia, ma'am, they call her."

"Alicia?"

"Truth, ma'am, and that same was the name I heard 'em call her over and over again, ma'am, and it's myself would scorn to tell you a lie, ma'am; about it."

"Go on—go on, I wish to hear all."

"Well, ma'am, they wanted to make out that you wanted to get her money, and that the holy man of a praste was rather fond of her, ma'am; but, as I say, if you do wish to get her money I'd like to know who has a greater right to it than the holy church that saves souls? and if the praste, blessed man, does look with the corner of his holy eye at a pretty girl, where's the harm? and it's quite a sin of anybody to interfere with his reverence's little amusements, and she needn't be so mighty particular."

"True—true, that is all correct; but who are the people you speak of that say such things?"

"Well, my lady, I tried to find out, but they began to talk about something else just as I was getting all the news. My master, ma'am, has got them to help him and no mistake, though."

"Who is your master?"

"Truth, ma'am, and it's Mr. Field that's me master."

"Field? I know that name. Then there is some truth in your communication. I remember that name well. I rather think, though, that I have an ally in Mr. White, the attorney, who will get the better of him. But tell me, what is Mr. Field's plan of operation?"

"The operation, ma'am?"

"Yes—yes."

"The—a—the plan, ma'am?"

"Yes; do you not understand me? You say they intend to try to get the

novice, Alicia, out of the convent, and I want to know how they mean to try to do it."

"Oh, yes, ma'am. Well, then, that I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"Bedad no, ma'am. The cunning of 'em, ma'am, bates all the world, and knowing that they are going to come here to-night and interfere with your ladyship and the other holy people, I don't know how they mane to do it."

"Then you have arrived at the end of your communication?"

"The end of what, ma'am?"

"Of your statement."

"Oh, yes. The end of it did you say, ma'am? Which end, ma'am?"

"Idiot! I mean, that you have now nothing more to tell me?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am—that's it is it, ma'am? Well, then, all I have to say is, that there's four of 'em now, along with the master—that's Mr. Field, as I told you, ma'am—and they mane to try something to-night, as safe as potatoes, ma'am; so I thought that, just for the good of the holy father, I'd come and tell you, and may be, thought I, it will be good service done to the saints, after all."

"It will—it will. I am much beholden to you, and will reward you well."

"Many thanks to you, my lady. It's a hard case indeed that the holy fathers can't amuse themselves a little with a heretic of a girl but there it to be a riot and a rackit about it."

"Can you fight?"

"Is it fight, ma'am? Hubabboo! Whoop! Yes, ma'am, I'm of the rale ould fighting stock, ma'am, any way."

"Then if ever you fought in your life it is your duty to fight for your church."

"Yes, ma'am, and I will, faith. There is only one of the fellows with the master that one may be much afraid of, and truth, then, he seems to be a born devil he does."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know who he is, my lady, but he is a fellow that it's much better to put a bullet in from behind a hedge quiet and easy than to come to fisty cuffs with."

"Is he so powerful a man?"

"Why, my lady, praise be to the saints, he is not so mighty big as he is a cute and knowing-looking sort of fellow, and he is good-looking, too, in his way, with his black locks of long hair, and his fine moustachoes, my lady, and his elegant lawn cravat——"

"Hold! What do you say? His moustachoes? Has he rather large and handsome black eyes?"

"True for you, he has, my lady."

"And a dark but clear complexion? And when he smiles does he look like—like——"

"A mighty good-looking fellow, my lady."

"Yes—yes."

"Then that's the same man, my lady, any way, and he is the leader of the whole of them, and is telling of 'em what to do, and a mighty ugly creature, I'm after thinking, he would be, my lady."

"Ruined! Lost—lost! Ruined!" sobbed the abbess, as she clasped her hands over her face and rocked to and fro in an agony of rage and apprehension.

"Is it ruined you are, ma'am? Well, I shouldn't have thought it."

"Oh, horror—horror! All is over—over now!"

"You don't say so, ma'am?"

"Oh, all other misfortunes were nothing to this. I have had misfortunes, but this one is the worst of all."

"And you have had misfortunes, ma'am, really now? Did any of 'em live?"

"Sir? What do you mean?"



THE LADY ABBESS POINTS OUT THE SECRET PASSAGE TO CLAUDE.

"The misfortunes, ma'am. We call 'em misfortunes in ould Ireland, ma'am, whether they are girls or boys, ma'am."

"Wretch, how dare you insult me! My vengeance shall at least reach you. If I cannot be revenged upon the villain that I would fain have in my grasp, I will at least embrace the one that is so."

"Oh, murder, my lady! Don't be after making a victim of me! Murder! Oh, there, be easy."

"Stop!"

"Yes, my lady."

"You say you can fight?"

"Bedad, yes, my lady."

"You shall, then."

"With all the pleasure in life, my lady. Only put me in the way of it, and it is myself that will fight—only show me the thick hedge to get behind, and a gun in my hand, and then won't I fight like a lion, my lady, and hit down the man that little expects it as he goes along, fine and aisy, on the other side."

The abbess rose and paced to a remote corner of the room, and opening a cupboard that was there, she took from it a double-barrelled, rather short gun, and placed it in the hands of Dennis.

"Go," she said. "There is not a moment to lose. Go down the lane till you see the branches of a tree projecting over the wall. Hide yourself any way you can, and wait till the man you have described comes to that spot. Let him get to the top of the wall, and then shoot him."

"Shoot him?"

"Yes, shoot him. He will fall into the garden if you manage well, and I shall have the pleasure of looking at his dead body. Go. When the deed is done, come to me here again for your reward."

"Trust me for that, my lady."

"Go at once. Take this ring. The production of it to the porter at the gate will pass you here again upon your return. You will find an attendant in waiting, who will show you out. There is not a moment to lose."

Dennis left the room, and the abbess, with a scream of rage and disappointment, fell to the floor.

CHAPTER CCCLXIII.

THE HORRORS OF THE CONVENT WELL ARE BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

This mode of tactics that was adopted by the abbess happened to suit Claude Duval and his friends very well indeed, considering that they had made good their entrance to the convent, and stood in no sort of fear of the gun with which Dennis was armed to repel any attack from without with.

If Dennis had happened to have arrived at the convent a little sooner, say an hour or so, they might have run some risk from the murderous way in which he would, no doubt, have carried out the abbess's orders.

"Now," whispered Claude to his friends—"now that we know all that there is to know regarding Dennis and his operations, let us at once proceed on our mission. It is evident that the abbess has no notion that we have already got within the convent walls."

"Not the least," said young Field, in a tone of joy, although he took good care at the same time not to speak loud enough for there to be any danger of his being overheard by the abbess—"not the least; and I do, indeed, now think that I shall soon behold my Alicia."

They now passed the secret little panelled door leading from the abbess's room to the dark and dreary passage with which, no doubt, the convent was, as such places usually are, well provided; and as at each step that they now took they discovered the danger of being overheard by the abbess, they felt their heads grow lighter, and a strange and more fearful assurance growing upon them that they would not succeed in rescuing the fair victims of the conventual system from the terrors that surrounded them.

Claude Duval quickened his pace now each moment and soon reached the door that opened into the chapel behind the altar. The moment he opened it, a rush of cool, grateful fresh air came upon their faces, and they stepped from the now gloomy passage with a feeling of thankfulness to escape from it.

A strange feeling of awe came over Turpin and Jack and Mr. Field as they now found themselves in what, in truth, was the rather large extent of the chapel.

There was a dreamy sort of stillness in the air which might have produced that effect, or was it from the fact that places dedicated to the worship of the Great Being who is the Creator and the Lord of Heaven and of Earth carry with them a feeling of sanctity, which even the most wicked and corrupt cannot shake off?

It may be so.

"And this is the chapel?" said Dick.

"It is," whispered Claude.

"How still and solemn!"

"My flesh creeps upon my bones," said Jack.

"How chill the air is, too."

"Come, come," said Claude Duval, "don't let the silence and the strangeness of this place infect you both with unknown fears."

"No, no."

"Forward! Follow me! We are behind what they call the high altar, now; but there is no possible occasion for us to linger in this place."

"On—on, then!" said Jack.

Claude Duval went forward carefully, for he recollected that there was a short flight of stairs to descend from the place in which he was in order to reach the body of the chapel. Fearing that his comrades might, if not in time warned of their existence, fall over them and so make more noise than would be at all desirable, he turned and said—

"Steps!"

That one word was sufficient to induce them to use the greatest caution in proceeding, so that they all descended from the raised portion of the chapel on which the altar stood with perfect safety.

"Now," said Claude, "we are not far from Alicia."

"Oh! joyful thought!" said Field.

"Hush!" said Turpin; "I am not accustomed to this place, of course, and it is possible that some accidental noise may have deceived me, but I thought I heard a groan."

"Let us all listen."

Jack bent his head right down to the floor of the chapel to listen; and then they all heard very clearly and distinctly a deep, hollow groan.

Claude Duval started.

"Did you hear it, Turpin?"

"I did."

"And you, Mr. Field?"

"Yes, yes."

"Can any of you fix the locality of it?"

They were all at fault in that particular. They had all heard the groan, but it seemed as if it floated in the very air of the chapel; and, at all events, it was quite impossible that any of them should take upon himself to point out any particular spot and say, "It is from there."

After listening for a few moments longer and finding that the groan was not repeated, Claude Duval spoke in a low and cautious tone of voice.

"I do not think," he said "we ought to let this circumstance stop us in our enterprise. Heaven only knows to what an extent these villanous conventual mysteries are carried on in this place, and what may be the amount of suffering contingent upon it; but as far as we are concerned we have now a distinct enterprise before us, and we should pursue it heedless of what may stand in the way."

How grateful young Field felt to Claude Duval for those few words!

"I agree with you," said Turpin; "we will follow you, Claude."

"This way, then."

With the master-key in his grasp that would open the mysterious door by the side of the confessional, Claude Duval crept along the aisle of the chapel in which that door was situated, and soon, as he thought, came to the confessional.

"This is the place," he said.

They all came to a halt.

Claude Duval now felt with great care all along the wall; but with the utmost caution and carefulness that he could use, he could not find the key-hole in the door, and wondered much what could be the cause of its disappearance.

"Can't you get on?" whispered Turpin.

"No, Dick."

"What's the matter?"

"I can't find the key-hole of the door, and I suppose the only plan will be to have a light at any risk. Just light a match, Dick, and hold it for me here, as I have the key in my hand."

"Yes, in a moment."

Dick Turpin quickly ignited a little match, and when the flame caught the wood Claude Duval could see the cause of his disappointment easily enough. There were several confessionals in a row, and the one that he had stopped at was not the one that was close to the portion of the wall which opened to the gloomy vaults and cells beneath the convent.

"I see, now," said Claude, "it is further on."

Mr. Field drew a long breath of relief. He was afraid when he saw the hesitation of Claude that the secret door in the wall was much too carefully hidden to be found again, and that it was just possible his Alicia might not be saved by those even who were willing to risk so much for her.

"Can you see it now?" he said, as Claude paused again, just as the match was going out.

"Yes."

"Oh, thank Heaven!"

"You should not have despaired, Mr. Field, even if the door had eluded all possible observation."

"But what could we have done?"

"What could we have done? I would have had up the floor of the chapel; and if that would not have succeeded, I would go outside and begin upon the convent brick by brick and stone by stone till I had revealed to the world the secrets of this most vile and detestable prison-house."

"Oh, my friend, the more I know of you the more surely do I feel that you will place my Alicia in my arms again."

"I will."

Claude opened the door in the chapel wall easily enough now, and just as the match burnt to the last portion, and Dick Turpin was compelled to drop it from between his fingers, they all caught a glimpse of the dark and gloomy-looking region which lay in the direction of the vaults, and directly through the door that Claude Duval had opened with his master-key.

"Let us descend a few steps," said Claude, "so as to get clear of the chapel, and then, Jack, you can light the little hand-lantern you have with you."

"I can," said Jack.

"Be careful of the steps. They are both narrow and steep."

This caution was really well needed, for the steps were both narrow and steep, and, besides, so dusty that the foot could hardly get a firm hold of them in descending.

After they had got about six steps down, Claude closed the door, and said to Jack—

"Quick with your lantern, now, Jack, I wish to see if there be any fastening to the door upon this side, for if so, I will take good care that we are not interrupted by the lady abbess or any of the old nuns while we are here."

Jack had in his pocket one of those small well-made hand-lanterns with a powerful bull's-eye lever, and a good reflector, so that when he lit it he could throw a strong stream of light upon any object that it was requisite to examine.

"Now, Jack, turn the light upon the door."

Jack did so, and by moving the lantern slowly up and down he showed the door plainly to Duval, and at the same time plainly showed him that there were no means of fastening it on the inner side.

"We must take our chance," said Duval. "Come on."

The impatience of Claude now to reach the cells, and to assure the unhappy prisoners there confined of their safety was very great, and he made good speed to the foot of the steep staircase. When there, the lantern did not burn so brightly as it had done above, which was a sufficient indication of the badness of the air, even if their own sensations had not sufficiently informed them of that fact.

"This is a terrible place," said Jack.

"Alas! it is," said Mr. Field. "Oh, gentlemen, only think of a young and innocent girl, who has been accustomed to all the luxuries and all the amenities of life being suddenly snatched from the world and shut up in such a region as this. Alicia—my Alicia, how can I ever make amends to you for your sufferings?"

"The joy of deliverance from this prison-house," said Claude, "will obliterate all the pangs of the past. This way—on—on."

Duval strode on quickly, closely followed by Jack, who held the lantern in such a position that it spread the greatest amount of light upon the pathway that he, Claude, was pursuing, and in this way the open space where the well was situated was gained, and they all paused a moment to look up at the vaulted roof of that strange-looking abode.

"This," said Claude, "is beneath the floor of the chapel, no doubt. This way, Mr. Field. Follow me closely, sir."

"It did not need many injuntions to induce Field to follow Claude Duva closely, and the latter made his way at once to the cell in which Alicia, with the young novice as her companion, had been left.

"Call to her," said Claude to Mr. Field.

With a shriek of joy, the young lover shouted—"Alicia—Alicia!"

Scarcely had the sound time to echo through the vaulted roof of that dismal place than there was an answering cry, and from the cell in which Claude Duval had advised Alicia to remain, she rushed forth into her lover's arms.

Claude Duval and his friends stepped back a pace or two in respect to the gush of feeling which was called forth by this truly happy meeting.

For some seconds neither of the young lovers spoke; but deep sobs came from the heart of Field as he wound his arm round the fair form of the young girl whom he loved so well, while she seemed hardly able to believe in the reality of the fact that she was once more with him, and that he had come to save her.

When he could speak it was only in disjointed words and sentences that he could utter the full joy that was at his heart.

"My darling—my own Alicia—my beautiful—my own dearest! Is this a dream, or do I, indeed, hold you again to my heart?"

"'Save me! save me!" she cried.

"Yes—yes, I will save you! Oh, look up, and let me once more see that dear face."

"It cannot be!" sobbed Alicia. "This is some mockery—some vision, and I am mad!"

Claude Duval now stepped forward, and in a soft and gentle voice, he said—

"Do you remember me?"

Still convulsively clinging to her lover, Alicia turned and looked at him. The tears streamed down her cheeks then, and releasing Field from her nervous grasp, she clasped her hands, and replied—

"Oh, yes. God bless you! You have, indeed, saved me."

"It is no dream," said Claude. "I have accompanied Mr. Field to this place in order that he may snatch you from it. Believe me, Alicia, that you

will be free. There are enough of us to save you. But how is your young companion?"

"I have two companions now. Oh, there has been a fearful scene enacted here."

CHAPTER CCCLXIV.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE CONVENT CELLS IS ENVIRONED BY DANGERS.

When Claude Duval spoke of her young companion he meant the novice whom he had placed with Alicia, and who he was glad happened to be in the cells to keep her company, and when Alicia said that a fearful scene had been enacted there, she alluded to the young creature who had been taken to the cells by the order of the abbess, after Claude Duval had left them.

"What scene do you allude to, dearest?" said Field. "Have you suffered further privations since this gentleman saw you?"

"Oh, no—no! but much terrors. Come this way, and then I will tell you all."

Alicia led them to the cell which she had so recently left, and when the light of Jack's lantern fell upon its gloomy interior, they all stood for a few moments transfixed, regarding the scene that was there to be observed.

Kneeling upon the floor of the cell was the young novice that Claude Duval had left with Alicia, and lying with her head upon her lap was the young creature who with such blows and violence had been dragged to that place by the orders of the abbess.

That poor young girl seemed to be dead, and the novice was shedding tears, which fell upon her face.

"There," said Alicia, sobbing, "is the sight that I wanted you to see."

"It is woeful," said Claude.

"Are we all to die now?" said the novice, looking up with such an expression of grief and resignation, that it was truly sad to look at her.

"No, no, dear friend," said Alicia. "Look at this gentleman. Do you not know him? He has come to save us."

"To save me?—oh, God!"

"Yes, to save you. From this moment, with the exception that it will take some little time to get from the place, you are free."

"Can this be possible?"

"It is true," said Claude.

The girl sobbed as though her heart would break. Never until that moment had she been able to comprehend the full possibility of being carried from the convent cells; but when she heard that Alicia believed it, and when she saw what appeared to her a crowd of well armed and valiant men at the door of the cell, and heard that they were resolved to take her from the convent, she could no longer doubt the fact of her deliverance, and the pent up feelings of her heart could only find a vent in tears.

"Let her weep," said Alicia.

"Yes," said Claude, "those are tears of joy."

"They are indeed," said Mr. Field. "But is that young creature who lies so still, really dead?"

"I hope not."

"No," said Alicia, "she is not dead, but she is in a sort of trance from which we have sought in vain to arouse her."

"Poor girl."

"I will tell you how it all happened," added Alicia, sobbing at the mere recollection of the misery that the young creature had gone through.

"Stop a moment," said Claude. "Let us try if we cannot recover her. I have

taken care to have with me a restorative in case of need; for coming into such a gloomy place as this, I did not know what possible necessities might arise."

By the aid of Alicia and the novice, the unhappy girl, who had been condemned to death in those cells for what she had said to the wicked abbess of the convent, was raised to a sitting posture, and then Claude bathed her temples with brandy, and placed some upon her lips.

It was some few minutes before even the power of the strong spirit had any effect in recovering her from the state of stupor into which she had fallen.

"Couldn't you give her a little drop of the brandy?" said Jack.

"No—no, it would choke her."

"Well, it might, poor girl."

"Look—she moves," said Turpin.

"You speak to her, Alicia," said Mr. Field. "Does she know you?"

"Oh, yes, she loved me well."

"Ah, all love you!"

With a shudder, the girl opened her eyes, and looked wildly about her and then in a low wailing voice she said—

"Cruel, cruel to kill me because, I would not do wrong. Oh, God, is there no justice in Heaven for these people? Help! oh, help!"

"Dear Helen," said Alicia, as she took her hand. "Do you not know me? I am your friend, Alicia."

The girl looked at her, and then shaking her head, she said—

"Yes, I will forgive you."

"For what, Helen? Oh! surely you do not mock me with such speeches! I, too, am a victim of the abbess's, and am here now to save you, along with these dear friends, who will aid us both."

The girl dashed aside the clustering ringlets of her hair, and looked with surprise upon one and the other of the faces around her.

"Oh! do not—do not!" she sobbed.

"Do not what?"

"Do not deceive me, I beg of you, or you will kill me!"

"Dear friend," said Alicia, "I am not deceiving you. Here is Mr. Field, of whom you have heard me speak, and these are friends of his who have come with him, making their way through difficulty and danger into the convent to save us. They will take us out of the power of the abbess; and the law of England, which guards, at all events, the liberty of those who appeal to it, will protect us."

The girl flung herself into the arms of Alicia, and laughed and sobbed by turns upon her bosom.

"Now I do believe," she said, "that it is not a dream. Oh, God! I shall see the blessed sunshine once again!—I shall once again look upon kindly faces that I love, and I shall yet be happy!"

"You will, dear friend, you will."

Claude and his friends looked at each other and then stepped aside a moment, to let the feelings of the young girls have free play. They, too, were deeply affected by the scene of mingled joy and sorrow that was pictured in the strange place.

"Oh, what a system must this be," said Duval, "that permits one portion of human nature to assume so awful an authority over another!"

"It is truly dreadful!" said Turpin. "I would have every convent, if I had my own way, levelled with the ground."

"And I!" said Jack.

"Amen, say I!" responded Claude.

Mr. Field now touched Claude Duval upon the arm.

"My good friend," he said, "I think that our invalid prisoner has sufficiently recovered to proceed. Shall we now proceed to leave this place, which can only be full of the most painful recollections to us all?"

"Yes, at once."

The three young girls, with faces now radiant with hope, stood ready to pro-

ceed with their deliverers. They seemed to think that they were now beyond all chances of any ill; and, in the faith they had in the power and prowess of those who had reached them in those gloomy vaults, they found the greatest argument to believe that with success they would take them from the dreary region they were in to liberty and light.

There needed no impulse to Claude Duval and his friends to do their best to bring this adventure to a happy termination; but if anything could have added to their resolve to do so, it certainly would be found in the confidence with which the young girls regarded them.

"At another time, Alicia," said Claude, "you shall tell us all that has happened in this miserable place since I was here last. At present, let us think of nothing but your deliverance from durance here."

The order in which they proposed to leave the cells was now duly arranged by Claude Duval.

"You, Mr. Field," he said, "will, of course, take care of Alicia—you, Dick, attend to one of the young ladies, and you, Jack, to the other. I will go first, as I know the way well by this time, and as I have the key that opens all the doors that may be in our way."

When thus arranged, they formed quite a little procession, and Claude said, with a smile—

"I think that if we meet any of the old nuns, who merely came into this convent on account of despairing of ever getting husbands, they will be ready to die with envy to see us all."

The novices smiled, and looked as happy as one may well suppose people to look who are being saved from torments and, perhaps, death.

"We all look like your children," said Mr. Field, "and as if we were following you for a walk."

"Thank you," said Duval; "now, really, I did not think I had such a fatherly look about me; but, I suppose, I must put up with that on account of the credit of being supposed to have such a fine family."

This little badinage raised the spirits of the poor captives, and they smiled through their tears, and felt happier than they had been for many a day.

Claude Duval, as he passed the well, cast a glance at it, and looked at Mr. Field, as he said, in a low tone—

"That holds a few secrets, no doubt?"

"It does, indeed."

The girls trembled as they passed that well, for they knew that several of the nuns, who had turned refractory to the orders of the abbess, had disappeared suddenly; and the idea that they had been cast down that well was the one most prevalent in the convent among the novices.

Claude rushed on at the head of the procession, and Jack still carried the lantern, until they came to the little staircase that led up into the chapel, and then Duval paused a moment.

"Let me caution you all," he said, "now to be as careful as you can not to give any alarm as we proceed through the chapel."

"We will."

"It is not that I think there is any force here that can possibly compete with us; but I do not wish to provoke a conflict, which might be one of life and death, and would cost us dear, although we might gain the victory. I have good reason to know, too, that the abbess has fire-arms."

"I approve of your caution," said Mr. Field. "It will be everything to get out of the convent by stratagem instead of force."

"Come on, then, cautiously."

Claude Duval slowly ascended the narrow stairs towards the door leading into the chapel, and they all followed him. It was not till he got within some half dozen steps of the top of the stairs, that he heard a strange, grinding kind of noise from the chapel, and he paused to listen to it.

The noise was as if some one were at work with some carpenter's tools in the

place, and yet nothing could very well be more improbable than that anything of the sort should be going on in the chapel.

"Is anything amiss?" said Turpin.

"I hardly know."

"Do you hear anything?" said Mr. Field.



THE ABBESS PLACES CLAUDE IN AMBUSH TO ASSASSINATE THE CONFESSOR.

"Hush! Speak low, and come forward here both of you, and listen. There is a very odd noise in the chapel."

"Oh, Heaven help us!" said Helen.

"Hush! I beg of you, ladies," said Claude. "Any indiscretion now, may place us in a very awkward position. Let me beg of you to be silent."

"We will—we will."

"Hush! hush!"

The silence in the mysterious passage was now very profound, indeed; so much so, that it would have been positively painful to have continued it for long; but, happily, there was no occasion for so doing, inasmuch as the noise in the chapel was of a character that quickly explained itself, and Claude Duval said, in a whisper, to those who were with him—

"Don't be alarmed. I don't myself consider that it is of much consequence; but it is quite clear that they are nailing up the door leading from here into the chapel."

"Then we are lost!"

"No, no, Alicia. Do not say that."

"But what can we do?"

"Of that we will think forthwith; and, in the meantime, let me beg of you to take heart, and by no means to despair."

"We will never despair while you do not," said young Field.

"Well spoke," said Turpin. "Hush! They are at it again."

Bang! bang! bang! came three terrible blows upon the door, and then they heard a voice say—"It is finished."

CHAPTER CCCLXV.

THE ABBESS, BY THE AID OF DENNIS, TRIES HER BEST TO DESTROY HER FOES.

THERE was no difficulty in detecting to whom that voice belonged. It was the voice of the abbess of the convent; and what she said meant, that she had given the finishing stroke to the fastening up of the door leading to the vaults and the cells.

Before, then, Claude Duval and his friends could address a word to each other, or come to any definite conclusion as to what to do, they heard some one say—

"Yes, my lady; and, bedad, you may say that, wid your own swate lips, my lady, and divil a bit of a lie."

"Silence!" said the abbess.

That Dennis was now with the abbess again, and that in some way she had learnt that Duval was actually in the vaults with his friends, there could be no doubt. The only mystery was, as regarded how she had managed to make that discovery, and recall Dennis so quickly from the garden-wall, whither, it will be recollected, she had sent him to wait for the arrival of those whose object in coming to the convent she was so very anxious to defeat.

But, still, the how she had got her information was of little consequence, compared to the fact that she had got it, and was acting upon it, to the extent of her abilities and means; and as regarded the rapidity of her movements, that was a matter that was much more apparent than real, for, to tell the truth, Claude Duval and his friends had been longer in the gloomy regions beneath the chapel than they thought.

Time to the wisest gets measured much more by its events than by its actual progess, so the abbess had had plenty of leisure to increase her information and to act upon it.

How she had received it was one of the mysteries of the convent that still remained to be solved.

Claude Duval now spoke in a low tone to his friends, saying, as he turned to them—

"It seems to me to be very improbable that the abbess, even with the assistance of Dennis, has been able to fasten the door leading to the chapel so firmly as to

resist all our endeavours to force it, and I advise that we wait a little until there may be the chance of her leaving the spot, and then make the attempt."

"Be it so," said Field.

"Be careful, though," said Alicia; "you do not know that desperate and revengeful woman yet."

"As how?" said Claude.

"I mean to say, that she will adopt any possible mode of accomplishing her desire for revenge, and what she seems to be actually about, is sometimes the furthest from her evil intentions."

"Is she so very cunning?"

"Indeed she is."

"Ah, yes," said the other two girls.

"Well, well, don't despair," said Claude. "What I think of doing now, is to make an attempt on the door; so just wait quietly for me where you are, all of you, till I report progress."

This they promised to do, and Jack quite extinguished the little light he had, so that it should not by any possibility be seen in the chapel, and then Claude advanced alone to the door, and placed his ear against it and listened.

All seemed to be as still as the very grave in the chapel.

"Is this silence real or assumed?" said Claude to himself. "I wonder if, relying upon the strength of the door, and the efficiency of the means she has used to fasten it, this woman really thinks that we are to be left here quietly to die of starvation. She must be mad to dream that we can be so utterly destitute of all resources."

Again he listened, but not the smallest sound disturbed the intense stillness of the chapel, so that he at last began to think that it must be deserted by the abbess and the nuns.

With this idea, Claude Duval drew back, and then suddenly brought all his weight and all his strength to bear against the door, which shook a little beneath the force it was subjected to.

"Ah, it is fast, indeed," said Claude.

The words had hardly escaped his lips when there was a loud report of the discharge of some fire-arms, and he felt a sudden blow which sent him staggering down two or three of the stairs.

"Hit, by Heaven!" he said.

The impression of Duval was fully and clearly that he was hit by a bullet in the breast, and the only wonder that possessed him was that he felt no pain beyond a stunning sensation, and a slight sickness, for the wound had seemed to be just at the region of the stomach.

It was clear that some one was in the chapel waiting for some such an attempt to burst open the door to be made as Claude had made, and then had fired a gun or a pistol through one of its panels.

Claude now staggered down the remainder of the stairs to where his friends were waiting for him, and Turpin said—

"Did you fire, Claude?"

"No—no."

"But we heard a shot, surely."

"Yes, it was at me. I am hit, I think."

"Hit? Don't say that. A light—a light, Jack! Oh, quick! If this be so, Duval, it is the worst chance that has happened to us yet, or that could, by any possibility, happen to us."

Jack eagerly got a light, and when he held it towards Claude they all found that beyond looking rather pale he did not seem so much amiss, and Turpin said to him—

"Where are you hit, Claude? I don't see any blood."

"Nor I," said Jack.

The girls looked as sympathetic as possible, and Mr. Field seemed in a perfect agony of apprehension.

"Upon my life," said Claude Duval, drawing a long breath, "I cannot give you any further information than that a shot was fired through the door, and I felt it hit me; and yet here I am."

"And none the worse?"

"I was the worse, but, strange to say, I am getting better. The bullet, or something very like it, did hit me, for it threw me, by the force of it, actually down several stairs."

"This is quite inexplicable. You are not the sort of man to fancy you are shot, Claude, just because you happen to hear the discharge of a pistol. Where did it hit you?"

"Here," said Duval, as he placed his hand upon his chest. "Ah! what is this? In my waistcoat pocket here is something. Oh, I recollect now. It is a crown piece that I put there some few days ago. Why—why—Look here, Dick. Bring the light a little nearer, Jack."

They both looked eagerly at the crown piece that Claude Duval took from his pocket, and then Dick Turpin said—

"The mystery is solved."

"It is, indeed," said Jack.

"Oh, what is it?" said Alicia.

"It is easily explained," said Claude. "Look at the indentation in this crown piece. You see it is quite shrunk hollow into the form of a cup. The bullet, by good fortune, struck it as it was in my pocket, and gave me the blow that I felt without being able to do me any further mischief."

"Ah, what an escape!" said Alicia.

"It is, indeed."

"Heaven be thanked," said Helen. "I do now, indeed, believe that Heaven is with us in this enterprise, or you, sir, would never have been preserved so miraculously as that."

"It has been a narrow escape, indeed," said Duval, with a smile; "but a miss, as far as a bullet is concerned, is as good as a mile. I don't at all like the state of affairs in the chapel, though, for it is quite clear to me that fire arms are relied upon more than the fastening of the chapel door."

"And that rascal, Dennis," said Mr. Field, "is at the bottom of all this. Oh, if I catch him!"

"Never mind him," said Claude. "It is possible enough that, before this night's affair is over, even Dennis may get his deserts; but, after all, he is only a fool, who is made the dupe of the bolder and wickeder spirit that directs him."

"The abbess?"

"Yes. It is she, and not her poor tool, Dennis, that we now have really to dread."

"But what are we to do?" said the young friend of Alicia's—"oh, what are we to do? You must not again, sir, risk your life by going nearer to that door in the wall of the chapel."

"No, certainly not. But what I propose in the first place is to do the best we can to fasten it on our side."

"Fasten it on our side!" said Jack, in surprise.

"Yes; for it will not be well to give them the chance of stepping down here after us, while we are in the open space beneath the chapel making our arrangements to leave it by some other mode than this, which, no doubt, they are foolish enough to think is about the only one we would think of attempting."

"I see—I see."

"Come, then, Jack, and let us try what we can do in that way. I saw that some of the planking at the foot of the stairs here, that hold up a portion of the wall of the pas[illegible] of the passage, that appears to have at one time fallen, or shown a disposition so to do, were loose. Let us get one of those pieces, and see what we can do with it."

"I understand you," said Jack.

"And so do I," said Dick.

Jack went right to the foot of the stairs, and soon returned with a piece of wood-work of about eight feet in length.

"Will this do?"

"Yes, comfortably," said Claude. "Come along with the light."

Jack lit him to the work he was about, and with great silence and caution, Claude Duval managed to place the plank of wood in such a position from the stairs to the door, that completely wedged up the latter, and any attempt to force it from without would only have the effect of tightening the plank in its place.

"Now," said Duval, "I think that we may take upon ourselves to enter quite fearlessly into the cells, and see what progress we can safely make towards our liberation from this place."

CHAPTER CCCLXVI.

THE CONVENT WELL GIVES UP ONE OF ITS TERRIBLE SECRETS.

THE confident and cheerful manner in which Claude Duval spoke, evidently had the effect of immediately reviving the spirits of the little party.

It was by no means striving at a conclusion to come to the certainty that he had in his own mind some plan of operation which not only rendered the closing of the door leading into the chapel by the abbess and her emissaries of little or no consequence, but rendered the keeping of that door fast since it had once been closed by them an essential thing.

The confidence that Jack and Turpin evidently had in the marvellous resources of Claude Duval, infected the others with the same feeling, and they all looked up to him as the person who was yet to triumph over all the obstacles in the way of deliverance from the vaults and fearful cells, and as the individual who would in time take them to the light of day.

The miraculous way in which Claude had been saved from the consequences of the bullet that had been fired through the door at him, doubtless by the abbess, or by [illegible], contributed largely to the conviction, and to the maintenance of the confidence they all had in him.

Alicia and the two novices could not believe it possible that a man so specially protected by Heaven in what he was about should fail.

And yet, with all this, it was with perceptible shudders that they again sought the dreary abode, which but a short few minutes before they had thought to take their last look at.

Claude saw this feeling in them and he said—

"Courage, ladies—courage. You should consider now, that this is the way to freedom, not to imprisonment. I do not, for a moment, doubt but that soon all will be well."

"You do think," said Alicia, "that you can save us?"

"I do, indeed."

"If any one can, it will be you," said Field. "Recollect that I place myself entirely at your disposal, Mr. Duval, and you have but to order me what to do."

"Come on, then, and fear nothing."

Claude himself led the way, but Jack followed him closely with the little lantern, and so once again they stood beneath the lofty roof of that portion of the gloomy underground region, that was immediately beneath the floor of the convent chapel.

"Here we halt," said Claude.

Without a word the party came to a stand-still; and then Duval, taking the lamp from Jack, said—

"How high do you think the roof is?"

"About thirty feet."

"So I thought, and the upper portion of it is quite lost in obscurity. Dick, look about you, and see if it be possible to find any means of getting a little nearer to the roof, to see of what it is composed."

They all looked about them for that purpose, but it was some time before they found anything to aid them, and then it struck Turpin, that he could accomplish it in a strange sort of way.

"Look you here, Claude," he said, "the walls of this place are supported in several instances by planks of great length, and of tolerable strength; now what is to hinder us from taking two of them, and making a long slanting passage up to the roof, since it is your object to get there?"

"How do you mean, Dick?"

"Why, I would place the two pieces of flat tall timber together at the upper ends, so that they made the shape of the letter A, and then I do think that with a little dexterity one of us may climb up to the top and get sufficiently near to the roof to have a good look at it."

"Good; that will do."

The possibility of this project was one that Claude Duval saw in a moment, and he was anxious that it should as soon as possible be carried out.

To three men such as Duval, Jack, and Turpin, used as they had been to make the greatest exertions, and to the constant exercise of their ingenuity under all sorts of troublesome circumstances, this little project of Dick's for getting to the roof of the place they were in presented no difficulties, provided the materials were at hand.

The long pieces of planking that Dick referred to were evidently of service in keeping some portions of the old wall of the place they were in from bulging forward, but although the removal of them seemed to compromise the safety of the wall, yet they did not suppose that for the short space of time they hoped only to pass in that place that any serious consequences would be likely to arise.

Dick and Jack soon got two planks, each of about twenty feet in length, and they placed them with Claude's assistance in the situation agreed upon.

When so placed it seemed to be quite clear that they reached nearly half way to the roof. By compressing the lower ends into the earth firmly they got the affair tolerably steady, and then Dick said—

"Now, if you, Claude, will hold one of these planks, and you the other, Jack, I will try to get up."

"Excuse me, Dick," said Duval, with a smile, "but you have but one object, I know, in all this, and that is, that we should succeed in what we are about. I am a lighter weight than you are, you know."

"I understand you, Claude. You think you can manage climbing up the planks better than I can, and it is no doubt true, so I will hold one of them for you."

"Besides, Claude is taller when he reaches the top," said Jack.

"He is—he is. Now, Mr. Field, you help us likewise, if you please."

"Yes, with pleasure."

"We will all help," said Alicia. "Can we do nothing to aid you in this matter."

"I think not," said Claude, "except keep out of the way, in case I should come down rather quicker than I go up. Leave us to manage this affair likewise, I beg of you, ladies, and pray get close to yonder wall."

"We obey."

Claude Duval was now satisfied that the girls were in safety, so he took off his boots; and, considering that he would get a firmer hold upon the boards with his stocking soles merely, he commenced the rather perilous ascent.

The angle at which the boards had been put together was rather an acute one; but then, when they placed them end to end in the shape we have described, they felt that the further they drew them apart below, the lower they brought the top

of them; and, therefore, they had probably gone to the very extreme in their calculations.

It was with difficulty, but still with certainty, that Claude Duval ascended the slanting boards, and, finally, in the course of about two minutes he was at the top; and then placing his left foot upon the junction of the pieces of wood, he contrived to steady himself pretty well, and to draw himself up to his full height in that rather awkward position.

Duval was pleased to find that they had made a rather wrong estimate of the height of the roof, or of the length of the boards; for, where he stood up, as we have described, he was really within about five or six feet at the utmost of the roof.

"Jack?" said Claude.

"Yes, Claude?"

"Can Mr. Field and Dick spare you while they hold the planks steady, do you think?"

"Yes."

"Then come forward and try if you can throw me up the lantern. I think I can catch it if you will be careful to throw it well and cleverly up to me."

"I will try, Claude."

This was really a hazardous experiment; but everything was so dark and dreary up above that Claude Duval could not see what he went up to see, namely, a something that appeared to be sticking to the ceiling.

Jack took the lantern; and, after calculating the distance he had to throw it, he said—

"Are you ready, Claude?"

"Quite ready. Now for it!"

With more skill than any one would exactly have given Jack credit for possessing, Jack threw up the lantern; and Claude Duval caught it tightly and carefully, without in the slightest degree shifting his position, or making any stir upon the two planks of wood, upon the top of which he stood in so very ticklish a position.

"All right, Claude?"

"Yes, all right, I have it. Now hold steady all of you, for I have something else to attend to."

There was a complete silence now while Claude Duval turned the light of the lantern upon the roof of the place.

That roof was crossed and recrossed by many beams of heavy timber, and to his satisfaction the object that appeared to be fastened to the roof of the he miserable abode was evidently some contrivance for letting people up or down through a trap in the ceiling, that was quite apparent.

The object consisted of a square wooden box, very shallow, but yet with sides sufficient to prevent any one from slipping off it; but how it got down or up was the mystery.

Close to it in the wood-work of the ceiling there were two very large pulleys, and over them passed two ropes, that seemed then to go horizontally a long way across the ceiling; but situated as he was, Claude could not find out where they went to.

Moving the lantern about in all directions, Duval strove all he could to find out the mystery of this curious construction in the roof, but, for a time, it baffled him, despite all the conjectures that came to his mind upon the subject.

CHAPTER CCCLXVII.

FATHER GARVEY APPEARS UPON THE SCENE AGAIN.

The little party, likewise, were rather puzzled to know what Claude Duval could be at, and after a time Dick Turpin said—

"Claude, is there anything amiss?"

"No, Dick, not amiss, but I am a litttle puzzled, that's all. There is some conjuration up here that I don't quite comprehend."

"Danger?" said Jack.

"Oh, no—no. It is some mechanical contrivance for getting up to a trap-door that is here in the roof, and which can lead nowhere but to the chapel."

Upon this information they looked at each other with curiosity, and Jack cried out—

"Why, Claude, if there is a trap-door there it is the very thing for us, I should say."

"Yes, provided we could get through it."

"Hem!" said Turpin, "that certainly is rather an essential consideration, I must confess. What does it look like?"

"A box."

"A box? Why you are joking now, Claude."

"I never was more serious in all my life. But I say, Jack, my friend?"

"Yes, Claude—yes?"

"I want you to catch the lantern again."

"All's right. Throw it now. I have it."

Jack caught the lantern, and then Claude said—

"Now I want you to manage to tie it at the end of as long a stick, or anything else that will hold it as nearly as you can up to the ceiling, as you can contrive."

"I'll do it. We must get the means somehow or another."

"I will tell you where, then," said Mr. Field. "By the side of the stairs leading from the chapel there is a long, narrow, iron rod, partially let into the wall at places. If you can pull it away, it will just do."

"Capital," said Jack. "Ladies and gentlemen, will you have any serious objection to being kept in the dark for a little time?"

"None—none," said Claude. "Go at once, Jack."

Jack did not wait another moment, but started off in search of the iron rod that Mr. Field had spoken of. The little lantern did not, while it was present, seem as if it had given much light; but when it was gone, the gloom—the awful darkness that fell upon the place, and upon every one in it, seemed to be something truly terrific.

It was quite in vain that from his elevated position Claude Duval strove to catch a sight, even dimly, of those below him on the floor of the dismal place.

The probability is, that the alarm of Alicia and her young friends was now much greater than they would have liked those who had so generously encountered so much in their service to know or to suspect; but be that as it may, she and the other two young creatures in the gloomy abode of priestly tyranny did not give utterance to any of the feelings of dread that had taken possession of their hearts.

Claude Duval, though, was about to say something which he intended should be to them of a cheering character—for, although they did not give any expression to their fears, he yet could not help feeling that they must have them—when he was stopped by a singular noise that arose in the place.

They must all have heard it as well as he. It resembled some one at work upon an iron-bar with a file more than anything else, and Claude was puzzled to know what on earth it could possibly proceed from.



THE TERROR-STRICKEN CONFESSOR IN THE DUNGEONS OF THE NUNNERY.

It was Dick who, in a whisper, said to him—

"Do you hear that odd noise, Claude?"

"I do certainly, Dick, and I should feel very much obliged to you, if you could give me any idea of from what it proceeds?"

"Ah, that I cannot."

The noise increased, and then there was a sudden snap, as though something had been broken. After that all was still.

"This won't do," said Dick "we must find out what is going on. Where can Jack be with the light? I hope no harm has come to him."

"No," said Claude. "I can see him, or rather the faint reflection of the light, coming even now."

They were all glad enough to hear this, and in another couple of seconds the flash of the lantern fell upon the roof and walls of the dismal abode, as Jack made his appearance with a long piece of the rough balustrade of the little staircase.

"I have it," said Jack.

"Hush!" said Claude, "we have heard strange sounds since you have been gone."

"Strange sounds?"

"Yes, Jack; and none of us can make out where they come from. It is a puzzle to me."

"Surely it is not that rascally confessor trying to get out of the cell in which you threw him?"

"By Jove, yes!" said Claude. "I never thought of him. You have hit it, Jack. It is Father Garvey, who has sufficiently recovered to make an attempt at escape from the cell. I had quite forgotten that there was such a person in the world."

"Yes," said Dick, "and it strikes me it would have been safer, after all, to have carried out the abbess's kind instructions towards him."

"It would; but we are not capable of such acts, Dick. Neither you nor I are assassins. Father Garvey, though, will keep, if I mistake not, awhile longer. Jack, what scheme have you?"

"You will soon see. What do you think of that?"

Jack had fastened the lantern to the end of the long iron rod that he procured, and succeeded now in hoisting it right up to the roof of the chapel.

"Good. Hold it steady now, Jack."

"Yes, I will."

"Now move along in a line towards the stairs, and go as gently as you can. That's it—that's it. All right—all right. Stop!"

Jack stopped, and as he did so, he came bump against the wall of the place, and down fell the lantern and the iron rod. In a minute all was darkness.

"The deuce take it," said Jack, "I might have been just a little more careful where I was going."

"Never mind," said Claude—"never mind; find the lantern and light it again. I daresay it has come to no sort of harm from its fall."

Jack, after groping about for some distance, found the lantern, and with one of the phosphorus matches he had, he lighted it, but it took some few minutes to burn up, and even then its flame was rather weak and unsteady.

Claude appeared to be upon the point of saying something, when a voice shouted out—

"Now, you wretches, I will bring upon you the vengeance you deserve! He is a dead man who stops me!"

With a sudden rush a figure darted along the place, and not seeing the two boards which were raised up there, came with a crash against them, that knocked them both over, and sent himself rolling to the farther end of the large open space.

All was confusion in a moment. Dick made a dart after the fugitive, and Jack cried out—

"Claude will be killed. He has fallen—he must have fallen."

The girls screamed, and Mr. Field, who had been thrown down with the boards, looked thoroughly bewildered.

"The light, Jack!" said Duval, in a calm, clear voice, as though nothing were the matter. "Silence, ladies—silence, if you please. There is nothing gained by screaming."

It is truly extraordinary how the presence of mind of one person will have an effect upon the feelings and the actions of many, and induce calmness instead of agitation. The manner in which Claude spoke, while it let everybody know that he was not hurt by the fearful fall that they all made quite sure he must have had, likewise convinced them that he saw what to do.

With a bound he reached that portion of the subterranean abode to which

the figure that had made the sudden rush had rolled, and before Father Garvey, for it was indeed he, could struggle half way to his feet, Claude had him by the throat quite securely.

"Now, Jack, the light."

"Yes, Claude."

Jack, and, indeed, the whole party, now made their way up to the spot where the confessor was writhing in the grasp of Duval. The confessor's face was pale as death itself, save a streak of blood that oozed from a wound in his forehead, that he had received from the blow he had struck himself against the edge of one of the planks. His vestments were torn, and he was covered with fragments of the damp straw that was in the cell where Claude Duval had left him, as he thought, in a tolerable state of security and repose.

"Unhand me, villain!" said Father Garvey—"unhand me, I say, or you shall rue the day you looked upon me!"

"No, master confessor," said Claude, "I won't unhand you; and as for rueing, I rather think that is what will be your fate."

The priest was half mad evidently, for, despite the powerful grip that Claude Duval had of him, and despite the numbers he saw around him, he began to kick and plunge, and bite and scratch, in such a wild sort of way, that Claude was compelled to say—

"Dick, be so good as to tie this gentleman's legs together, and his hands behind his back."

Dick made a dart at the legs of the reverend father, and soon tied them firmly together: Jack did the same by his hands, and then Claude let him go; and he rolled upon the floor, and cursed and swore in a way that none but a priest could curse and swear.

"You may amuse yourself, holy sir, at that kind of fun as long as you like," said Claude; "it don't affect us in the least; only mark me, if you make too much noise it will be necessary to put a stop to it."

This significant hint was not lost upon Father Garvey, and he lay partly in a state of exhaustion, and partly in a state of prudential stillness, only that he glared at Claude Duval as if he would have eaten him, had he the power so to do.

The alarm of the young girls was by no means decreased by all this; and it was found that the youngest of the novices had fainted.

CHAPTER CCCLXVIII.

THE ABBESS TRIES A NEW PLAN OF OPERATIONS AGAINST THE INTRUDERS.

"Oh, help! help!" said Alicia; "I do think that Helen is dead! Oh, bring the light here!"

Upon this cry they speedily brought the light to the spot, and then sure enough they found that the young creature was completely insensible, and hanging upon the arm of Alicia.

"She is not dead," said Duval; "she has fainted. But we must not let her remain in that state, as in the bad air of this place it is impossible to say what catastrophe might not ensue.

"How are we to recover her?" said Field. "What are we to do, Alicia, to restore her?"

"We want water," said Alicia. "Cold water would, no doubt, bring her to herself again."

"I'm afraid that is not to be had here."

"There is a well," said Jack, "close at hand. I cast a stone into it as I came along, and there was a distinct splash of water consequent upon its fall. Surely

there is some mode of getting up some of the water; and if so, I will warrant its being cold enough."

"Go and see," said Claude—"go and see what you can do, Jack. Here, Miss Alicia, let the young creature lie down. She is not very heavy, I daresay; but she is still too heavy for you to support for a length of time."

As he spoke, Claude slipped off his coat and spread it upon the ground for the young girl to lie upon. Alicia thanked him by a look which expressed much more than words could say upon the subject, and then she knelt upon the coat and supported the head of the novice upon her lap, which was certainly much easier than holding her up, as she had been doing.

"I will go and help Jack to get the water from the well," said Claude. "There is no danger, and Mr. Field will stay with you, and we shall hear if you want anything."

Both Jack and Dick Turpin had gone to the well to see what could be done in the way of getting up some cold water for the use of the fainting novice, and when Claude arrived they were slowly hauling up a bucket that they had found there, and which they had attached to a rope that they found, but of the strength of which they had rather serious doubts.

"The water is a long way down," said Jack, "but we have got some, I can tell by the weight."

"Pull slowly and quietly," said Dick.

The bucket came up to the surface, and then Claude stretched out his hand and got hold of it.

"All's right," he said, "I have it."

He drew it towards him, and then in rather an odd voice, he said—

"The light, Jack."

Jack picked up the lantern from the floor and held it over the bucket, and then they all three looked in silent horror at what it disclosed to them.

Floating in the water they had got up from the well was a portion of an infant's hand and arm, and a large piece of a skull with hair still upon it. The water itself had a shiny, oily look, and upon its surface floated fatty globules, and what appeared to be pieces of half decomposed flesh.

"Horrible!" said Claude.

Jack turned aside sick and faint at the sight.

"Good God!" said Dick.

Duval held the bucket over the brink of the well, and let go of it. Far down with a sullen kind of splash it reached the water, and then all was still.

The three friends looked at each other now for several moments in silence, and then Claude said in a whisper—

"We must not tell this to the ladies. It will kill them with terror. Surely now we must believe to the utmost in all the horrors that are recorded of convent criminality. This well seems to be the receptacle of the bodies of infants."

"Yes, infants born in the convent," said Jack. "There can be no doubt of it. Of course, they must be disposed of somehow or another."

"That is true," said Dick; "and if any one tells me that a score or two of idle, well-fed women come to such an abode as this, and leave their passions at the gates, and turn saints when they enter a convent, I shall have no hesitation in saying that it is a lie."

"This is truly sickening," said Claude.

"I am quite faint," said Jack.

"Come away from the brink of the well," said Dick. "I fancy, now, that horrible and noisome odours arise from it. We shall be poisoned if we remain any longer close to it. But, amid other mysteries, and stranger things, Claude Duval, there is one which we want an explanation of from you, and that is, how you came so neatly to the floor when the planks were knocked from under you without doing yourself any apparent injury whatever?"

"Yes; that," said Jack, "is, indeed, a mystery to me."

"It is one that I can easily explain," said Claude. "I came down quite easily and comfortably; for when the boards went from under me, I had hold of something else."

"Something else! What else?"

"Listen. While I was up there looking at the roof, I saw that there was some mode of reaching this place by means of a kind of basket or box, that was secured under a trap-door opening from the chapel. I could not see how it was made to act, till you, Jack, held up the lantern by the aid of the iron rod, and then I perceived that there were two ropes over two pulleys going in the direction you intended when you ran against the wall, and two in the other direction. As you went, I saw that at the end of the roof there were two other pulleys, and that the ropes went over them; so I came to the conclusion at once that there must be some counterpoise to any weight upon the descending platform or box. At the moment that the pieces of planking were knocked from under me, I clutched at the lower part of that box, and down I came quite easily and rapidly, with it in my grasp."

"I see," said Jack.

"And so do I," said Dick. "When you left go of it, up it went again, I suppose?"

"It did."

"Then, we are saved!"

"I hope so. I suppose that the abbess knows of this little mechanical arrangement; but, no doubt, she considers the idea of our getting to the roof of the place as quite out of the question, and so don't trouble herself about that part of the matter at all."

"That is it, you may depend; but her ladyship don't exactly know the sort of people she has got to deal with. What would be a difficulty to many, is none to us, or, at all events, it is one that can be easily got over. Let us see how our young friend the novice is."

When they got back to where Mr. Field was staying with the young girls, they just said that they had been unsuccessful in getting some water from the well, and Dick proposed just wetting the lips of the fainting girl with a little brandy of which he had a flask full in his pocket.

In the absence of any other means of trying to recover her, they were perforce compelled to adopt that, and the effect so far justified it, that in a few moments she began to breathe, and to open her eyes.

"Oh, save me—save me!" she cried. "I have done nothing to deserve this cruel treatment."

"Be calm," said Alicia, "you are with friends."

"Oh, no—no. Do not—oh, holy lady abbess, I cannot bear it—indeed, I cannot. Do not subject me to this really fearful punishment."

"She raves," said Alicia. "Alas! poor girl."

"I will promise," added the young creature, "to tell of nothing that I have seen or heard here. I will swear it, and, indeed, and in truth, you may rely upon my oath, for I have not yet seen enough of the wickedness of this place, to be callous to an oath."

"Listen to me," said Alicia. "Do you not know me?"

"Yes—yes, you will obey the orders of the abbess."

"No—no. Indeed I will not."

"And you will punish me. I know that you are all preparing so to do. I shall be stretched upon that dreadful machine, and my hands and feet tied, and then I shall be cruelly beaten. Oh, do not, I implore you! The pain—the agony is great!"

The affected young girl burst into tears.

"She will recover now," said Alicia.

"This is enough to melt a heart of stone," said Field. "Does she allude to punishments that the abbess inflicts upon the novices?"

"Yes," said Alicia. "I cannot describe them to you, but the abbess and

some of the older nuns take a delight in inflicting pain upon the novices, and that is what fills the imagination of our poor young friend with such terrors."

The tears of the novice seemed to wash away the cloud that had been before her perceptions, and she was able to comprehend where she was, and to feel that there was no danger.

So blissful a state of things made a wonderful change in her aspect, and half laughing and half crying, she clung to Alicia, and implored Heaven to bless those who were doing so much to save her from misery, pain, and degradation.

"Hush!" said Jack suddenly, as he laid his hand upon the arm of Claude Duval. "What is that?"

"What? what? Ah! Let us listen."

Some sound now like the tapping of some pieces of metal against each other evidently came from the chapel above. At first Claude thought that it was from the part of the roof were was the trap door; but he soon traced the sound to quite another part of the ceiling. It ceased, though, before they could come to any conclusion as to what it was, or what it portended.

"This place," said Turpin, "is as full of mysteries as of dangers. Come, now, Claude, do you think that it will be safe to try the assent to the chapel by the trap door?"

"Safe or not safe, we will do it; but before we commence operations, tell me, Alicia, do you think that there is any possibility of another prisoner being in the cells?"

"Alas, I know not, but I would gladly urge you to search them all before leaving."

"It is a duty. Come you with me, Jack, and we will go together. We will make our search as rapidly as we can, and lose no time."

CHAPTER CCCLXIX.

THE SECRETS OF THE CELLS APPAL JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL.

THERE was, in reality, no time lost in the search of the cells that Claude and Jack now undertook, for Claude wished to acquaint his friend exactly with the mode of operation that he thought would answer with the cords and the pulleys connected with the trap-door in the roof.

One thing in connection with that trap-door was quite clear, and that was—that the principle of its construction was such that it had been only intended for the purpose of facilitating the descent of any one from the chapel, and not the ascent of any one from the gloomy region below.

It required a weight in the square box attached to the ropes to overcome the weights that no doubt would be found attached to the ends of them; but when the box reached the ground, and the unhappy object either fell or got out of it, then it would ascend again, because the weights became the heavier.

When it had ascended it was quite clear, that unless the chapel door was to be found, and along with finding it the means of opening it were found, the victims must soon perish in the vaults from starvation, if from no other cause.

The problem, then, that Jack and Claude and Dick had to solve in connection with the trap-door and its appendages was, to make it useful as a means of ascent as well as descent, and that was rather difficult.

Before deciding upon what mode of immediate operation they could bring to bear upon that subject, they proceeded to the cells one after the other.

The only fear they had was lest there should be some of the cells in a secret situation which their time would not allow them just then to look for; but, still, they must do something, if they could not do all they wished, and so they dashed open the door of the first cell they came to.

It was empty.

"That is a relief," said Jack. "Now for this one! Ah! look—look, Claude!"

"What is it?"

"Some one is there. We come to save you, be you whom you may; for your presence in one of these cells is sufficient proof that you are an enemy to the abbess of the convent."

No answer was returned to this speech of Jack's, and yet they could both of them see pretty plainly that there was something like a human being at the farther end of the cell.

"Give me the light," said Claude; and, taking it from Jack, he advanced right into the cell. It did not take him more than two steps to get to the farther end of it; and then the sight that he saw made him quickly recoil again.

Fastened by the waist to the wall by a short chain that did not permit it to fall to the floor was the dead body of a nun. The convent costume still clung to the faded skeleton form; but the flesh had dropped from the face, leaving the hideous, yellow, discoloured bones plainly perceptible.

"Horrible! horrible!" said Claude.

"What is it?"

"Take the light and look for yourself. I cannot give you any description of the sight."

One glance was quite enough for Jack; and, without a word, he turned from the loathsome spectacle, and shut the cell door.

In no other cell but one more did they find anything that was so fearful to look upon; and in that they saw the body of a man lying upon its face. A number of loathsome flies, of immense size, were feasting upon the remains of that unhappy human being, who, no doubt, had been decoyed into the convent by the abbess, and then safely disposed of, for some reason or another, in that house of death.

"There are no more cells," said Jack. "Let us return to our friends now, Claude; and they may, in truth, when we tell them what we have seen, congratulate themselves upon escaping the duty we have been upon."

"They may, indeed, Jack."

Claude Duval and Jack now returned to the party they had left, not far from the spot above which was the trap-door in the floor of the chapel. Without describing what he had seen, Claude satisfied himself by saying, that there was no other human being alive but themselves in the place.

"And now, Dick and Jack, you both help me, and I think I have found a mode of getting the square box down here."

"Yes," said Dick, "that may be; but to get it up again with a weight in it is the difficulty."

"Which we must meet by adding weight to the other end of the ropes. But let us get it down first. I expect that but a small force is requisite for that purpose. Where is the iron rail, Jack, with which you elevated the lantern so cleverly?"

"It is here."

The iron rail was very much rusted indeed; but Claude Duval used it very tenderly, and after snapping off a piece of about six inches at the end, he found the rest of it in not so bad a condition, and that it would bear being bent into a hook at the end.

"Now," he said, "if I can catch hold of the lower part or the rim of the strange kind of tray that is up there under the trap-door, down it will come."

With great care Claude elevated the iron rod, and got a hold of the platform; and as he had surmised, it required but very little force, indeed, to bring it down to the floor. The weights attached to the ends of the ropes evidently did not much more than overbalance it, and cause it to ascend, when no force was used to keep it down.

"Here we are," said Claude.

"Ha!—ha!" laughed a hideous voice. "Lost!—lost!—lost! Make your

peace with offended Heaven, ye Philistines, for you surely die now! Ha! —ha!"

"The devil!" said Claude.

Jack turned so sharply round at the sound of this terrible voice, which appeared to fill the whole place, that he struck the lantern against Dick Turpin, and knocked the light out; but all was not darkness in the gloomy vault. Not far from the roof, and close above the spot where they had heard the mysterious metallic tapping a short time since, they saw a strange dubious sort of light; but what it was, or where it came from, was a mystery that they saw no means just then of solving. Now and then a spark from the strange light would dart out of the mass of it and fall to the floor, generally going out before it reached it; and then some of the light seemed to be making an odd, crackling kind of noise, that could not by the adventurers in the vault be at all accounted for in any reasonable way.

"Never mind," said Claude Duval, "it is very kind of the abbess to provide us with a light. We shall see all the better what we are about now."

"Much better," said Mr. Field.

"So we shall," said Dick.

"Yes," said Jack, rather dubiously; "but I doubt whether upon the whole we shall find it any advantage."

"Never mind. You, Jack, go to one of the ropes that hang down the wall with the weights at the end of them, and you, Dick, go to another on the other side. It appears to me that, with very little trouble, you will be able to haul me up to the ceiling. The united leverage caused by two men using their utmost exertion would be sufficient to hoist me much higher than the chapel-floor, therefore it will be a comparatively easy task for the three of you to raise me, and it will not require much force to keep me there when I once touch the roof."

"We may do that," said Jack.

They saw at once how this could be done, and without another word departed to do it. They found that, pulling in unison, Claude and the little box began to go up—up—up gradually to the roof, and that they could maintain his position there without any serious difficulty at all.

It was no part of Duval's system to delay when nothing was to be got by it, and he set to work upon the trap-door in the roof in earnest. It was fastened on the outer side; but by the aid of a powerful small crow-bar, with a very sharp edge to it, Claude soon lifted it, and pushed it on one side. He was rather surprised that all seemed as dark now as it had been before, and that he found no change of atmosphere above the trap-door, which, to all appearance, opened into the chapel.

Duval put up his hand as high as he could reach, and found no obstruction, so that he felt satisfied he must be in the chapel, and yet there was something very strange about the fact that it should be so completely deserted and silent as it was.

"Claude—Claude!" called Dick.

"Yes, Dick?"

"Is all right there?"

"Well—I—hope so. It's rather confusing."

"Come down, Claude—come down!"

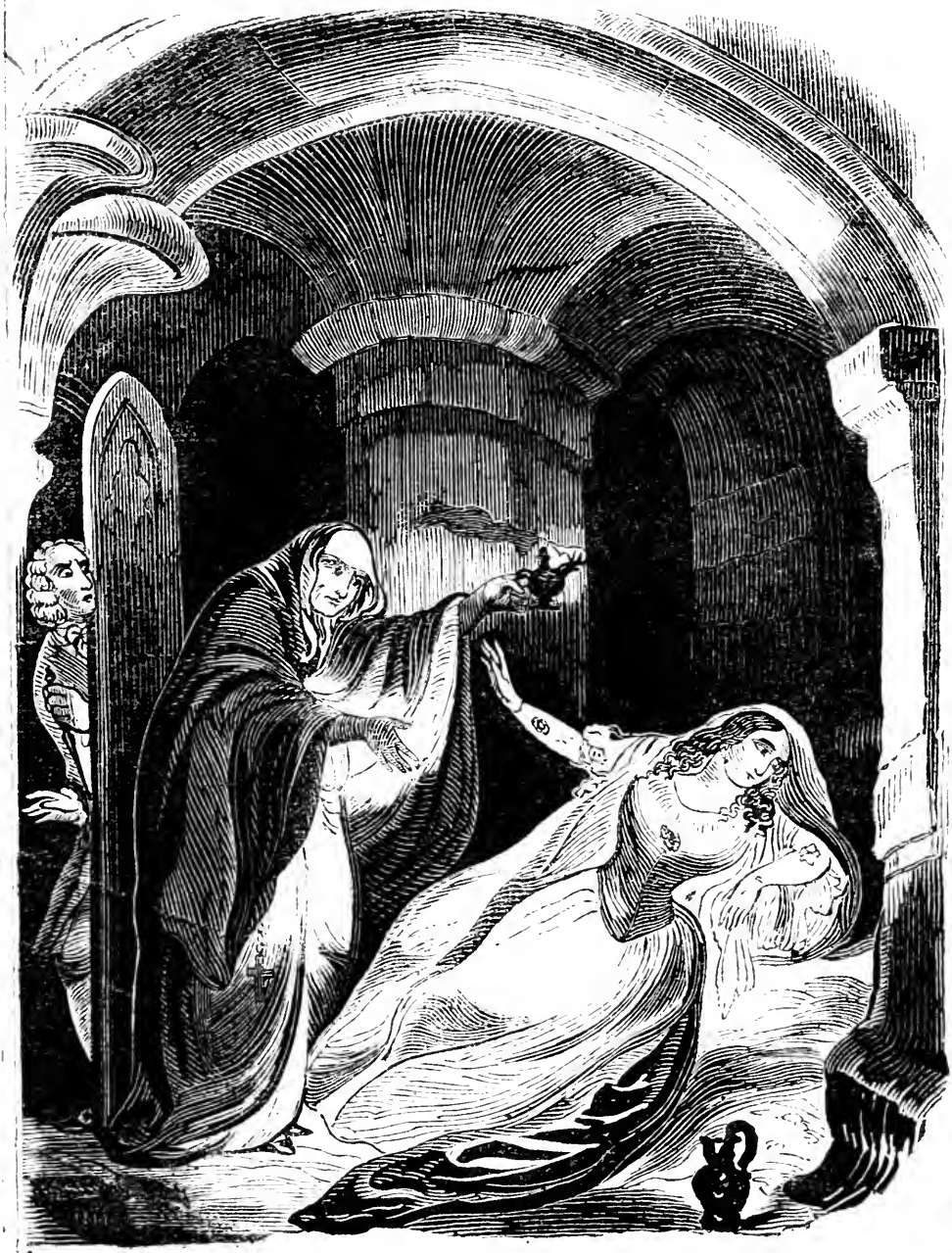
"Ascertain, if you can, what the obstruction is, before you come down."

"Oh, God! what is it?" said Alicia. "We shall all die!"

"No—no, it will go off," said Mr. Field. "It cannot hurt; and yet it is strange."

"What on earth are you all talking about?" said Claude, as he strove to look clearly down into the vaulted place.

"There's a suffocating vapour here," said Turpin, "that is half choking us



CLAUDE FOLLOWS THE CONFESSOR TO ALICIA'S CELL.

all, and we don't know what to make of it. Don't you feel any of it up there Claude ?"

"No."

"Nor smell anything ?"

"Certainly not. The air don't seem to be amiss up here at all. What can you be dreaming about?"

"It is no dream, Claude Duval. The mysterious light yonder near to the middle of the roof is some process by which some deleterious kind of gas is evolved, which must be heavier than the atmospheric air, and so sinks, which is the reason you don't smell it where you are; but I can tell you, old fellow, that we can't live in it long."

"Let me down at once. Let go of the ropes. Let me down. By Heaven! I fancied something of the sort."

They were unwilling enough, as may be supposed, to involve Claude Duval in the same disagreeable state of things that oppressed them in that wretched place; but as it was impossible that he could have any correct notion of the state of the atmosphere below in the situation he was in, they gradually relaxed the ropes, and let him safely descend to the level of the floor of the huge cavernous place again.

It was a great object though, now, not to allow the movable piece of platform to go up to the roof again, which it, of course, would have done the moment it got free from the weight of Claude Duval; so he said to Jack—

"Stand upon this, Jack. What we have to say, we may say just as well with your weight here as otherwise."

Jack stood upon the platform at once, and that sufficed to keep it down, and then as Claude Duval stepped off it to the ground, there came a gush of the noxious vapour, with which the place was filling, right across his mouth, and he staggered and nearly fell beneath its deadly influence.

CHAPTTER CCCLXX.

THE DANGERS OF CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS INCREASE, AND FATHER GARVEY TRIUMPHS EXCEEDINGLY.

"By Heavens!" said Claude Duval, "it is the intention of that hag of an abbess to smother us."

"Very like it, indeed," said Turpin. "Only I for one beg to decline the operation."

"But what are we to do?" said Jack.

"Make a bold attempt at once at the door leading to the chapel," cried Turpin. "I won't stay here and be gradually choked any longer, for that is the sort of operation that I feel is now going on with us."

As he spoke, Dick Turpin began to make his way out of the place, in the direction of the passage leading to the flight of steps, above which was that door which there was every rational reason to believe was well guarded by the lady abbess and her emissaries.

"Hold!" said Claude."

"Yes, to my life I will," said Dick Turpin.

"Nay, hear me."

"Go on, then. What have you to say that is better than such a mode of operation?"

"Much."

"Out with it then, Claude."

"There is, of course, a route to the chapel by the platform. I propose that by such means we reach it, and not by the door. There can be no doubt at all but that we are expected to make an attack upon the door, rather than stay here to be suffocated, and do you think, for a moment, that with such an expectation, a woman of the foreseeing and cunning disposition of the lady abbess would leave that door unguarded? No, you may depend that it would be certain destruction to some of us to go to that door, and those who might be destroyed might be those, who, as men, we should most lament."

As Claude Duval spoke, he glanced at the helpless females who were with them, and Dick Turpin felt the effect in all its force.

"You are right, Claude. By Jove, you are right."

"I knew you would say so."

"Yes; if we were only men here, I should say let us go by the door; but now, I bethink me, we have others to look to. Have the matter all your own

way; but in the name of all that's delightful, let us have a mouthful of fresh air as soon as possible."

"I faint," said one of the novices.

"No—no! Don't," cried Jack. "There is no time, I assure you, my good girl. We are not in circumstances to allow you to faint."

Claude could scarcely forbear a smile at this odd mode of addressing the novice that Jack adopted; but he, too, felt that there was no time to lose, so he said—

"Now draw me up again. I see what has to be done, and done it shall be quickly. Do not ask me any questions; but do as I ask you, and I will pledge my word to save you all."

Both Jack and Turpin had quite confidence sufficient in the courage and in the extraordinary tact of Claude Duval in adopting the best possible mode of getting clear of any set of adverse circumstances to obey his orders when he gave them with such confidence; so they proceeded at once to the ropes again, after he had placed himself upon the movable platform.

It did not take many minutes to raise Claude right up to the roof again, and then he commenced operations with alacrity.

Upon the former occasion when he had been up that height he had felt that his hand and arm passed up into a hollow space, which ought to have been the chapel itself, since it was beyond the roof, but which yet could not be it, since the darkness was intense, and there was not fresh air enough to lead to the supposition that such was the case.

This was a little puzzling, to be sure; but the state of affairs below were of such a character that it would not do to stop and consider about what was to be done.

Promptitude of action now was really everything.

It will be recollected that Father Garvey had been tied neck and heels by Jack and Turpin; so that he lay upon the floor of the place totally harmless, and now and then, when his passion get the better of his prudence, uttering vehement expressions of anger, and sending those who had got thus the better of him to the full enjoyment of all those pains and penalties of another life which persons of most, if not of all denominations know so perfectly well how to make the most of.

Of course, neither Claude nor his friends troubled themselves not one jot about the denunciations of Father Garvey, so long as he did not make so much noise as to disturb them, and that he did not certainly do, for even in the midst of his rage he did not forget that—

"Discretion is the better part of valour."

The two young novices seemed to be more deeply affected by the terrible suffocating vapour that the lady abbess had succeeded in calling to her aid against her foes than any of the party.

As for Claude, the higher he got up from the floor of the gloomy and death-dealing region the more free he felt himself from the vapour, so that it was quite evident it was one of those deleterious gases which are heavier than atmospheric air, and so descend through it.

That the abbess should use such a vapour as that showed the extreme art of the woman, for if it had been of a more volatile tendency it would, of course, have had the likely effect of filling the chapel and the whole convent with its death-dealing fumes; but as it was, it just was doing the duty she intended of it and no more,

With the crowbar in his hand—the same crowbar that had enabled him to knock away the portion of the roof of the subterranean place that was immediately above the movable box or platform, call it which you will—Claude now tried to work upon what further obstacles there were that stopped his way to the chapel.

With the crowbar, though, in his hand he found he could only just reach to

the roof of the sort of building that was over the orifice leading to the vaults, and for the life of him he could not make out what it was.

While he was thus trying, without much effect, his skill to get out of the place, Jack called up to him—

"Claude—Claude?"

"Yes, Jack?"

"We can't live here any longer. We are dying. The poisonous vapour is taking possession of our senses."

"Don't say that."

"Alas—alas! it is true. Farewell—farewell, Claude. Provide for your own safety, if you can, and don't heed us."

"Is Father Garvey dead? I hear no complaints from him."

"I don't know. He lies upon his back, too, and ought to be getting the most of the vapour. I daresay he is no more."

"Stop a bit," cried Dick Turpin—"stop a bit; I have found out how the holy father manages. He is all alive and well, for he is tying, now, a handkerchief over his mouth and nose, that he has had tied in one direction for some time; he is only now shifting it to a fresh part of the handkerchief. Let us do the same and we are safe, if he is so."

"Try it at once," cried Claude, "for the love of heaven!"

The hope that this might be a means of saving them from the worst effects of the deleterious air that was evolved from the substance in the brazier that had been let a little way down from the chapel into the vaults assailed them all for a moment or two with new vigour.

They luckily found that one of the novices had a dress of rather closely woven muslin, which was just the thing: so, with her full and free consent, they tore it up into long pieces, and each of them tied a portion round their mouth and nose, so that the air that they admitted to their lungs was, in good truth, thoroughly and completely filtered by passing through the several folds of the muslin.

Now, it is quite a well understood fact, and one which it is as well that every one should know, that air may be filtered quite as easily as water, because in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred what is with the air and vitiates it is of a much more material character than the real air itself, and will be arrested by an obstruction that allows the pure air to pass.

This is precisely the principle upon which nature, in a common filter made of gravel and charcoal, permits only pure and limpid water to pass through it, and keeps back all grosser particles of matter.

The effect, then, of what we may truly call these muslin filters of air upon the half-fainting occupants of the vaults of the convent was great, indeed. In the course of a few moments the feeling of lassitude that was so like death, and which in a short time would have passed into that state, wore off, and the blood once more freely circulated in their veins.

"Oh, this is Heaven in comparison with our former state!" said Alicia.

"It is—it is!" cried the novices.

"Upon my life," said Dick, "it is delightful! We do not value simple delights till we have been deprived of them for a time. I never could have believed that to draw a long breath without the feeling that you were half-choked by the process was such a truly delightful feeling as it is."

"Nor I," said Jack. "But we must let Claude know that all is well with us now, and that we can wait a little."

"Do so."

"Claude?" called Jack—"Claude?"

"Yes, Jack? How are you all now?"

"Much better."

"I am so glad to hear it!"

"Yes, we can wait now; so, don't do anything precipitous that may be done better and more effectually by taking your time about it."

"All's right! I am working away! Ah! what's that?"

"You abominable wretches!" said the deep, hollow, sepulchral kind of voice that had before sounded in the place, and which evidently came from somewhere contiguous to it. "You abominable, vile, and sacrilegious wretches! Already must you be in the pangs of that dissolution, which will only be the precursor of the still greater torments that you will suffer in the world which is to come! Death is your portion!"

The voice ceased.

"Don't reply," said Claude. "It is quite as well that the very amiable individual who thus spoke should think that we are suffering all the pangs she or he supposes, as then it will not seem necessary to adopt any other means of quickly and comfortably disposing of us."

Acting upon this hint, they were all quite still in the vaults. But Father Garvey, having his wits about him, and from the first not having suffered from the deleterious vapour, the nature of which he understood, no doubt, quite well, called out in loud accents—

"No—no! They will escape! They will escape!"

"Stop his mouth!" said Claude.

The most prompt and effectual way that struck Jack of stopping the mouth of the father-confessor was to thrust something into it, so he made up to him, and, despite his resistance, crammed the handkerchief the reverend confessor had been holding directly to his mouth and nose right into the former, so that while it still acted as a filter to him for the foul air, he could not shut his mouth at all, nor utter a word.

It was found, too, that Father Garvey had got one of his hands at liberty, and that Jack took good care to secure again.

"Now, master father-confessor," said Jack, "I rather think that you are in about as helpless a condition as you very well can be in. Don't kick, for if you do, you will only draw a little tighter the cord that holds your legs together. Don't struggle with your hands, for if you do you will have a good chance of dislocating your shoulders. Don't try to bawl out, for if you do you will infallibly choke yourself."

All these troubles come so home to the mind of the father-confessor, that he did not attempt to commit any one of the imprudent acts that Jack portended, but only lay upon his back goggling his eyes, and looking as though the last threatened catastrophe, namely, the choking one, was much nearer at hand than Jack intended, or his reverence would wish for.

CHAPTER CCCLXXI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ORIFICE IN THE ROOF IS EXPLAINED.

WHILE all this was going on below, Claude was far from being idle upon his rather exalted perch above.

Finding that all was for the present safe, comparatively speaking, at all events, with his friends upon the floor of the vault, Duval took his work much more deliberately, for he felt quite sure that nothing was to be gained by percipitancy, while everything was to be lost.

He was satisfied that the roof over the orifice in the chapel floor was of a rectangular form, and to give a very familiar description of it, it seemed after Claude had got away the lower part of it, to be something like a very large chest reversed, and placed over the hole in the floor of the chapel leading to the vaults.

With this impression, then, of the shape of the obstacle that was in the way of his reaching the chapel, Claude Duval felt, with care and gentleness, for what

might be called the sides of the reversed chest, and he soon felt them, just situated as might be expected.

One of these sides presented a firm resistance to the pressure of the crowbar; but to his great surprise, the other yielded before it in a moment, and, indeed, it did so with such readiness, that Claude Duval very nearly fell from the platform owing to not finding the resistance he expected.

It was, indeed, a fortunate thing for him that he was tolerably well upon his guard, or he must have had rather a severe tumble.

Upon finding, then, that this side, as it were, of the square chest over the opening in the roof of the vaulted place and the floor of the chapel gave way on one side, Claude carefully examined the how and the why it so gave way, and he was not long in satisfying himself that he knew all about it.

That side he found to be about four feet in height, and it was evidently hinged on to the upper or flat portion of the chest by those description of hinges which would go both ways, according as any force was applied to the flap or door with which they were connected.

"Good, so far," cried Claude to himself, and then raising his body up by a rather powerful effort, he found that there would be no difficulty in crawling through that hinged piece of wood, and on the instant he did so, his hands fell upon the cold marble floor of the chapel.

The air, too, was cool and refreshing, and, in comparison with the darkness of the place immediately below him, the chapel was quite light.

Several candles, that burnt day and night before an image of the Virgin, that was in a nick about the centre of the principal aisle of the chapel, shed their light through the whole space, which, to Claude Duval, presented so great a contrast to the darkness from whence he had issued.

One steady glance around him, now, made him familiar with all that had seemed to be so full of perplexity and mystery.

The chest-like construction, which had so puzzled him from below, was nothing more nor less in appearance, when you viewed it from the chapel, than a tomb, apparently of stone, with the effigy of some highly-sanctified individual reposing at full length upon the top of it. The top and one of the sides and the two ends were of stone, but the flap or door-way, if it might be called such, through which Claude Duval came into the chapel, was of wood, painted very finely to look just like the rest of the construction.

In lieu of a tomb, then the whole affair was but a blind, to cover up that mode of descent to the vaults below.

The comprehension of the whole affair was quite easy.

If any one got upon the floor, and chose to roll against the wooden door at the side of the seeming tomb, it would, on account of opening either way upon its well-hung hinges, give way with them, and they would come upon the piece of wood-work in the roof, which Duval had before displaced with the crowbar, and which was hinged so as to open downwards, and to close again by a spring. Through, or rather past that they would go, and so on to the descending platform, which with their weight would go plump at once to the floor of the vault, and then the job was done.

The person would either roll out in the progress of the fall, or be jerked out upon reaching the floor, or immediately get out, and in either case up would go the platform again, in consequence of the counterpoise weights acting upon it, and the whole apparatus would be quite ready for the use of any one else who might choose to go down, or who might be forced down, not choosing it at all.

In working away the lower piece of wood-work, Claude Duval had found that there was some iron-work in his way, and now he quite understood what it had been.

"So," he said to himself in a whisper, "I have now come at the secret mode by which any victim might at a few moments' notice be spirited, as it were, away from the chapel, and no one know whither they had gone, except those entrusted with the fearful secret of this seeming tomb."

That the abbess, or some one in her interests, might be in the chapel, was a proposition so very likely to be true, that Claude was prudently careful not only not to utter a sound that might betray his presence, but likewise not to let his head be seen above the level of the edge of the mock tomb.

That such caution was very much called for under the circumstances, very quickly became apparent enough; for as Claude was just, with all the care possible, projecting the top of his forehead high enough above the tomb to let his eyes get clear of the rim of it, there came a sudden flash of light over the chapel, and he heard a voice, which he knew at once as that of the lady abbess, say—

"Dennis—Dennis!"

There was no reply.

"Dennis—Dennis!" she said again, in rather louder tones; and then, in a half sleepy tone, Dennis replied—

"An' faith, sir, it's meself that will be the faithful servant, and follow you, sir, through fire and water, sir, an' please you."

"Dennis, I say! You dream."

"Eh? Oh, dear!"

"Fool! awake."

"Yes. Bedad, my lady abbess, and it was dreaming I was, surely. I thought I was talking to the master, you see, ma'am, that's all; but, bedad, it's meself that knows where I am now all among the saints, any how."

"Silence!"

"Yes, ma'am, if you please, ma'am."

There was now a pause of a few minutes' duration, after which the lady abbess said, in a low and anxious tone—

"It is strange—very strange, indeed."

"Yes, ma'am, it is."

"Hold your tongue, idiot!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do not presume to speak, except in reply to me."

"No, ma'am."

"I placed you here to watch, did I not?"

"Faith, then, ma'am, you never said a truer thing than that, any how."

"And instead of watching, you fell asleep?"

"Asleep, ma'am?"

"Yes, asleep."

"Is it asleep, ma'am, you say? Oh, bedad, then, that's a mighty great mistake, my lady, any way. It was only thinking I was, my lady; but it isn't the likes of me that would go to sleep in this a-place, my lady, more by token that you tould me to watch and listen; and how could I do them same things if I was to be going off to sleep, my lady?"

"That is just what I should like to know," said the abbess. "If you have not slept you have watched; if you have watched you have heard something, for it is not in reason that all this time should pass and no sound indicative of death coming from those below."

"Certainly not, ma'am, as you say, it isn't in reason."

"What have you heard, then?"

"What have I heard, is it?"

"Yes, fellow."

"Why, ma'am, infidels and heathens like them as is below in the cellar, ma'am, is not to be accounted for any way."

"Then you heard nothing, and so I know that you slept upon your post."

"Slept on a post, ma'am?"

"Fool! You slept here in the chapel instead of watching and listening as I told you to do to the slightest sound that might disturb its stillness."

"Oh, no, ma'am."

"Now, I tell you that you did. Do not provoke me, or your life is not worth a moment's purchase, and you die, too, without absolution."

"Don't be after saying that, ma'am, and threatening a poor fellow with the going out of the world without the clergy, ma'am. I will tell you all I heard ma'am, which was a shrieking and a groaning."

"Ah! A shrieking and a groaning?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"That is music to me to hear of."

"Yes, ma'am, and after a while, you see, ma'am, there was a knocking and a rumbling, as though the ould gentleman himself was coming; and then, after that, ma'am, everything went quiet and aisy, and nothing woke me up—I mean, nothing disturbed me, as I sat here thinking of ould Ireland."

"They are dead, then?"

"I should say uncommonly dead, ma'am."

"My vengeance is complete. Ha—ha—ha!"

"Ha—ha!" laughed Dennis. "Mighty droll it is, any way. Her ladyship's vengeance is complete. Ha—ha!"

"Silence, idiot!"

The tone in which this command was given pretty clearly let even Dennis know that he went upon rather dangerous ground when he presumed to laugh at the same time and at the same thing as the lady abbess did. He was silent on the moment.

The abbess, then, lifted the lamp she carried from a stand on which she had placed it, and approached the door in the wall of the chapel, and placed her ear to it and listened.

"All is still as the grave," she said.

"Yes, ma'am," said Dennis.

"Peace! Yes, all is still as the grave; and why not? for it is a grave to them. They are surely all dead now, and I have my revenge upon them all. Well, that is something. I must write to the sovereign pontiff to appoint a new confessor to the convent, since Garvey has been so well got rid of."

"Yes, ma'am," said Dennis.

"Silence, on your life!"

"Oh, dear!"

The abbess now rather alarmed Claude Duval by coming at a slow and solemn step towards the very mock tomb, through the side of which he had made his way into the chapel. With great speed and dexterity, and yet with no sort of flurry, for that might at once have discovered the fact of his presence there, Claude passed through the hinged doorway of the tomb and so on to the top of the platform, upon which he crouched as low as he could.

The only thing that Claude Duval now dreaded was that Jack or Dick Turpin might call up to him something, in which case a full discovery of all that was taking place would most likely ensue, and all the powers of mischief of the abbess might be brought to bear upon the new train of circumstances that would open to her mind, and of which she had now no conception at all.

The idea did occur to Claude of just making a sudden dart and laying hold of her and making her a prisoner there and then upon the spot; but, still, he did not quite feel that that would suit him, for her outcries and the fright that would ensue with her would, in all probability, alarm the convent, and then the contest with the old nuns, which he wished for the sake of the females of his own party to avoid, would ensue.

As he lay, he considered that he was tolerably safe from the observation of the abbess, especially as she had, evidently, no sort of suspicion that any one was there; so he kept quiet, thinking that it would be time to be violent if any chance discovery of his presence there should take place.

As he suspected, the abbess had come to the tomb to listen if she could catch any sounds from below through its side.

Stooping close to the tomb, after placing her lamp upon the top of it, she

pushed the hinged side of it open, and inclined her ear towards it for a few moments, which seemed a long time to Claude Duval.

Luckily no one spoke from below; but Father Gervey uttered a groan.



CLAUDE FORCING THE CONFESSOR INTO THE CELL.

CHAPTER CCCLXXII.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE CONVENT, AND THE ABBESS'S DISCOMFITURE.

THE abbess, in order the better to hear if any sound came from the vaults, very materially aided the concealment of Claude Duval, for she inclined her ear and not her eyes in the direction where he lay.

The groan that Father Garvey uttered in the anger and the despair of his spirit reached her, and was music to her ears.

"Ah, I hear them," she said—"I hear them now. They are dying—they are now dying!"

"True for you, ma'am," said Dennis.

The abbess started to her feet, for she had no desire to make Dennis acquainted with the secrets of the convent further than necessary, although she had retained him in the service of the unscrupulous system.

"Keep back!" she said, imperiously. "How dare you follow me, idiot?"

"Keep back is it, ma'am?"

"Yes, yes."

"Oh, then, ma'am, that's what I'll do. Me whole family has lost many and lots of honours all their lives by not going forward. But modesty, you see, ma'am, and diffidence is the great fault of me countrymen, and they can't help it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, ma'am; that's true for you."

The abbess had let the door at the side of the tomb fall shut when she rose from her attitude of listening, so that about Claude Duval all was the most intense and impenetrable darkness again; but, situated as he was, he could hear every word that the abbess or Dennis thought proper to say.

"Their doom is fixed," said the abbess, "and you shall receive the reward that your faithful services to the church entitles you to."

"Many thanks to you, ma'am. Deed and faith, ma'am, it's a great thing to be able to serve the saints in this way, and to get the better of the heretics."

"It is—it is!"

"An' it's meself, ma'am, that would be glad to be always doing that same."

"Then you have no objection at all to remaining here permanently in the service of the convent, have you, Dennis?"

"No, ma'am."

"You will understand, then, that if you do so, you will have no foolish scruples about what you do?"

"Sure no, ma'am."

"Even what the world without calls murder must to you be a duty in this place, if you are called upon to do it."

"If the praste, ma'am, says that it's right, it isn't for the likes of me to say no to it. Surely, ma'am, his reverence knows what is right in all things, and it's his look-out, you know, ma'am, if it isn't."

"That is true, Dennis. In those few words you have embodied the one great principle of Catholicism, and for which the holy church has been contending ever since it was a church. The laity have no right to think at all about religion, or anything else that the clergy choose to decide about. All they have to do is to obey."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Dennis, you will suit us very well. You will reside here within the consent walls, and attend a little to the garden, and make yourself generally useful."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You will eat and drink of the very best, for nothing will be shut up from you in that respect."

"Bedad, ma'am, that will suit me."

"I should think it would; and, in addition to that, you will be well paid, and all you have to do is to obey our orders, be they what they may, without a doubt, a hesitation, or a question."

"Certainly, ma'am."

No doubt the abbess considered that in Dennis she had really met with a capital assistant in what further villanies and atrocities the progress of events might give rise to in the convent.

We can only wonder that superstition could so take hold of any human mind as to make it, like Dennis's, the slave of another person's iniquity, and induce it to give up the one great and indefeasible right that belongs to the whole human race—the right of thinking for itself.

But, as the lady abbess truly said, in that was to be found the one great principle of Catholicism for which the Church of Rome had ever fought, and for which it will ever fight.

Claude Duval was rather amused by the dialogue that he had had such a good opportunity of listening to between the abbess and Dennis; but he was in the hope now that they would both leave the chapel, so that he might be able to give notice to his friends below that the coast was clear, and commence forthwith concocting measures with them for an escape from the vaults.

In this hope Duval was disappointed, for in a few minutes he heard the abbess say gloomily, as she paced to and fro past the tomb—

"They will surely all die, and then this poor fool who has so freely entered into my service must go and cast them all into the well. Yes, the well—the well! How many secrets of this house does that hide!"

Claude remembered with a shudder what had come up in the bucket of the well, when an attempt had been made to get some water for the fainting novice.

"Dennis!" cried the abbess, sharply.

"Yes, ma'am."

"You will still keep watch here for some few hours."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And do not go to sleep. The fire-arms are still so placed that if you should hear any one at the door yonder trying to break it open, you can discharge them with a touch, and death must be the instant fate of any one or more persons on the other side."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Now I commend you to the saints. Farewell!"

"Amen!"

The lady abbess, like a ghost, stalked from the chapel, leaving Dennis on guard within it, and relying upon his stupidity and his superstition to keep him true and faithful to her.

When she was gone, Dennis took a turn up and down one of the aisles, and then he spoke to himself, saying—

"Bedad, then, this is a mighty quare change in me fortunes. Here I am in the service of the saints, and it's quite a blessed thing to think that I shall be on such mighty good terms with them that they will keep me quite out of purgatory when I get there, for I take it we can't all go there, if it is for ever so short a time. Well, it's a good thing I heard what that atheist of a Master Field was about with the bad lot that he picked up to help him, any way, and was able to tell all that same to the lady abbess. Oh, then, it's a holy woman she is, any way! I'll just sit down here, and try to keep awake by saying my prayers in the holy place, which can't fail to be pleasing to the saints hereaway. What if her ladyship does smother a few heretics and Orangemen in the cellars down below—isn't it all for the good of religion? To be sure it is—to be sure."

With this opinion, Dennis sat down very composedly to try to keep awake, and began the mumbling of some Latin prayer, of the meaning of which he had not the most distant conception in the world.

This process, though, instead of having the effect of keeping Dennis awake, had just the contrary one, for it sent him to sleep, and in the course of five minutes more Claude Duval had the gratification of hearing him snore away at a great rate.

"That will do," said Duval.

It was now the object of Claude to let his friends below know that he was

all right, and that if ever a time had come when they might fairly expect to escape from the convent without creating any alarm, now was that time.

Leaning over the side of the little platform upon which he was, Claude called very gently to Jack—

"Jack—Jack!"

"Yes, Claude?"

"You and Dick can let me down now. Let go of the ropes, and I shall come easy enough to the ground, I daresay."

"All's right; wait a minute."

It was not to be supposed that during all this time Jack and Dick had been personally holding the ropes that held up the platform, with the weight of Claude Duval upon it. They had found a means of securing them in the proper place after hauling him, Duval, up to the roof.

It took them a minute or two to undo the knots they had made in the ropes, and then they let Claude carefully down.

During that time that they had been undoing the rope Duval had tied his handkerchief over his mouth, so that he was prepared against the effects of the noxious vapour that was in the lower part of the vaults beneath him.

Notwithstanding this precaution against the positively deadly consequences of breathing the noxious air that was below, Claude Duval felt, the moment he got into that had atmosphere, the great difference there was between it and the cool air in the chapel above, and he was all the more anxious to get his friends into a better state of things.

"Has anything happened," he said, "since I have been away from you?"

"No, Claude," said Jack; "but we have been in a state of great apprehension concerning you. We thought we heard voices above, and strange lights appeared, too, upon the roof, but as we heard nothing from you we thought it prudent to be perfectly quiet."

"It was indeed prudent. If you had spoken all might have been lost."

"All lost?"

"Yes. Listen to me, and I will tell you exactly the state of affairs above us in the chapel."

Claude Duval, then, very briefly but amply told them what he had overheard between the lady abbess and Dennis, and concluded by saying—

"Now that the abbess has left the chapel, and that Dennis is asleep in it, I think that the time has come when we should attempt to escape from here."

"But how?"

"I will tell you. You, Jack, and you, Dick, are quite strong enough to raise, by the aid of the ropes, the platform with me upon it and one of our fair friends here, and, therefore, I propose that I take them up to the chapel one after another in that way until all are safely there."

"That will do," said Dick; "but I propose that you take Mr. Field up first and show him the way, and then he will be there as a protection to the ladies, for should the abbess return or that rascal Dennis awaken, you know, and none of us be there, we don't know how much mischief a few seconds might produce."

"True—true, that is a good thought. Mr. Field, will you come?"

"Yes, ot once."

"Alicia shall follow you."

"No—no," said Alicia; "my poor young friend, who is really very unwell, shall go next; she has more need of a little fresh air than I have by a great deal. You will guard her?"

"I will," said Field, "with my life."

"Settle what order of precedence you all like best," said Claude Duval; "it don't matter to me one jot, for I am resolved that, if I live, you shall be free from this place. Now, Jack and Dick, come on, and let me show Mr. Field, since he is to go first, where he is to take up his position so as to aid and defend the ladies should he be called upon so to do."

Before Mr. Field went upon the platform with Claude Duval there was a silent pressure of the hand beetween him and Alicia, but they did not speak. The affection subsisting between them, and which the dangerous circumstances in which they were placed had tended to strengthen, wanted no words to make it well and truly understood.

Jack and Dick were not backward in attending to the ropes, and in another moment, Claude Duval and Mr. Field were slowly, but surely, going up to the roof of the vault.

When they reached there, Claude at once showed Field how to get into the chapel, and then he said to him in a whisper—

"Of course, you will be of the most material assistance to the ladies when I bring them up, and I pray that you direct them to keep here upon this spot, just beneath the level of this tomb, for I don't think Master Dennis is sleeping quite so soundly as we could wish."

"He shall sleep soundly enough," replied Mr. Field, in a similarly cautious tone of voice, "if he dares to interfere with me, or with any of those who will be soon, I hope, under my protection."

"That will do," said Claude.

Duval then called cautiously to Jack and Dick to let him down, which they did on the instant, and then he took up one of the novices in the same way that he had taken up Field, and by the aid of the latter she was safely got into the chapel, without any noise.

By repeating this process, the other novice and Alicia were placed in comparative safety, so that there remained in the vaults only Claude Duval and his two friends, Jack and Dick.

"Well, Claude," said Dick, "how are we to manage?"

"I have thought of that."

"Have you?" said Jack. "Well, I am glad to hear it."

"The ropes," added Claude, "can just be got hold of, I find, from above, and I think that if two of us get hold of them there we shall find no difficulty in hauling up any one man who may be here."

"That will do, then," said Dick Turpin. "Now do you and Jack go up together, for my experience of the power requisite to draw up the platform convinces me I can do it alone."

CHAPTER CCCLXXIII.

FATHER GARVEY REMONSTRATES AGAINST THE PROGRESS OF AFFAIRS IN THE VAULTS.

Claude Duval, although he had no sort of doubt upon his mind about the possibility of leaning through the opening at the bottom portion of the tomb in the chapel, and so pulling up the platform, still did not like the idea of leaving Dick Turpin the last in the vaults, and he said—

"No, Dick, no. If one person can pull the ropes from below here so as, by the aid of the weights that are attached to them, the platform can be fairly raised, let that person be me."

"Why so, Claude?"

"Because it is I who have brought about all this danger, and I think I ought to be the last in this place."

"Stuff—stuff! There is a good reason why you should go, now."

"What is is?"

"You have been enduring all the fatigue of going up and down, and of opening the tomb above, and I have been quite resting, comparatively speaking, here, so go at once."

"Dick is right," said Jack, "and I say, go at once. I do not myself offer to be the last to stay, because I think, and indeed I know, that my strength would be unequal to the task of pulling up the platform by the aid of the ropes here alone."

"Come on, then, Jack," said Claude; "we will delay no longer in the matter. Come on, old friend, at once."

Both Jack and Claude now got upon the platform; but before Dick Turpin could lay hold of the ropes to pull it up, they were all attracted by the extraordinary and agonizing contortions of the priest, who lay upon the floor with the handkerchief thrust into his mouth, just as he had been left for some time past.

The unhappy wretch managed to utter the most horrible groans, and to roll over and over, as though he were in a fearful agony of pain.

Claude Duval looked at him for a few moments, and then he said—

"Jack, I don't like that."

"Nor I," said Jack.

"Nor I," said Dick Turpin.

"It is true," added Claude, "that this is a very bad fellow, and that, if right were done, there is scarcely any amount of suffering that he don't deserve; but yet it is so truly awful to see a human being suffering such pangs, that I beg of you to relieve him, if you can, Jack."

"I will," said Dick Turpin. "Don't you get off the platform now that you are once on it, Jack. It is the handkerchief in his mouth that is choking him, I suppose. I will relieve him of it."

With this intention, Dick Turpin laid hold of the end of the handkerchief that was a little way out of the mouth of the confessor, and pulled it out entirely, when the unhappy man gasped several times, and lay perfectly still for a few seconds.

"He is dying," said Claude.

"I am afraid he is," said Jack.

The confessor opened his blood-shot eyes, and turning them upon Claude Duval and his friends, he said feebly—

"Mercy! mercy!"

"What can we do for you?" said Claude. "All that you now suffer, or that you have suffered, you have brought upon yourself, unhappy man that you are, by your conduct in this most villanous abode. Thank yourself for your sufferings."

"Oh, no—no! Have some mercy upon me!"

"What would you have me do?"

"Release me from these cords. They cut my flesh, and kill me. Oh, you will not leave me to die in this frightful place?"

"We cannot aid you."

"Yes—yes, you can—you can! Oh, yes, you know you can. It is easy to release me from these bonds. You are going yourselves away from here, and you will leave me to starve to death. Is that christian?"

"No, if we were going to do such a thing, your reproach would be just enough," said Claude Duval; "but we are not."

"You are—you are!"

"Not at all."

"But I see you all going—I see you now!"

"It does not fellow, because we are going, that you are to starve to death here. For your consolation—for I would not have even such a man as you suffer the pangs of experiencing such a death—I can tell you, that your mistress, the lady abbess——"

The confessor howled with rage at the mention of the abbess's name.

"Your mistress, the lady abbess, fancying that we shall all be dead, in the morning intends to send some one here to throw our bodies down the well."

"No—no!"

"But I say yes ; I heard her say so."

"She will forget."

"Then it is her fault, and not ours; and, once for all, I tell you, Sir Priest, that you will not be released further than you are now by us, for we will not trust you with the free use of your arms and your legs. Give him his handkerchief Dick, so that he may keep the noxious vapours of this place from his lungs, and then let him be."

"I don't think he is in any danger," said Dick, as he threw the handkerchief to the priest. "The savour of the vapour, which so nearly killed us all before we found out how to guard against it, seems to be dried up, and I don't think any more of it is being evolved now."

"Then he has really nothing to complain of."

"Nothing in the world."

"Wretches! Beasts!" cried the priest, as he strove in vain to rise from the attitude he was in. "I consign you all to perdition! May you all fail not to feel doubly and trebly the torments that I feel! I solemly curse you all in sleeping and waking—in sitting and in lying—in standing and in walking—at home and abroad—in eating and in drinking! Curse you all! Amen!"

"My dear sir," said Dick, "if it be any amusement to you to curse us, pray go on at it as long as you think proper."

"Perdition catch you all!"

"Very good, sir, only you will recollect, if you please, the old proverb to the effect, that curses are like chickens—they always, sooner or later, come home to roost."

"Bah!"

'You may say 'bah!' as much as you like, but if you look at us you will not fail, with your great sagacity, to see that—

'Notwithstanding this terrible curse,
We don't yet feel a penny the worse;'

so good night, sir, and I hope you and the rats will be hearty company for each other."

The father-confessor only glared at Dick Turpin, now, as though he would have eaten him up if he could, and Dick, taking no further notice of him or his rage, went to the ropes for the purpose of exerting his strength to draw up Jack and Claude Duval to the opening in the roof.

There was no great difficulty in doing this, and Dick had the pleasure of seeing them both in safety at the roof of the vault, and after that pass into the chapel itself. He then let down the platform for his own accommodation, but it could hardly have been possible for any human being not to feel some sort of sensation of terror and of loneliness in the situation that Dick Turpin was now left.

We should very much wrong Dick if for one moment we were to insinuate a doubt of the good faith of his friends above. Turpin knew well that rather than leave him there they would all come down again and stay with him, let the consequences be what they might.

It was not the feeling that he was deserted that crept over the soul of Turpin in that dismal abode, but it was a kind of shuddering one at finding that he was, to all social intents, alone in a region which had been, no doubt, for so long a time consecrated to the Demon of Murder.

To be sure, the father-confessor was there; but we cannot wonder that he, as company, did not occupy a very large share of the attention of Dick Turpin.

After a few moments the voice of Claude Duval came clearly down to him, although Claude still spoke only in the most cautious of whispers.

"Dick—Dick?"

"All right, Claude."

"Do you see me?"

"Dimly I do. Is all right above?"

"Yes, Dick; get on to the platform now, and let Jack and I draw you up."

"Do you think you can do it?"

"We will do it, so we don't intend to think about it, I assure you, Dick. Are you ready?"

"Yes, quite ready."

Dick Turpin could not conceal from himself the fact that the old ropes that connected the platform with the roof had creaked very ominously as Jack and Claude went up, and the idea now came across him that nothing was much more probable than that at this the last moment they might break and let him down. In that case, even if he escaped personal injury of a serious character from the fall, his situation in the vaults would be rather critical.

To be sure, there was the door at the head of the stairs, leading into the chapel, by the side of the confessionals, and by that his friends above might, admitting them to have the power to do so, release him; but, upon the whole, Dick would very much rather be with them in the chapel.

With such feelings and such apprehensions, rational and likely as they were, it may be guessed that Dick did not much enjoy his little voyage from the floor of the vaults to the ceiling.

It was not the easiest thing in the world for Claude Duval and Jack even, although they were as efficiently as he could do so assisted by Mr. Field, to draw Dick Turpin up to the orifice in the tomb.

Nothing but their thorough determination to pull him up, if it was at all possible to do so, prevailed over the difficulties they had to encounter, which difficulties were mainly on account of the very awkward position they were forced to get into to bring any strength to bear upon the ropes at all.

"Take it easy," said Dick, when he was about half way up. "Take it easy. The old ropes are straining fearfully."

"The deuce they are," said Claude.

"Yes, yes. I hear them."

"And so do I," said Jack.

"Hush!" whispered Duval. "Don't say another word, Jack, but pull him up."

A few more minutes sufficed to bring Dick nearly to the top of the place, and then he stretched up his hands and made a clutch at the rim of the orifice, close to where Claude and Jack were leaning over the sides. Fortunately, the clutch was successful, and the principal weight of Dick Turpin was no longer on the little platform.

"Give me a little help, and I am with you," said Dick.

Claude clutched him by the collar, and with a great exertion of strength, fairly pulled him through the side of the mock tomb, and placed him in safety in the chapel.

Dick Turpin then drew a long breath, and shook his head, as he said—

"I wonder what could tempt me to go down and come up again upon that frail concern."

"Thank the fates," said Claude, "you have no need so to do, nor have any of us, either."

"You forget the necessity of caution," said Jack. "I pray you to speak low, Claude. It is true that Dennis's nose, by the tune that it is playing, lets us know that he is fast asleep; but yet, it is just as well that we should be as careful as possible."

"It is better to be so, Jack. Now, let me see. Are we all assembled here and ready for a start?"

"All—all!"

"And the ladies are recovered, I hope, from the sufferings of the dismal place from which we have so happily escaped?"

"Oh, yes," said Alicia, "we are quite well now, and happy."

"Then, gentlemen," said Claude, "look to your arms, for we will now,



THE REUNION OF ALICIA AND THE NOVICE IN THE CONVENT DUNGEONS

despite any sort of resistance that can be offered to us, leave this place. I, for one, will fight to the last, and I am quite sure you will all do so likewise."

"We will!" they replied.

It was at this moment that the convent bell began to toll dismally, and they were all so astonished at the sounds at such an hour, that they crouched down behind the mock tomb with a feeling of consternation, and something like dismay.

Of course, the most natural idea in the world was, that the tolling of the bell was some sort of alarm given of their presence in the chapel; but they soon found cause to alter that opinion.

The monotonous tolling of the bell continued for the space of about three minutes, during which Claude Duval and his party looked at each other as well as they could in the faint light that the chapel afforded them, as though each would ask of each some kind of explanation of what it really meant.

It was one of the young novices who then, in a tone of alarm, said—

"I know what this means—oh, I know too well!"

"What does it mean?" said Claude Duval. "I charge you to tell us at once."

"It is what the abbess calls an early chapel, and is held one hour before sunrise, to try some guilty nun or novice for some offence against her."

CHAPTER CCCLXXIV.

THE TRIAL OF THE DELINQUENT NOVICE IN THE CONVENT CHAPEL.

When the young girl gave this explanation of the cause of the ringing of the convent bell in so dismal a manner, it suddenly ceased, and the stillness that succeeded had something awful and solemn in it.

Claude Duval turned to Alicia, saying—

"Do you, too, think that the explanation we have heard of the cause of the ringing of the convent bell is the correct one?"

"Alas, I know not. I have not been sufficiently long an inmate of the place, thank Heaven, to become acquainted with all its manners and customs."

"It is so, I assure you," said the novice, and then she appealed to the other one, who was rather unwell, as she it was who had fainted in the vaults, and her statement was at once by her confirmed.

"Well," said Duval, "it don't matter to us, that is one comfort, and perhaps it is all the better that the abbess should be occupied with her own affairs, so that she won't have any time to interfere with ours. There can be no doubt but that she thinks us by this time all dead in the vaults, and so feels herself at full liberty to go on with her regular devotions, without troubling herself further about us."

"Oh, sir," said the novice, "but how shall we escape hence?"

"Escape hence? Why, by leaving this place. I propose to wait here now for a few minutes longer until we can fairly assume that the abbess is quite busy tending the conference or council you speak of, and then we will make our way into the garden, and be off at once."

"But, good gracious," cried the novice, in a tone of voice that, considering the neighbourhood of even the slumbering Dennis, was not a prudent one to trust to the still air of the chapel, "it is here that the trial will be held."

"Here?"

"Yes, here, in the chapel."

"The deuce it is."

"There is danger, you see, sir."

"I do, indeed. What the deuce is to be done now, I wonder? This is rather awkward. Never mind, though, they are not here yet, and we may still, if we are quick about it, have time to escape. This way—this way!"

"Hush," said Jack. "Look there."

Jack pointed to the steps of the altar, down which the abbess was now slowly coming, guarding the lamp she held in her hand against the draughts in the chapel. It was, no doubt, to the fact that the little flickering flame of the lamp demanded all her attention that Claude Duval and his friends escaped the penetrating glance which she otherwise would have sent round the chapel.

"Stoop, all of you," whispered Claude.

They all shrank down, now, below the level of the top of the tomb, so that

even if the abbess were to pause and look in that direction, she would not see them amid the dusky air of the place.

"What is to be done?" whispered Mr. Field.

"Hush," said Alicia, "speak only in whispers, for the love of life! If we could get about twenty feet to the right of this spot we should reach the confessionals, and two of them would hold us all. It is very unlikely that they would be visited by any one, and as there is no Father Garvey to take possession of one of them we should be safe there until the trial was over."

"We will try it," said Claude Duval, "at all events."

"Do so—oh, do so," said Mr. Field.

The abbess reached the foot of the altar steps, and then, still shading her lamp with her hand, she said, in a low voice——

"Dennis—Dennis?"

A loud note of anything but a musical character from the nose of the slumbering Dennis was the only answer to the lady abbess's call.

"Dennis—Dennis, I say?"

Another snoring sound was the reply.

"The wretch sleeps," said the abbess.

It was, no doubt, the anger of the lady abbess that made her quite forgetful of the fact that the little lamp she carried in her hand was, from some cause or another, burning very feebly and required great care to keep alight, for with hasty steps, and without shading it at all from any sudden rush of air, she advanced towards where the nasal sounds convinced her that the slumbering Dennis gave so loud an idea of vigilance upon his part, and the lamp instantly went out.

We are afraid that at this juncture the abbess of the convent uttered an exclamation that was much more strong than polite.

"What can be the matter with the lamp?" she then said, in a more subdued tone. "It was wont to burn well. Father Garvey, when he was alive—ha! ha! now he is dead—but when he was alive, he used to say, that the well in the vaults gave forth poisonous exhalations, and that such hindered the burning of the wax tapers in the altar sconces; but I never believed him."

After, with some dexterity, and once with partial effect, trying to blow the lamp into a flame again, which may be done sometimes, if done with tact, she found that there was no recourse but to go to the farther end of the chapel, where the dim light was burning before the effigy of the Virgin Mary in a niche, and by its aid re-illume her hand lamp.

Dennis went on swearing, certainly, at a most awful rate, and the abbess, after shaking her clenched hand at him, went with quick steps to the little image of the Virgin with the lamp.

Neither Claude Duval nor his friends could have the least difficulty in being cognisant of all these proceedings on the part of the abbess, and amid the stillness that was in the chapel, they could hear, with the greatest ease, everything that she said. When the abbess moved off to the far end of the chapel in quest of a light, Claude felt that then was the opportunity, and the only one, that in all probability they could have of concealing themselves in the confessionals.

In quite a low, anxious whisper, he spoke to Alicia, saying—

"If you can manage to guide us to the confessionals you speak of, do so now, if you please. If they are close at hand, and if there should be no difficulty in getting admission to them, now is the time."

"It is—it is. Come."

They had all heard what Claude said to Alicia, so there was no time lost in any explanation, and they followed her along the aisle with rapidity. They took good care to keep in stooping attitudes, so that they might not be seen by any accident; and then Alicia opened one of the confessional doors, saying—

"This will hold some of us."

"It will hold us all," said the novice, who had fainted in the vaults below. "It will hold us all."

"Nay!"

"Yes—yes, it will. There is an inner chamber to this one confessional, which Father Garvey used often to sleep in."

It certainly was possible that the confessional, without an inner chamber at all, might have hold them all; but in order to make it do so, they would have had to stand up rather closely to each other. The novice, though, was well aware that at the back of the confessional there was a little door that opened to a chamber, about twelve feet square, in which the holy father used to repose after the labour of attending to the confessions of his penitents at the convent. Upon one occasion, curiosity prompted her to make the most diligent search for that little door, and she had not only found out its exact position, but had made herself acquainted with the secret spring by the aid of which it was opened.

This knowledge stood her in good stead now.

Imagine then, the whole party, which now consisted of no less than seven persons, safely in the confessional, and the door closed. The novice found the spring of the door in the wall, leading to the other chamber, and there they had plenty of room.

All this did not occupy many moments in accomplishing, and it was well that it did not, for Claude Duval felt rather uneasy every minute that the lady abbess was out of his sight.

There was one great advantage, though, connected with getting into the chapel, and that was, that the girls could have a good rest in the priest's chamber, which was very luxuriously and handsomely furnished.

To be sure, the darkness there was something that might, indeed, be called profound; but if they felt around them, almost wherever they did so they found some soft sofas or easy chairs, in which one might sit and doze the hours pleasantly enough away.

"Now, for Heaven's sake," said Claude Duval, "be quiet, ladies, while we men look into the chapel as well as we can from the door of the cosfessional, and see what goes on there."

"There is no occasion to look from the door," said Alicia; "there is a grated window which will afford you an easy view. It is covered with wire gauze, too, so that you can see out from here, and, while there is no light in the confessional, no one can see you."

"The very thing," said Claude.

As he spoke, the convent bell began to toll again, and the novice said—

"That is the second bell. The nuns will assemble now, and bring in their prisoner at once."

Claude Duval was exceedingly anxious to see all that might transpire in the chapel, and along with Dick Turpin, Jack, and Mr. Field, who, by-the-bye, converted himself into a sort of general intelligencer between the ladies in the priest's room and the confessional, through the gauze wire of which the proceedings in the chapel could be seen, took up their posts at that spot.

This second time that the bell rang was for a very short time indeed, and then there was a shuffling of feet in the corridor leading to the chapel, but as yet no one but the abbess was to be seen within its walls.

The abbess had re-illumined her hand lamp at the little shrine of the Virgin, and had approached Dennis, to whom she administered two or three kicks, and he woke up, saying—

"Murder! murder! Oh, bedad, and what's that same——"

"Wretch!

"Oh, ma'am, and then, sure, is it you?"

"Beast!"

"Is it a baste, ma'am, you are after calling me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, then, ma'am, I'd rather not, for sure and it don't seem fine and aisy for such a lady as yourself, ma'am, to be destroying your elegant mouth with such words."

"You are an idle, good-for-nothing fool, and your life ought to pay the penalty of your folly. How dare you come here and undertake a duty, and then neglect it?"

"Neglect it, ma'am?"

"Yes, neglect it."

"And pray, ma'am, if it's all the same to you, what was the duty, ma'am?"

"To keep the most diligent watch in the chapel."

"And didn't I, ma'am?"

"You know you did not. You slept as soon as my back was turned."

"Oh, no, ma'am."

"Oh, no? But I say, oh, yes."

"Bedad then, ma'am it isn't right to contradict your ladyship, but I only slept with one eye, and I assure you, my lady, that the other was continually rolling round and round, and doing the duty of twenty soldiers, ma'am, all on duty with a sword and a blunderbuss each of them, ma'am."

"Idiot!"

"Yes, ma'am—I'm sure, ma'am, it's quite a pleasure to be anything your ladyship may happen to like best."

There was a decided tone of insolence about Dennis now. That inevitable effect upon a small mind of being useful was beginning to take its course with him. He was beginning to improve upon it, and to fancy that he might say and do things that otherwise he would not have dreamt of.

Nothing but the ignorance of this man could possibly have induced him to act in this way, for after what he knew of the proceedings within the convent was it likely that such a woman as the abbess would, for long, endure either his presence or his insolence?

No. The danger of the position in which Dennis stood was such that any one with a very little more sense than he had must have seen it, and the look that the abbess gave him was truly that of the basilisk, for it promised death to him.

"Very well, Dennis," she said, quite mildly. "I daresay you are quite right."

"True for you, ma'am."

"And so, as the business that I come to the chapel upon now is rather of a private nature, you will oblige me by going up the steps of the altar and making your way behind it, where you will see a door in the wall. By pursuing the passage beyond that door you will come to my apartment."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Wine is on the table. I need say no more."

"Troth, ma'am, and you need not, any way. Good luck to you, ma'am."

Dennis left the chapel by the route indicated to him by the abbess, while from an arched door at the farther end of the aisle there entered the building a long row of nuns in the habit of their order, and with their arms crossed over their breasts, and walking slowly like people who are given to somnambulism

CHAPTER CCCLXXV.

CLAUDE DUVAL STAYS THE EXECUTION OF A JUDICIAL SENTENCE.

CLAUDE DUVAL thought that surely there must be something more in the character of these proceedings, so full of formality as they were, than the mere passing sentence upon one whose crime was only a crime affecting the peculiar position in which she was placed, and who might be adjudged to any punishment the person in power chose, without even the fraction of an examination into the circumstances of the case.

It seemed as if, to use a common expression, the abbess, who reigned in that

convent, certainly, with absolute authority, was making much ado about nothing in this trial of the novice.

But when we come to consider that catholicity, as understood by the Church of Rome, is a system, and that in all its parts it abounds with ceremonials of the most sombre, as well as of the most glittering character, and that without those ceremonials it is nothing, we shall see how even those who are united, with absolute authority, under its jurisdiction, have to conform to those general principles by which the whole of the system is carried on.

The trials, too, of the inmates of convents and of nunneries were considered by the Catholic Church as useful in another point of view. They taught those who were present at them what was the peculiar crime that had to be avoided; and this was a knowledge that, with all the concomitants and ceremonies of a trial, was advanced at much greater length than as if it had merely stated that so and so was punished by order of the superiors for such and such conduct.

Besides, these forms and ceremonies kept up the semblance of something like a regal state; for what would be regality without its nice ceremonies?

Thus, then, was it that the abbess of the convent took the trouble of solemnly trying, or seeming solemnly to try, one over whom she had sovereign authority, and whom she had quite made up her mind beforehand to adjudge guilty; the amount of punishment that she was to receive had, no doubt, been completely settled in the mind of the abbess.

This was the only way in which Claude Duval could to his own mind, in anything like a satisfactory manner, account for the vast trouble that was taken to make something that, in reality, was quite arbitrary, appear to be something strictly in accordance with justice, always assuming that the affair was really an offence.

The long and really solemn procession of nuns came slowly along the aisle, and what with their sombre dresses, the dim religious light of the place, and the strange ghost-like manner in which they glided along, Claude could not help admitting to himself, that the catholic was indeed the faith that, of all others, mostly took the imagination prisoner.

The nuns soon arranged themselves in a circle round the steps of the altar, or rather, we should say, round the space of the chapel immediately in front of those steps; and then a chair of an ancient looking form, with much gilding upon it, and a carved angel's head at the corners both of the seat and back, was placed in the centre of the half circle of nuns, rather close to the steps of the altar.

The seat, of course, was for the lady abbess.

A death-like stillness now reigned in the chapel, for the bell had ceased to toll, and the abbess was hidden somewhere. It suited her better not to appear till all the nuns were assembled, and then she could do so with effect; and so, from behind the altar she made her appearance.

The nuns all bowed reverently before her.

Claude Duval, if he had not enjoyed the rather frequent opportunities that he had of seeing the abbess, certainly would not have known her now, in her robes of office.

From some receptacle at the back of the altar where they were kept, she had procured them, and placed then over her other apparel, so that she presented rather a gorgeous appearance as she stepped forward to take her place in the seat of authority that had been placed for her.

"Silence!" cried the abbess, after rather a long pause. "Have you prayed?"

"We have," said all the nuns.

"Sisters, have you remembered the sinner in your prayers?"

"We have."

"Do you think, sisters, that in the time which is to come, and which will be without end, she will find favour?"

"She will."

"That is well. We would have it so from the bottom of our hearts."

An old nun now stepped forward from the rest, and kneeling at the feet of the abbess, she said—

"Holy mother, it is true that the sinner shall find peace and mercy in the world which is to come, through the intercession of the church; but that state can only arise after she has passed the bar of human justice."

"What would you have?" said the abbess.

"Her trial."

"Whose trial?"

"The novice, Frances."

"Be it so."

Now, all this was repeated in such a style that it was quite evident to Claude Duval and his friends that it was nothing in the world but a regularly established farce; so that when one of the nuns or novices was tried for any offence, real or supposed, the abbess should be able to say that she had been called upon by all the sisterhood, in full chapter assembled, to take that course.

When the abbess had said, "Be it so," the old nun rose from her knees, and retired among the sisters.

After a few moments' thought, then, the abbess gave out the words of a kind of hymn of praise, which was sung in the space of about three minutes by the nuns; and then, as the echo of the voices died away, she said—

"Bring the culprit hither."

There was a considerable stir among some of the old nuns now, and then about half a dozen of them started upon the errand in search of her whom the abbess was pleased at that early stage of the proceedings to call the culprit, although professed only to be sitting there to try her for alleged offences.

During this pause in the proceedings Claude Duval took the opportunity of asking Alicia if she knew a novice by the name of Frances.

"Oh, yes," she replied. "She is a beautiful young girl, and has only been in the convent about a month."

"What is her age?"

"Not exceeding sixteen, I should say, and she has the greatest dislike to a conventual life, and has expressed as much."

"How came she here, then?"

"She has been forced here by her friends, being originally deceived into the idea that it was a boarding school."

"Then her offence for which she is about to be tried is, no doubt, just for expressing a dislike to the convent?"

"Oh, no—no!"

"No? What else can she have done?"

"Something that you will, no doubt, hear alleged against her, whether it be true or not; but that is not the offence. If that were to make a high cause of, the lady abbess would have nothing in the world to to but to hold chapters for the trial of all the novices in the convent."

"And the nuns—do they never grow uneasy?"

"Yes; but the punishment of anything in the way of apparent repentance of having taken the vows to which they would be subjected is so severe, that they are terrified into silence; and after a long time the mind gets vitiated and habituated to this sort of life, and from weeping and wailing in secret over their own sufferings, they get to take a pleasure in inflicting them upon others."

"No doubt."

"Claude—Claude," said Turpin, "come to the grating here—come now."

Claude hastily applied his eye to the wire gauze once again, and he heard a great shuffling noise in the immediate vicinity of the chapel as he did so.

A door in the wall was flung open, and then the old nuns who had left to seek her whom the abbess had called the culprit made their appearance, dragging some one with them.

"Help! Oh, have mercy upon me!" cried a voice.

Claude Duval felt the hot blood of indignation rise to his face, and he placed his hand upon the door of the confessional.

"Hold," whispered Jack.

"But can I hear this?"

"Yes. Wait a bit. Remember that we have it in our power, at any moment, to step forward to the release of the young girl."

"Yes; but——"

"Nay, Claude, be patient yet awhile."

"I will try to be so."

The old nuns dragged into the chapel a young and beautiful girl, whose long hair hung down to her waist, and one of the old hags had a mass of it twisted round her hand, with which she gave the poor girl such tugs that it was a wonder she did not pull that quantity out by the roots.

The other old nuns followed and kept striking her severe blows about the head, neck, and shoulders.

"On—on," cried the hag that had hold of the girl by the hair. "Come on, wretch—come on, heretic! Ha—ha! I have you!"

"Release me—oh, release me! I will follow you if it be to death, but do not torture me thus!"

"I will torture you, you wretch. So, you think because you have a pretty face that you won't stay in the convent, do you?"

"Mercy—mercy!"

"Take that, and that."

The old hag tugged at the young girl's hair as she spoke, and Claude said, in a whisper—

"Jack, get your head on one side."

"What for?"

"I am going to shoot that old devil."

"No—no. Look!"

Goaded at last to desperation by the suffering she endured and the torments of the old nun, the young girl rushed forward and sent her sprawling upon the pavement of the chapel, against which her head came with an ominous sort of crack.

The old hag, to try to save herself, let go of the hair of the young girl, who, thus being free for a moment, bounded forward, and kneeling at the feet of the lady abbess, she cried—

"Madam, you are the superior of this convent, and your word is law. If I have done anything for which you feel that you have a right to punish me, let me hear what it is, but do not sit there and suffer me to be ill-treated by these persons whom I both hate and despise."

The abbess looked coldly at the young girl.

"The sisters of the convent are not," she said, "to be hated and despised."

"Yes, if they are hateful, and if they do despicable things."

"Silence!"

The novice rose from her kneeling posture and looked around her with disdain upon her countenance, and Claude Duval, as he looked at her, thought her certainly the sweetest creature of her age that he had ever seen.

"Let me kill her—let me kill her!" cried a voice.

At the same moment the old hag who had had the tumble upon the cold and hard pavement of the chapel, half blinded by her rage and her dishevelled locks, made a rush at the novice, but the young girl dexterously slipped aside, and the hag, unable to stop herself, or really not seeing where she was going, flew right in the abbess's face and imprinted half a dozen terrible long scratches upon her, to the great danger of her eyes, at the same time that she cuffed her about the ears with the other hand in a most vicious manner.

The abbess was so completely taken by surprise, and confounded by the sudden character of this attack, that she had got all the worst of it before she could recover herself sufficiently to resist it. Then, with a shriek of rage, and

pain, she laid hold of the hag by the throat and dashed her to the floor, and kicked and struck her with such ardour, that sense or life seemed to leave the old woman, and she lay passive and covered with blood at the feet of the revengeful abbess.



FRANCES BROUGHT BEFORE THE ABBESS ON A CHARGE OF HERESY.

CHAPTER CCCLXXVI.

THE DOOM OF THE YOUNG NOVICE IS PRONOUNCED.

This most infuriate encounter between the abbess and the old hag who had used the novice, Frances, so ill, was so delightful to Claude Duval and his friends

hat they actually danceed again while it was going on, and Claude himself had he greatest difficulty to prevent himself from calling out in a loud voice—

"Bravo—bravo!"

Prudence, however, and a desire to hear what might further take place, restrained him, so he listened and watched the proceedings in the chapel with still greater interest than before.

The wild rage of the abbess was such that it was some time before she could command her voice to speak, and when she did it was more in a scream than in any other sort of tone.

"Is the wretch dead? Is she dead?" she cried.

As she spoke, she jumped upon the body of the old nun again, and evidently very much enjoyed the doing so.

The other nuns looked aghast at all this, and then, with one accord, they called out in reply—

"Dead—dead! Yes, she is dead."

The abbess sunk back into her chair again, and applied her handkerchief to the long bleeding scratches in her face, and then, in a quiet tone, she said—

"And you all stood by and saw me thus treated. Yes, none of you moved an inch."

They all dropped on their knees, and were beginning some sort of lamentation; but the abbess, by an impressive gesture, stopped them, saying—

"Peace—peace, I say! Be still."

They all rose.

"Take this wretch," added the abbess, pointing to the insensible form of the old hag—"take this wretch, and, whether she be alive or dead, cast her through the bishop's tomb into the vault."

Even the old nuns looked at each other, and shuddered.

"Do my bidding, or woe be to you all!" cried the abbess.

It was evident that they did not consider this an idle threat, or as one that could with any degree of safety be disregarded, for they advanced, and lifted the body of the old nun from the floor.

"Away with her!" shouted the abbess. "Away with her, and let me never look upon her hideous face again."

The nuns lifted the hag, and as they did so, she showed some slight signs of returning consciousness; but they all bore her to the tomb, which covered the opening to the vaults, by the aid of which Claude Duval and his party had reached the chapel. They laid her upon the floor at full length, by the side of the swinging side of the tomb.

"Away with her!" cried the abbess.

They kicked her against the swinging board, and in another moment she was gone!

This was, in sober and plain truth, rather an awkward state of affairs to have to contend against. Claude Duval hardly felt satisfied not to interfere while murder was going on before his very face in this sort of way; and yet as the mischief was all confined to those with whom he could not have any special sympathy, he did not like to step forth, and say—"I will put a stop to this."

The nuns, when they had pushed the body of the old hag through the opening in the vaulted roof, stood for a few moments listening. There was then a strange wailing noise as the platform descended with her, and then there was a piercing shriek!

The nuns started.

"She was alive!" cried the abbess, as she clapped her hands together in joy at the thought, for from that fact she considered her triumph and her revenge to be all the greater. "She was alive! Ha! ha! she was alive!"

"She was," said the nuns.

"'Tis well—oh, 'tis very well! Now she will suffer, and may she feel the weight of my greatest curse!"

"Amen!" said the nuns.

"Come now, sisters," said the abbess, "come to me, and let us forget the wretch, of whom we are so well rid, while we proceed to investigate the crimes of the novice now before us. Come hither! come hither!"

The thought that she would be so fully and so amply revenged upon the old hag who had scratched and buffeted her at such a rate seemed to give the lady abbess pleasure sufficient to obliterate for the moment the sense of the injuries she had received, and she had spoken in much of her usual tone of voice.

The nuns, in pursuance of the orders they received, again collected in a half circle round the abbess, and the young prisoner, looking pale and anxious, for she fully expected death, stood in the centre of them, and facing the abbess.

A kind of established form was now proceeded with in the accusation of the young novice, for the abbess pointing to her, said—

"Who is this?"

"A novice of the convent," said one of the nuns.

"Her name?"

"Child Frances."

The novices generally were called child so-and-so, whatever their names might be, and the nuns were called sisters.

"Why is she here?"

"For sin committed."

"Is this so?"

"No!" said Frances.

"She says no?"

"But she ought to say, yes. It is the devil that has whispered to her to say no to the charge."

"Alas!" said the abbess, "unhappy girl! why do you not at once and heartily confess your great sin, and upon your knees ask for the forgiveness of the church, and of us? It might be then that your punishment would not be so very severe; but if you are obstinate, there is no saying how far the saints may wish us to go against you."

"With what am I charged?" said the young girl. "What is the meaning of all this? Tell me what it is you charge me with doing that I had not the most perfect right in the world to do?"

"Silence! you are a prisoner."

"Alas! I know it. I have been ever since I set foot within this dreadful place."

"That is contumaciousness," said a nun.

"It is," said the abbess; "but we will proceed, not heeding it just now. It seems to me that the charge against you, is this."

As she spoke, she took a written paper from her bosom, and handed it to one of the nuns, who in a drawling tone read as follows from it—

"'This certifies that Child Frances is a novice in this holy house, and that on the Wednesday of the last week, instigated by the devil, she threw over the wall of the garden a certain written paper, highly to the injury of the saints and the Holy Catholic Church.'"

"You hear, Child Frances?" said the abbess. "That is the accusation."

"I do hear."

"And what have you to say to it?"

"You know well what I have to say to it. I am here a prisoner. I am kept here against my will, and denying the right of every one so to imprison me. I say that I have the right to do all I can to obtain my liberty."

"Is that your answer?"

"It is."

"Unhappy girl! you know not what you say."

"I do know."

"Peace—peace! Read the letter which, by quite a miracle, owing to the saints being continually heaping favours upon this convent, we found by one

who brought it to me, instead of carrying it to any heretic, who would, no doubt, have made use of it against us."

The nun who had made the accusation now produced another note, which she read as follows:—

"'This is addressed to any one who may find it, and who, with Christian feeling, may be disposed to aid the writer. My name is Frances Atherton, and I am confined against my will in the convent at the corner of the lane—it is called Berrymead. What I wish is that the finder of this note would go to some magistrate and place it in his hands, so that he may feel it to be his duty, as, no doubt, it will likewise be his intention, to take such steps as will release me from the odious and unjust imprionment that I suffer.

"'May Heaven reward you for aiding me,

"'FRANCES ATHERTON.'"

"Is that your writing?" asked the superior of the novice.

"It is."

"And what were your expectations consequent upon that being found?"

"My expectations were what I mention in it."

"Wretch!"

"The wretches are those who forced me, in self defence, to write it, and who now insult me for so doing."

"Ha—ha! you are bold."

"I am."

"And yet you are here."

"And yet, as you say, madam, I am here. You think that I am in your power, but surely heaven will not look down upon us all this day and suffer me to be sacrificed."

"You will see."

"I hope so, and that the seeing will consist of some aid coming to me."

"Holy sisters," said the superior, "you have heard the accusation against this Child Frances, and you have heard that she admits her guilt. What say you— is she a guilty one, or is common-sense and light a delusion?"

"Guilty!"

"'Tis well."

The whole of the nuns had spoken at once, and the echo of their voices had a strange effect in the old chapel. Poor Frances seemed hardly able to support herself, and the courage with which she had hitherto spoken and borne her trial appeared to be giving way. She turned very pale, and as her eye ran over the array of countenances around her she could see no glance of compassion in any of them.

Then she looked at the abbess who was in deep thought, with her head resting upon her hands, or who affected to be so and assumed that position.

"Madam," said Frances, "madam?"

"Go on."

"I cannot see that my offence is one that is not so natural that your own sense of justice must acquit me of any frailty. What would you do if you were a prisoner anywhere? What would you do but try all manner of means in order to effect your escape, if possible?"

"Peace!"

The abbess looked up, and there was such an awful expression upon her face that even some of the oldest nuns started back a pace or two and regarded her with terror as they guessed what was coming.

"Sisters!" said the abbess.

They all very reverently bowed their heads.

"Sisters!" she said again, "it is necessary in this convent that some terrible example should be made."

"Amen!" said the nuns.

"The spirit of disaffection and of dissatisfaction is abroad," continued the

abbess, "and it must be checked. The saints have whispered counsel to me, and the sentence I now pass upon the culprit here before us is theirs, not mine."

"Amen!"

"Bring the feather couches!"

There was a movement among the nuns as though a shock of electricity had passed through them all.

"Bring the feather couches!" said the abbess again.

"Amen!" said one.

The rest struck their breasts, and then all said—"Amen!" Half a dozen of them left the chapel, and Frances looked about her with an unknown dread, for she did not know what fetching the feather couches really meant, and in what way they concerned her.

In the course of five minutes the nuns who had left the chapel came back, bearing with them two large feather beds. One of them they laid exactly at the feet of the abbess, and flattened it out. The other they then laid by the side of the first one, and likewise flattened it out.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Frances.

"You will soon know," said one of the nuns.

"Silence!" cried the abbess.

"But this is absurd," said Frances. "I protest against any punishment which you would seek to inflict upon me, and I bid you beware of the consequences. If there be law and justice in England, you will hear of it."

"Peace, girl! Peace, I say!"

"I will not hold my peace, and so seem to submit to your capricious and unfeeling dictates. I will not!"

"Seize her, and bind her!"

The nuns made a rush at the young novice, and held her arms.

CHAPTER CCCLXXVII.

DETAILS THE PROJECTED MURDER AT THE OLD CONVENT.

If Frances, the young novice, was surprised at the rather singular preparations that were being made, and in which she was evidently the principal person concerned, Claude Duval and his friends were not less so.

With very great interest, because all the proceedings were very new and very strange, they had listened to the mockery of a trial that had taken place in the chapel; but what was to be done with the two feather beds that the abbess had sent for was beyond their ability to conjecture.

"Dick?" whispered Claude.

"Yes, Claude?"

"What do you think of this?"

"I don't know what to think. It gets the better of me altogether. Have you any idea about its meaning?"

"Not the least."

"Let's wait, then, quietly."

"Be it so; but upon the least evidence of any real danger to that young girl, it seems to me now that we must risk everything, and show ourselves. Do you agree to that, all of you?"

"We do—we do!" they all said.

"Very well, then; will you leave it to me to say when the interference is to be undertaken? I do not ask from any feeling of vanity, but just because it must be left, you know, to some one."

"We leave all to you," said Mr. Field.

Both Jack and Dick concurred in this by a few short words, so that Claude Duval felt that the fate of the young novice remained in his hands, and he only

waited before actually interfering to hear what extraordinary villany the lady abbess was going to give utterance to, in the shape of a command.

They had not to wait long for the denouement of the affair. The abbess had for some few minutes affected to be in deep thought, or prayer, again; and then she looked up with her face frightfully pale, save where the red streaks of the scratches that the old woman who had been tumbled headlong into the vaults had given her shone up in strong relief, and said—

"Is all ready?"

"All ready," said the nuns.

"Ready for what?" cried Frances.

"Bind her."

Some one of the nuns produced a cord, by the aid of which they bound the hands of Frances behind her, so that it was out of the question that she could make any effectual resistance to what they were about to do.

"The letter," said the abbess. "Where is it?"

"Here, holy sister."

The letter that Frances had written and thrown over the convent wall was handed to the abbess, who thereupon cast it upon the feather bed that was nearest to her.

"Place her there!" said the abbess.

The nuns began to force Frances towards the bed, but she cried out for help, and, pinioned as her hands were, she still managed to give them a good deal of trouble to get her along. By dint of violence, however, they were pretty sure to succeed, and they forced her to the side of the bed.

"Help! help!" she cried. "Oh, is there no help?"

"None!"

"Oh, is this possible, that of all here there is not one human heart that can feel for me? What is it you would do? At least, tell me what I have to expect."

The abbess made a gesture with her head, and the nuns flung Frances violently on to the bed.

"No—no! Oh, God! mercy!" she cried. "What are you about to do?"

The abbess made another gesture, and then they turned her over on to her face, so that her cries were partially smothered. Then the abbess rose to her feet, and looking like a demon, and speaking with what we might well suppose would be the accent of one, she cried out—

"Do your duty. Quick—quick! Kill her! kill her!"

Some half dozen of the nuns who were not holding the novice down upon the bed nearest to the abbess lifted the other one, and placed it upon her in a moment. A smothered shriek came from the girl.

It was not till that instant of time that Claude Duval felt perfectly sure of what they were about to do; but then there was no doubt but that the intention was actually to smother her between the two feather beds.

So monstrous an act might well stagger any one who saw it in contemplation; and for the space of time you might have counted four in, Claude Duval was petrified with horror and amazement. Then with one dash of his hand he flung the door of the confessional wide open, and with a spring that brought him into the midst of the nuns, he appeared before the astonished eyes of the abbess and the hags of nuns.

"Hold, wretches!" he shouted in a voice of thunder. "Hold, I say! I will not see this vile murder done!"

Jack, Dick Turpin, and Mr. Field, were by his side now in a moment, and they each had a pistol in their hands ready for use.

It would be quite impossible for any pen to adequately describe the consternation of the abbess and the nuns at the unexpected appearance in the midst of them in this most extraordinary manner of four well-armed and resolute men. The effect for the moment was perfectly overpowering.

Before, however, the abbess or any one could speak, or even had time to think

of what to do, Claude had laid hold of the corner of the upper feather-bed and drawn it off the novice, crying out as he did so—

"Rise, Frances—rise; you are saved! you are saved!"

The young girl uttered piercing shrieks, for she had but the moment before been under the full and perfect impression that she was doomed to the horrible death from which it did not seem possible that any human agency could now save her.

The scene of confusion that ensued was positively awful. The old nuns who had assembled at the call of their villanous abbess, and who had evidently exulted in the act of cruelty and murder that had been so purposely attempted to be carried out in all its horrors, fled along the chapel in all directions.

At first, Dick Turpin was for intercepting them in their flight, but Claude Duval called out him—

"Let the hags go, Dick—let them go."

"Yes," said Jack, "and a good riddance too."

The few lights that had cast some sort of radiance upon the scene were, with one exception, knocked down and extinguished, and when Claude Duval, after placing Frances in the arms of Jack, made a spring over the two beds that were on the floor, in order to catch hold of the abbess, for he thought it expedient to take her prisoner, at all events, he found that it was not so easy a thing to do as he had anticipated.

With a scream of rage, such as might well have come from the throat of some wild animal from whom its prey had been but nearly snatched, the abbess produced from somewhere in her apparel, where she had it hidden, a dagger, and just as Claude Duval was upon the point of seizing her by the arm, she raised it, and made a plunge at his heart with it, crying out as she did so—

"Wretch! take the reward of your interference. Death—death, at least, to you! and then, let who will take my life, I shall, at least, feel that I am avenged."

It was fortunate that the flash of the keen and highly-polished blade of the dagger shone in the eyes of Claude Duval for a moment; and he was able to swerve on one side, so that the blade only inflicted a slight wound on his shoulder.

This swerving, though, had the effect of freeing the abbess from the slight hold he had got of her; and so, without pausing there a moment to see if she had inflicted any serious injury upon him or not, she dropped the dagger, and turning, she flew up the steps of the altar, and disappeared behind it in a moment.

Claude Duval heard the snap of the spring of the little secret door at the back of the altar in a moment; and he did not doubt but that she had taken good care to fasten it on the other side.

"Are you hurt, Claude?" said Dick.

"Oh, no—no."

"But she has escaped?"

"Never mind her; let her go. It would have been a very difficult matter to know what to do with her if I had taken her prisoner; so, after all, perhaps it is better that she has really got away. Where are the nuns?"

"Oh, they have all disappeared somewhere."

"Then we are masters of the field of battle, I suppose?"

"It looks like it, certainly. No one seems to be here to dispute a supremacy."

"Victory! victory!" cried Claude.

Hearing the cry of victory from the lips of Claude Duval, the young novice stepped forward from the confessional, and with eager joy embraced Frances, who really was so much astonished and bewildered by what had taken place that she looked around her, as if she feared that, after all, the seeming deliverance that she had had from the murderous abbess would turn out to be nothing but a delusion.

"You are saved!—you are saved, Frances!" said Alicia. "Do you not know that you are saved from death?"

"Are you Alicia?"

"Yes; and here is Helen. Do you not know us?"

"Oh, yes—yes!"

The young girl could control her feelings no longer, but burst into a complete passion of tears, so that they had great difficulty in calming her at all.

"Never mind her tears," said Jack. "You may depend upon it that there is nothing that will recover her more rapidly and readily than they."

"Yes," said Claude; "let her weep."

Dick Turpin now set about lighting one or two of the other lights about the chapel; for they were in such a state of semi-darkness, that he feared the old nuns or the abbess might think it a good opportunity of attempting to do them some sort of mischief.

"What are you about, Dick?" said Claude. "Don't make such an illumination."

"I am afraid of being left in the dark," said Dick. "If they found we had only one light, perhaps it would not seem to them a very difficult thing to find some means of putting it out; but if there are half a dozen it will be quite a different affair. There, now, I think we shall be able to see what we are about."

The candles burnt up quickly, and as they did so, they shone upon rather a strange scene in that chapel.

There was Claude Duval and his friends, and there was young Mr. Field, and there was Alicia and the two novices and Frances, who still could hardly believe the evidence of her own senses to the effect that she was free, although she had left off weeping.

Upon the floor were the two mattresses that had been brought into the chapel for the horrible purpose of committing one of the most hideous of murders, and beside them lay, here and there, a veil and a rosary, which the old nuns had dropped in their flight, as they made so hasty a retreat from the place.

Close to the steps of the altar, too, was the seat of judgment which the abbess had occupied during the mock trial of Frances; and there lay, too, the dagger with which at the last moment she had tried to take the life of Duval.

"Well," said Dick Turpin as he looked around him, "I think, Claude, that this is about our most curious adventure."

"It is, Dick."

"Never mind that," said Jack. "Let us go."

"You are right Jack, we will go at once, for we have those now in our care whom we ought to take out of the danger of this place as quickly as possible."

With these words, Claude Duval approached Frances, and spoke kindly to her saying—

"You are now quite safe from the abbess, and your life will be protected by ours. What I wish to know of you is, if you are strong enough and sufficiently recovered from the shock you must have received to leave this place."

"Oh, yes—yes. It is the staying here that will drive me mad."

CHAPTER CCCLXXVIII.

DENNIS TRIES AN EXPERIMENT ON THE CREDULITY OF HUMAN NATURE.

"We are all ready," said Alicia, "Let us go at once."

Frances rose from the breast of Alicia, upon which she had been reposing, and approaching Claude Duval, she placed both her hands upon his arm, saying—

"You have saved me, sir, from such a death as is truly horrible to think of. Will you, oh, will you teach me how to thank you!"

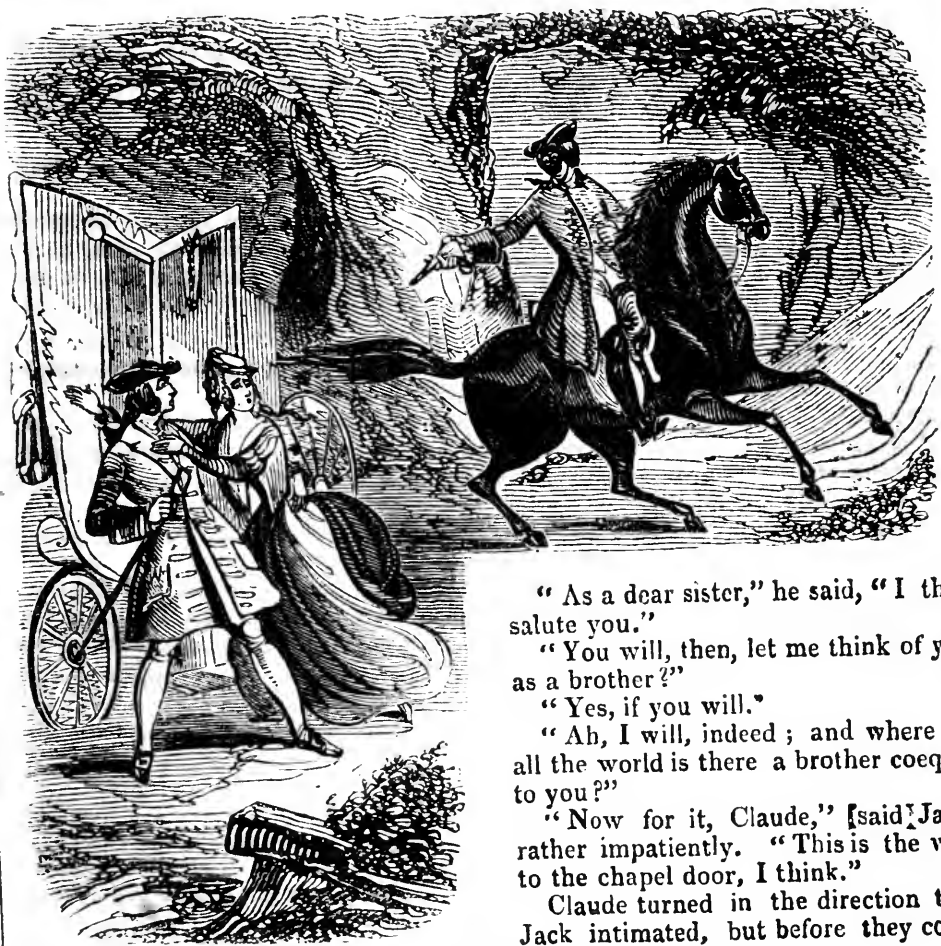
"I am more than thanked."

"No, no. If all my life I were to try to do you kindness—if I pray for you

while I have breath to do so, I cannot hope to repay this great, this deep and lasting obligation."

"I pray you to say no more about it," said Claude. "It is of little moment, I assure you. Don't speak of it."

Frances was really a very beautiful girl, and it was by quite a momentary impulse now, and with perfect innocence of purpose, that Claude Duval placed his arm for a moment around her and kissed her.



"As a dear sister," he said, "I thus salute you."

"You will, then, let me think of you as a brother?"

"Yes, if you will."

"Ah, I will, indeed; and where in all the world is there a brother coequal to you?"

"Now for it, Claude," said Jack, rather impatiently. "This is the way to the chapel door, I think."

Claude turned in the direction that Jack intimated, but before they could any of them move a step, a loud, bawling voice cried out—

"Oh, bedad! and isn't this the joy of poor Dennis's heart! Do I look at my master, or don't I? Oh, the saints be good to us all! and haven't I been grieving about him, till I thought I hadn't any eyes left in me head wid crying. Oh, master—master, don't you know your faithful Dennis, who has had so many adventures in the search after you, that they have been enough to make all the hair drop off his head? Bedad! then, I feel as if I had come into my ancestors' property in ould Ireland again, now that I see you, sir."

With this congratulatory speech, of the sincerity of which the reader, from his previous knowledge of Dennis's proceedings, is able to come to so good an opinion, Dennis had the impudence to come from behind the altar, and to walk down the steps of it as if nothing were at all amiss, and as if he had only to make a few professions of regard for his master and his friends to put himself again upon capital terms with him.

"Why, it's Dennis," said Dick.

"Dennis, by all that's abominable!" said Mr. Field.

"Yes, sir," said Dennis, "it is, sure enough, your own faithful Dennis, who is willing, the saints be praised, to follow you, sir, to life or death."

"Of the latter proposition I have no doubt," said Mr. Field.

"Many thanks to you, sir, for not doubting your faithful Dennis, and, bedad! now I look about me, here are all our old friends, sir. Oh, then, it's the joy of my heart, that is ready to come right out of my eyes, sir, and to go rolling down my nose and my cheeks, to see you wid such a good company, sir."

Claude looked at Dick and Jack, and they both looked at him, and then Duval said—

"Can impudence go further than this?"

"Impossible," said Dick.

"Wait a bit," said Jack, "there is some plan in all this."

"Think you so?"

"I do, indeed."

"But what?"

"My opinion is, that this rascal is sent by the abbess."

"Ah!"

"Yes; so it will be just as well to look to him well."

"It will—it will. Mr. Field?"

"Yes, my friend?"

Claude Duval whispered his suspicions in Mr. Field's ear, at the same time advising him to humour Dennis a little, in order to get out of him, if possible, what was the diabolical scheme of which he was to be the abject tool.

"I will," said Field. "Well, Dennis?"

"Yes, your honour? Oh, then, it gives me quite a joy all around my true, innocent heart, sir, to hear you speak again in this world."

"Come here, Dennis."

"Yes, sir; it's myself that will come. Oh, the holy! oh——"

"What's the matter?"

"It's the eyes of me that are forced to go on winking like nothing at all, at all, at the sight of all these young beauties, sir. Bedad! and where, sir, did all these lovely young females, sir, come from?"

"Never mind that, Dennis. I want to know where you came from?"

"Where I came from, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, I thought you would want to know."

"You thought right."

"Then, sir, I'm mightily glad I am right, sir; for it ain't often, sir, that a poor fellow is right when he is with all this quality, sir."

"But how came you here?" said Claude.

"How came I here, sir?"

"Yes."

"After the master, sir; at the same time, sir, it's mighty glad I am to see your own good-looking face, sir, to the face. And it's a fine looking man you are, sir. Sure, and the girls, sir, have been pulling caps about you where you come from, sir, no doubt. Master, don't you think, sir, that it would be as well to get out of this place?"

"Better than well, Dennis. Can you show us the way?"

"Well, sir, then I can."

"That's it," whispered Jack to Claude.

"What?"

"He will lead us all into some danger by order of the abbess."

"Hush!"

"Well, Dennis," said Mr. Field, "if you can show us the way out of this place, we shall be much indebted to you."

"Well, sir, then, it's the oddest thing in the whole world, sir, that I can do so at all—at all; but you see, sir, just in an accidental kind of way I do know the

way out; and if you will all follow me, ladies and gentlemen, I will lead you fair and easy away."

"Go on, Dennis."

"This was, sir—this way."

Dennis went to a corner of the chapel, and opened with a key that he had in his hand a secret door, and pointing through it, he said—

"Now, sir, pray go on—all of you pray go on, and it's myself that will follow you, sir."

"And where does that lead to?"

"To the garden, sir."

"Very good, then, Dennis; you will go first."

"Me, sir?"

"Yes, you."

"Oh! but, sir, where would be my manners to go first, sir, I'd like to be after knowing? Oh, no, sir, it's myself that will follow the quality. You have nothing to do, sir, but to go straight on, and you will find, the saints be good to us, it's all right."

Claude whispered to Jack and Dick; and one of them placed himself on one side of Dennis, and the other on the other. Claude Duval himself stepped up to him behind, so that Dennis was environed completely, if we count the open door as one side of the four.

"Now, Dennis," said Claude, "we have that respect for you that we insist upon your going first."

"Me, sir?"

"Yes, you. So you had better go at once without any further bother about it. We will follow you."

"But it's all right, sir."

"We know that, and so we will follow you. Do you think for a moment that we would follow you if it were not all right?"

"But, sir, I—that is—you——"

"Go on, Dennis."

"But, sir—master, I don't want to go first. I'm only a poor sort of fellow, you know, sir; and, bedad! I'd rather not go first. Master, will you speak to the gentlemen, sir, an it please you, sir?"

"No, Dennis; I insist upon your going first."

"Then, sir, I won't! I ain't very well, sir. Let me go, gentlemen. I don't feel very well. I want to go away altogether, sir, if you please. Oh!—oh! murder!"

Claude Duval caught Dennis by the back of the neck as he tried to make a bolt past Jack, and held him firmly.

"You scoundrel!" he said, "you shall go whether you like it or not."

"Murder! murder!"

By one of those efforts of strength which Claude Duval sometimes astonished people with, he fairly, by the aid of both his hands, lifted Dennis off his feet, and flung him with terrible force head-foremost through the open door into the obscurity and complete darkness beyond.

There was one loud scream from Dennis just as Duval threw him, and then, to the surprise of them all, they did not hear him fall; but in about three or four seconds there was a faint cry, as if far away in the very bowels of the earth.

They all looked at each other in amazement.

"What is the meaning of that?" said Dick.

"I can guess," said Jack.

"And so can I," said Claude. "Get one of the candles, Jack."

Jack run to one of the candles that were lighted at one of the little shrines of the chapel, and soon brought it to the spot.

"Don't be rash, Claude," he said.

"No, no; trust me for that. I will be more than careful."

As he spoke, Claude Duval stood upon the very threshold of the little open

door through which he had projected Dennis, and, stretching out his arm with the candle, he looked beyond it.

The mystery was at once explained.

Beyond the door there was no flooring at all, but a deep chasm, down which Dennis had gone, and down which the party now in safety in the chapel would, no doubt, have gone, if they had but allowed Dennis to be the last one of the lot, for, no doubt, if any difficulty had arisen he would have made a rush at them, and, so taking them by surprise, have precipitated Duval, his friends, and his master, down the chasm.

After that, the young girls would have been an easy prey to the abbess and the old nuns, who, no doubt, were waiting with some eagerness the result of the diabolical experiment.

"It's all over with Dennis," said Claude, as he drew back.

"How so?" said Mr. Field.

"Look!"

Claude handed him the light, and as Duval had done, he, too, took a cautious look through the open door, and then he turned away with a shudder.

"It is, indeed, all over with him."

"No man more richly merited the fate he has come to," said Dick.

"And may all such so perish," said Jack. "He was the very worst of traitors, for he betrayed the hand that fed him."

Jack closed the door, and they shrunk from the very vicinity of it. Then Claude Duval said in a clear voice—

"Take good care of these young ladies, and follow me. I will not remain another minute willingly in this most odious place."

CHAPTER CCCLXXIX.

THE DEPARTURE FROM THE CHAPEL, AND THE MYSTERIES OF THE GARDEN.

ALICIA hung upon the arm of Mr. Field, and they followed Claude Duval closely. After them came the three young girls, and Dick and Jack, each with a loaded pistol in his hand, brought up the rear of the little party.

Claude Duval and his friends were quite clearly in that frame of mind that it was not likely they would stop at trifles in effecting their escape from the convent. The atrocious attempts that had been made not only upon their own lives but upon the lives of the innocent and beautiful girls who were with them, had certainly had the effect of enraging Claude and his friends beyond all endurance; and if any of the old nuns or the abbess had come in their way, it is very likely that they would hardly have stopped to consider whether their sex gave them any particular claim to mercy.

There was a look about the face of Duval which let Jack see, for he knew him well, that his patience and temper had been tried to the very utmost by the events that had taken place in the convent.

Proceeding along the aisles of the chapel, Claude reached a kind of transcept, at one end of which was an arched door, which had evidently been designed by the architect of the place to be the principal mode of egress and ingress from the chapel.

This door was securely and elaborately bolted, but it did not present any apparent obstacle to getting it open, till all the bolts, and there were five in number, were withdrawn, and then there was evidently some hindrance to its opening which Claude at the instant could not detect.

There was no lock.

"Confound the door," said Claude, "I don't know what is the matter with it. Just come and look to it, Jack. You, I know, comprehend these things."

Jack stepped forward, and by the aid of one of the lights, he carefully examined the door, and then he said—

"I have it, Claude. Don't you see that there is a long iron pin here down the side, which holds it all the way by a kind of lip, that just comes over it ?"

"Ah, yes ; what are we to do ?"

"Hold the light. Dick, have you the crow-bar ?"

"It is here."

"That will do."

With the crow-bar, that had already been of such use to them, Jack tapped the long piece of iron, till he found a part of it that returned a much duller sound than the rest.

"This is the spot to try it," he said.

There were few persons who could wrench with a crow-bar with greater skill than Sixteen-string Jack, and now he managed to place it in such a position that the long piece of iron gave a sharp crack and flew aside upon its hinges; for it was hinged all the way like the locking pilastres that are now so fasionable to pedestal chests of drawers.

"That's it," said Jack. "There is a secret spring that held it, and which if we had known the way to act upon it, no doubt would have moved the iron rim at once. I have broken it, though, so our end is answered."

Upon Duval trying the door, now, it opened at once, although rustily, upon its hinges, for it had evidently not been used for a very long time indeed.

"Oh—on," said Duval, as he forced the door open. "I will get through every obstacle to liberty out of this place, the very atmosphere of which, if depressing."

There was quite a gush of cold air upon their faces as they went out of the chapel. Immediately outside the door was a little portico with a dome top, and beyond that they found half a dozen stone steps, that led at once into the garden.

"Bravo!" said Dick, "all's right now."

"I don't koow that," said Jack.

"Why, what have we to be afraid of? I think that, honestly speaking, we are a match for the abbess and all the nuns, if they were to have the folly and the temerity to attack us."

"That they will not do, but I am thinking of what the abbess told Claude about there being only one path through the garden, in consequence of the spring-guns and the steel-traps that were in it."

"Oh, I don't believe a word of that."

"I am glad to hear you say so. What do you think of it, Duval? We are talking of the danger of the garden."

"We can't help it," said Claude. "I should say come on, and don't heed the one half, or the whole of the abbess's story about the may-be romance."

They were all very well pleased to hear that Claude Duval, whom they looked upon as rather a high authority, had such an opinion regarding the dangers of the garden, for the novices as well as Alicia had during their residence at the convent been duly informed of those dangers.

There was one particular portion of the convent garden only, the whole of which was, not without reason, supposed to be within the view of some window of the house from which the abbess could look, in which the novices were allowed to walk; but they had been told that if they ventured to go beyond that spot they would encounter such injuries as would be to them a source of pain and suffering while they might exist.

Claude Duval, though, took a very common-sense view of this matter; and, in the first place, he thought that the abbess said too much about the dangers of the garden for them to be real; and, in the second place, he knew how difficult it would be to maintain anything like such machinery for injuring people, as she would fain make others believe was there, in anything like a good state of repair.

Spring-guns require constantly reloading and looking to—spring-traps get

rusty and fall to pieces; so, taking one thing with another, Duval was much inclined to think that the abbess drew rather largely upon her imagination for her facts, or pretended facts, concerning the dangers of the convent garden.

With such impressions, then, he resolved to take the shortest route he could to liberty with those who were entrusted to his care.

"This way," he said. "Keep close to me. Come on—come on. Why, there is daylight enough for us to see well."

"There is, indeed," said Jack.

"Claude—Claude," said Dick, "I don't know if you know it, but the fact is, you are going, to my judgment, dir ectly the contrary way to the lodge entrance at the corner of the lane."

"I know it."

"Then I have no more to say."

"Allow me to explain that, during my researches in the garden, I saw that there was a door in the wall. It was of iron, to my thinking, but it has, no doubt, a lock, and that will be as easily found as the lock of a wooden door. My object is to take you to that door in the wall, and to let Jack try his skill upon it."

"I will," said Jack.

"Of one thing," added Claude, "we may he assured, and that is, that the fastenings of the doors, be they what they may, are on this side; so I cannot for a moment think that they can be any very insurmountable obstacles to our proceeding."

"They cannot, indeed," said Jack; "and it is infinitely better to leave the place by such means than by the ordinary lodge entrance."

While this little discourse was going on Claude had proceeded not very rapidly, but easily and steadily, along the path of the garden which seemed most likely to lead him in the direction he wanted.

The early dawn was just casting its cold, grey light upon the tops of the old trees in the place, and the birds were beginning to awaken from their slumbers.

A rather keen, fresh air was blowing; but that was rather delightful after the vivid recollection they all had of the direful and unwholesome vapours they had had to encounter in the dismal vaults of the convent.

Claude Duval was beginning quite to congratulate himself upon the fact that the abbess had only spoken, as she had done of the dangers of the garden, to frighten him and others, when a circumstance occurred which gave rather a new turn to his thoughts.

As he went on he was rather surprised to see lying in his pathway a quantity of dry twigs, which appeared to be scattered too artfully to be the product of chance.

Duval paused a moment, but only for a moment, and so very brief was the pause that it could hardly be observed by those who followed him. He did not say anything; but, planting one foot firmly on the ground, he advanced the other, when, to his astonishment, the moment he hurled aside one of the pieces of wood, the whole fell with a crash, revealing the fact that there was a pit of about fifteen or twenty feet in depth, which was just the width of the path, and which had been loosely covered over by wood, and the debris of the garden, for the purpose of making it appear to be all level ground.

"Hold!" cried Claude.

"What is amiss?" said Mr. Field.

"Nothing particular."

Mr. Field got to the brink of the pit, and gazed at it with surprise.

"Why, what can this mean?"

"Only a little trap in which to catch any one who might happen to come this way, that is all; but, as we have avoided it, why it don't matter to us now. I am rather surprised that the abbess could think it possible that any one would be taken in by such an obvious arrangement."

"She relied upon night favouring the delusion," said Dick.

"The fall would, no doubt," said Jack, "have inflicted such injury as to make capture certain."

"No doubt of that," said Claude. "It would be difficult to fall into a hole like that and avoid a broken or a sprained limb; so that then her ladyship could come at her leisure and take what sort of vengeance she liked upon the interloper."

"Even so," said Alicia. "I have heard her say that there were deep holes in the grounds that went far down into the very centre of the earth."

Claude laughed at this extensive idea of Alicia's about the pitfall going to the centre of the earth, and he said—

"Without going so far as that; it goes, no doubt, quite far enough for mischief. I think, though, that now we know what are the descriptions of danger in the place, we may very well guard against them."

As he spoke, he tore from a tree close at hand rather a long jagged bough, and determined to use it to test the stability of the ground as he went on.

A very slight deviation from the path enabled them to get past the spot where the pit was; and they went on in safety for some time. The morning light, which each moment increased, was certainly a very great aid to them, so that, after all, as Alicia said—

"Everything is for the best. We were agrieved at the many delays which the destructive spirit of the abbess placed in our way when we were trying to leave the convent, and now we find that the effect of all those delays has been just to give us daylight to find our way in, and that, having such daylight, we have avoided a fall into yonder pit."

"Even so," said Claude. "We never do know in this world, so short-sighted are we, as to what is to come, that which is good for us."

It was at this moment that the report of a gun being discharged came upon their ears, and a shower of leaves from a tree close at hand fell among them.

CHAPTER CCCLXXX.

THE ABBESS IS COMPELLED TO LET HER PREY ESCAPE HER AT LAST.

CLAUDE DUVAL did not allow himself for a moment to be put out of his way by this attack; for that it was an attack there could be no sort of doubt.

Drawing a pistol from his pocket, he just glanced around him, and made up his mind in which direction the shot had come, and then he fired.

The moment that he pulled the trigger of the pistol, he called out—

"Forward—forward! now, quickly, before there is time to fire a second shot at us. Follow me, and depend upon my leading you all right. Ah! there is the gate in the wall. Jack?"

"Yes, Claude?"

"Run on before, and open the gate. We will follow you. Do you see it?"

"I do."

Jack ran on to the wall which had just become visible between two trees, and there, sure enough, was the little low-arched iron door that Duval had spoken of to his friends.

That it was the abbess herself who had fired the gun at the party, but who had been foiled in doing them any harm, owing to the abundant character of the vegetation about that spot, Duval did not doubt. His only hope now was, that she might not know exactly how to load the gun again, or that if she did, she might not have the means at hand to do so.

A glance from Claude to Dick let the latter see that he thought the present danger rather great; and so, indeed, it was, for if the abbess were to make an apearance and fire with shot at the party, the odds were very greatly in favour of her hitting somebody; and it would have been a hard case, indeed, if any of the

young girls had been killed or badly wounded at the moment of escape, after passing through so many of the dangers of the convent.

"Jack," cried Claude, "how do you get on?"

"It is an old lock."

"Can you pick it?"

"No, Claude."

"Then force it, Jack; for, on my honour, I don't think that there is any time to spare."

"The deuce there isn't!" said Jack.

When Claude said such a thing as that Jack felt quite certain that he had good cause for haste; so, taking the crowbar in his hand, Jack plunged the fine flat end of it between the door and the wall, and by a powerful effort of leverage, burst the door open.

"All's right," he cried.

"Thank Heaven!" said Claude. "Mr. Field?"

"Yes—yes."

"Take the ladies out of the garden. Quick—quick!"

"At once—at once!"

"No!" cried a voice. "Too late!"

Claude turned in the direction the voice proceeded from, and just emerging from amid a clump of trees that grew on one side of a narrow gravelled path he saw the abbess, with a short carbine in her hands, which she levelled at the party.

"Stir one step, any of you, and I fire!" she cried.

"Stop!" said Claude.

"Ha! ha! you are in my power!" said the abbess.

Claude gave Dick a look, and then they both placed themselves before the terrified girls, so that if the abbess were to fire, they would intercept the shots; and then Duval said to her with great coolness—

"Madam, I am loth to take the life of a woman; but I swear to you that if you do not depart at once, and cease to annoy us, I will forget that your sex claims my consideration, and kill you as I would a mad dog."

"Base words!" said the abbess—"base words; but I well know my danger, and I likewise well know my resources."

"You had better leave us."

"No! I know that this establishment cannot subsist after what has happened here to-night; and after what you and your myrmidons are cognisant of, I know that you will denounce this house, and that the evil spirit of the English laws, which are not made to favour Catholicism, will be down upon me and mine. I care not to outlive the ruin of this house."

"Rash woman, you know not what you say."

"I know well what you say, and my whole and sole object is not to die quite unavenged. In this death-dealing carbine I hold the lives of several of you. I only now gloat over the destruction I can at any moment hurl among you."

"You are mad."

"Perhaps I am—perhaps I have always been mad. I know I was mad to trust you, and be fooled by you as I was; but it was passion blinded me. I would have made you rich as any prince; but now that you have deceived me I will kill you."

"And do yourself no good."

"I care not."

"Come, now, I will make conditions with you."

"I'll not believe you."

"Nay, why not?"

"I made a bargain with you, and you deceived me—shall I be twice a fool within twenty-four hours? No. I do not know who or what you are; but I think that you are some bold and skilful spy of the police. But whether you are or not, I am lost and ruined, and I will have revenge!"

"Dick," said Claude, "she will fire."

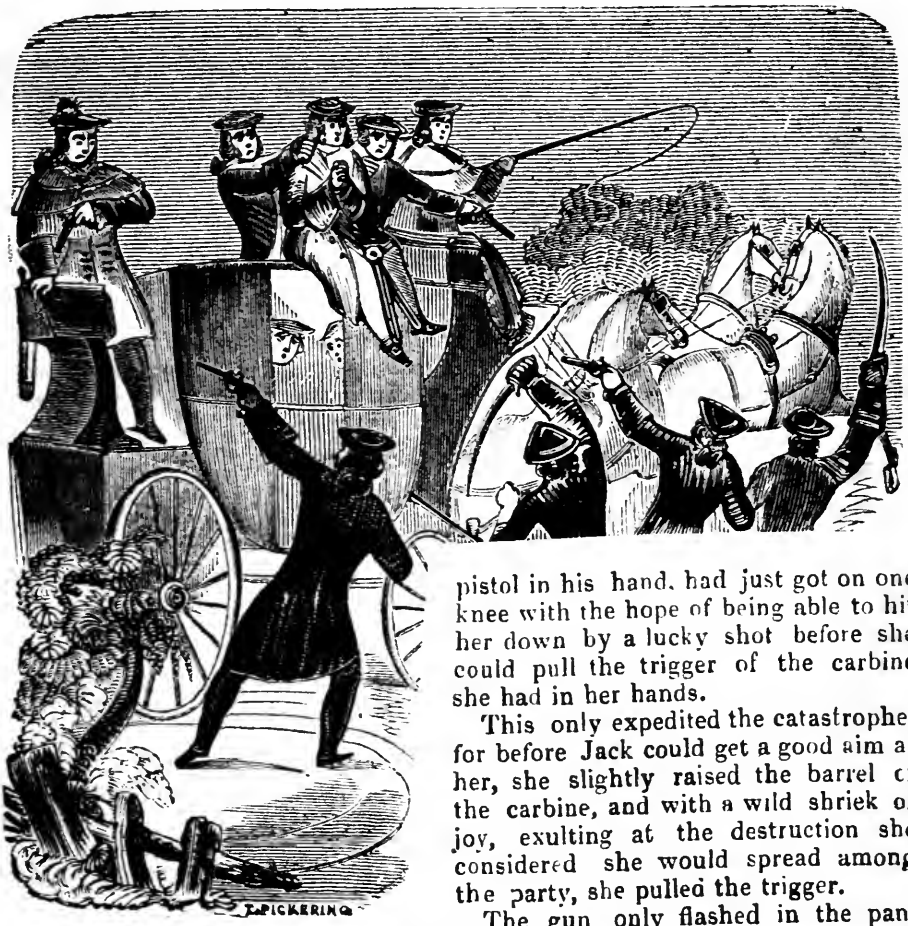
"Of course."

"If anything happens to me, Dick, leave me here."

"If I do, may I be—— Well, no matter."

"Ah!" cried the abbess, "I see you. It will not do. Die, all of you!"

What she had seen was Jack, who, dodging behind Dick and Claude with a



pistol in his hand, had just got on one knee with the hope of being able to hit her down by a lucky shot before she could pull the trigger of the carbine she had in her hands.

This only expedited the catastrophe, for before Jack could get a good aim at her, she slightly raised the barrel of the carbine, and with a wild shriek of joy, exulting at the destruction she considered she would spread among the party, she pulled the trigger.

The gun only flashed in the pan, and Claude Duval and his friends were saved from what might have been a most serious calamity.

Duval drew a long breath, but he did not say a word. Advancing with a pistol in his hand, he kept his eyes fixed upon the face of the abbess.

When she found that the carbine had missed fire, she had uttered such a cry, that any one would have thought she had really been wounded to the death.

Then casting the useless weapon to the ground, she seemed intent upon flying from the spot; but the steady gaze of Claude Duval evidently exercised a strange fascinating power over her, and there she remained staring at him as though she had been turned to stone.

Duval waved his arm when he got within about a dozen paces of her, and cried—

"Away—away, infamous woman! My duty to society, I know, is to secure you, and give you into the hands of the law, which for your numerous offences would most probably put you to death: but I have private obligations which press too much upon me at this time for me to do so. Away and repent, for soon you will have to answer both at an earthly and heavenly tribunal for your black and malignant life."

"Mercy!" she gasped.

"Away—away! Do not let me look upon that most awful sight that man can see—the fears of a wicked woman."

She shuddered, and stepped back pace after pace; but instead of taking the route among the trees as she had come, and as she, no doubt, intended to go, and thought she was going, she took the little path by the side of the thick vegetation.

"Away!" cried Claude, again.

"Mercy—mercy!" gasped the abbess. "Mercy! Oh, God!"

These were the last words she spoke, for, to the horror of Claude Duval, who did not look for such a catastrophe, that path into which she hurried in her absence of mind had in it one of the pitfalls similar to the one he, Duval, had escaped from.

The abbess trod upon the terrible ground, and with a piercing shriek she fell headlong backwards, and disappeared as if the earth of its own accord, or at the bidding of Heaven itself, had opened to receive her.

"She is gone, by Heaven!" said Claude.

The novices filled the air with shrieks of dismay, and it was with some difficulty that Mr. Field got them silent, so full of terror were they at the awful end of the abbess of the convent.

Dick and Jack both ran up to Duval, for they could not believe but what something serious must have happened to him at the moment.

"What is it?" said Dick.

"Yes, Claude," cried Jack, "where is the abbess?"

"Gone."

"Gone has she—but where?"

Claude pointed with his finger downwards, and then he said—

"She has gone into a grave of her own fashioning, Jack. Can you bear to look upon her?"

"Yes."

"I don't think I can. Hark!"

A strange and horrible wailing cry came upon their ears, and then a frightful scream, after which all was still as the grave itself.

"This is horrible," said Dick.

"I cannot bear it," said Jack. "Oh, come away."

"No—no," said Claude Duval, "it looks cowardly to leave even such a woman as the abbess of the convent in the awful position she may be in. We are men, after all, and it is our duty to go to her aid. Come with me, both of you; Mr. Field will look to the ladies for a minute or two. Will you come?"

"Yes," said Dick.

"I will follow you," said Jack.

Upon this Duval, although he absolutely shuddered as he did so, strode forward to the little pathway, about six paces down which the abbess had met with such a fearful catastrophe. Arriving at the edge of the pit he cast a glance down it, and then turning to his two friends, he just said—

"Look."

They did look, and turned away pale and aghast.

The infernal ingenuity of the abbess had placed at the bottom of that pit a terrible machine of iron, with spikes about the length of sword blades sticking up from it, so that whoever might fall into the pit could hardly avoid being pierced through by them. That dreadful fate that she had intended for others she had met herself. She lay at the bottom of the pit quite transfixed by some of the spikes, and fast bleeding to death, although, as Claude looked down, he saw some slight movement of one of her arms as he thought, but he was not quite sure of that.

For a moment or two, neither Claude nor his two friends spoke, and then it was Dick who said—

"On your soul, Claude, tell me. do you think anything can be done for that woman? for, if so, I will scramble down the sides of the pit in some sort of way."

"No," said Claude. "No—and yet—"

"Yet what?"

"It would be a mercy to send a bullet through her brain."

"She is dead," said Jack. "I have taken a second look. Come away, and rest content, Claude, with the fact that she is dead."

"I am glad to think that it is so," said Claude. "One would not have such a woman as that suffer."

"Certainly not."

"Come away—come away," said Dick. "At all events, it is a gracious thought for us that she come by her death by an act every way her own, and with which we had nothing to do."

"You are right there," said Claude Duval. "I would not have had that woman's death upon my conscience for any money."

"Nor I."

"It will be better," said Claude, "to say nothing of the fearful state in which we have seen the abbess to the ladies."

"Certainly not, Claude," said Dick. "Which of us, I wonder, would like to set about describing to them such a scene?"

"Not I," said Jack.

"Nor I," said Claude. "So now come on, and I for one shall breathe a little more freely when I have left this terrible abode. The death of the abbess, I think, almost absolves us, does it not, from the necessity of any further interference with Berrymead Priory or its inhabitants?"

"It does, to my thinking," said Dick, "for some time to come, at the least."

CHAPTER CCCLXXXI.

GENTLEMAN JACK HAS HIS LAST ADVENTURE.

While this little examination into the condition of the abbess of the convent was going on upon the part of Claude and of his two friends, Dick and Jack, Mr. Field had very properly and prudently taken the ladies through the little iron door in the wall into the lane, that ran along by the outside of the wall of the garden.

There they were not only tolerably safe from any further attacks upon the part of the convent authorities, but they were out of hearing of anything that might have a tendency to increase the condition of alarm into which they had been thrown.

Upon Claude and his two friends seeking them, the novices and Alicia looked as though they would have been glad to have received some information regarding what had taken place in the garden that had seemed so alarming, and Claude thought it was better to say something than to leave them entirely to their own conjectures upon the subject.

"Rest contented," he said, "as regards two things—one is, that the lady abbess of the convent will trouble you no more; and the other is, that none of us have her death to answer for, in any shape or way whatever."

These words were sufficient to let the novices know that their great enemy was no more, at the same time that they did not have the effect of inducing any belief that he who had been so true a friend to them had found it necessary or politic to have the death of that abandoned and truly horrible female to answer for.

A feeling of great relief came over all their minds at this assurance, and they were content, or seemed to be content with the amount of information they then possessed, and did not seek for more.

This was so far satisfactory, then, to Claude Duval, that he felt the whole affair, as regarded the convent of Berrymead, had assumed an aspect that would not make it necessary for him, or Dick, or Jack, to interfere further in it.

"Now, Mr. Field," he said, "here we are in the open air, and I think we may take upon ourselves to say, that we have nothing further to do with the building that lies within this gloomy wall."

"I hope not, indeed."

"You," continued Claude, "can make your own arrangements regarding Alicia, and for what my friends and I have been able to do, I have only one favour to ask."

"What is that?"

"It is, that you will charge yourself with the care of these young ladies, and see that they reach their friends in safety."

"Most cheerfully will I do so; and I will promise even more than that, for if it should so happen that the bigotry of any of their friends should be so great that they hesitate to receive them in the manner one may wish, I and Alicia will offer them a home with us, for it will be quite impossible we should ever forget the mutual aid and assistance, and the common dangers we have all passed through together upon this eventful night, that is now with the past."

It was quite impossible that Mr. Field could have said anything else which would have given Claude Duval more satisfaction than this, for it at once relieved him of what, to him, might have been the most awkward part of the whole adventure, namely, the care of the young girls who had been rescued from the convent.

Turning to Dick and Jack, Claude said in an undertone—

"We have but to get our horses now, and to bid adieu to these kind friends, with whom we have been associated in this adventure."

Dick and Jack at once assented to this view of the affair; but it happened that Claude Duval had not spoken in so low a tone but that Mr. Field had heard him, so stepping up to him, he said—

"Duval, can you spare me a few moments of your time?"

"With pleasure: what would you say?"

Mr. Field led him a little in advance of the party, and then with an air and manner of evident emotion, he said to him—

"Do you think, that after all you have done for me and mine, I can possibly think of parting with you thus? Do you think that I have no heart, and that I do not feel deeply to its inmost core what I owe to you?"

"I never thought any such thing," said Duval.

"Then let me tell you that I feel such gratitude towards you, that all I possess is at your behest. I pray you to desert the mode of life you are now engaged in, and induce your two friends to do so likewise. Come, then, with me, and with Alicia, and we will provide a home for you. What I propose is, that we all reside together."

Claude shook his head.

"Nay, do not put a negative upon the matter. Alicia and I quite understand each other regarding it, and have briefly spoken of it together."

Again Duval shook his head doubtingly.

"You have not heard all that I have to say," added Mr. Field. "Will you listen to me with patience?"

"I will."

"Then, Claude Duval, what I propose is just this, that we—that is, Alicia and I—purchase an estate some way in the country, and that we and such of the novices as may want a temporary or a permanent home, reside there with you and your two friends. We shall all be far enough removed from popular observation for you to be safe along with your two associates; and as by the course of time the memory of your deeds will by your non-appearance in public grow faint, so will your sense of security be all the greater; and you will, at

least, feel that there is no danger, even if you were inclined to mingle a little with the great world again."

Claude Duval was silent for a few moments; and it was evident that the proposition so kindly made by Mr. Field had greatly affected him. When he spoke again, it was in a very different tone of voice to any that he had hitherto used.

"Mr. Field," he said, "if, not very long ago, this proposition had been made to me, I should have accepted it."

"But why not now?"

"I will tell you."

"Yes; but I hope to conquer your scruples."

"Listen: there was one whom I loved, but she is now with the dead. From that time my heart has become, as it were, a barren waste; and I can know no peace but in the wild excitements of the life I lead, or in the grave!"

"Do not say so!"

"It is the truth; so urge me no more. I will find you out and see you now and then, when I can do so without the chance of casting a slur upon your fair fame with the world, by letting it seem that you have such an acquaintance as Claude Duval, the highwayman. And now, if you would really be kind to me, you will say no more upon this subject."

After such a speech as that from Claude Duval, of course it was quite out of the question that Mr. Field should further urge his argument; so he merely bowed and said—

"Your wishes shall be laws to me."

"Nay, now," said Duval, as he held out his hand, "do not let us feel any coolness towards each other, or disagreement upon this matter. Let me have the satisfaction of knowing that I still have in you a friend."

"You have—you have, indeed!" said Field, as he wrung the hand of Claude Duval. "You have in me a friend, and you ever will!"

There could be very little doubt but that Alicia and Dick and Jack understood pretty well what was passing between Claude Duval and Mr. Field; but they said not a word when they both slackened their pace and allowed the party to come up with them.

Duval looked tolerably cheerful; and the little party in a short space of time reached the spot where Claude and his friends had left their horses. There was then a strange kind of gloom on the whole of them; and Duval, as he patted the neck of his steed, said with a voice of feeling—

"Ladies, I and my friends will bid you good-day at this point of your plans. Mr. Field will take every possible care of you, I know; and I can only say that it will be your own faults if ever you enter a convent again; and that I wish you all good husbands as soon as possible. Come on, Jack."

Claude sprang upon his horse; and, as his friends were already mounted, they all three were ready for the road.

"Now," said Claude, in a whisper, "let us be off as soon as we can, for the longer we stay here the more painful will be the parting upon both sides."

"Let's cry out good-by, then," said Dick, "and gallop off."

"No—no," said Jack. "Not that—not that. We ought to shake hands with all the novices before we go; so, Dick, don't be over-hasty."

"As you please."

"Jack was always very gallant to the ladies," said Claude with a smile.

This hand-shaking that Jack was so anxious about was gone through very tearfully by the young girls, who considered that they were so much beholden to Claude and his friends that it was impossible to bid them adieu without emotion.

"We shall meet again, surely?" said Frances.

Claude bowed and smiled faintly.

"Ah, you do not mean it, then?"

"Yes, I do. I hope that we shall meet again, and it shall not be my fault if we do not. Farewell."

With these words, Claude gave his horse a slight hint to go on, and as he went off at rather a sharp trot, Dick and Jack had no resource but to go after him. They let him precede them because they wished that he should go just where his fancy might lead him, and they could guess very well that in the state of mind he was in he could not, for some little time, be very much in the cue for conversation upon any subject.

Rather to their surprise, for they thought he would have gone towards London, Claude turned his horse's head countrywise, and fairly rode past Berrymead Priory again.

They could none of them forbear from regarding those gloomy and suggestive walls with strange feelings as they rode past them, and even Claude Duval slackened his pace and turned his head to take a last look at the ivy-crowned walls within which had taken place such strange events.

This slight relaxation of speed upon the part of Claude brought both Dick and Jack up to him.

"Shall we ever," said Claude, in much his usual manner, "shall we ever see that place again inside, Dick?"

"I don't want."

"Nor I," said Jack.

"And, indeed, I don't; and yet when we come to reflect that there will be a new abbess, and new nuns, and new novices, we shall not be far wrong in coming to the conclusion that there will be fresh novices treated there of a not very dissimilar kind to those which have recently taken place."

"Then, Claude, if such be the case, we had better denounce the whole affair to the authorities."

"Probably Mr. Field," said Jack, "will feel it to be his duty to do that."

"It is likely."

"Well—well," said Claude, "come on—come on. We will take a canter to the first retired inn we meet with, and then have some breakfast and put up for a little while. I for one feel as if I wanted some rest, and I think that if we can lie by with anything like safety till sunset it will be well."

They all three trotted along the road abreast now, and so passed on through the villages of Ealing and Hanwell, crossing the little River Brent by a rustic bridge that was there at the period of our story.

About a couple of miles further on, situated in the midst of very picturesque and beautiful scenery, they came to an inn called "The Reindeer and Cup," and from the quiet and rusticated character of the place, so far as they could see, Claude thought it would do to stop at.

"What do you think of this house?" he said.

"It is the very thing for us," said Dick, "to all appearances."

"So I think."

"And so do I," said Jack. "We are all agreed."

"Then let us stop here and breakfast, and rest our cattle better than they could where we left them while we were at the convent. We will, if no cross-accident should occur to mar such a design, stay here till sunset, and then, old friends, I should say, let us to the road again!"

Jack and Dick were far from being averse to this proposition of Claude's, and after a glance at each other, Jack said—

"Yes, Claude. Let it be the road again, for I don't think that either you or I or Dick are in just the frame of mind to sit down quietly in any state of life, whatever might be its advantages."

"Certainly not," said Claude.

"I think with you both," said Dick. "Time was when I cherished the dream of one day making sufficient by this mode of life to go from it, and in peace and retirement and serenity pass the remainder of my days; but I have lived long enough to feel how fallacious is any such idea, and so I have completely abandoned it."

"We are all agreed, then," said Claude; "so to the last we shall be, what

we have been so long, knights of the road. Here we are at the inn. It will be just as well that we ascertain what guests are here before we alight and allow ourselves to encounter a disadvantage."

CHAPTER CCCLXXXII.

THE "GUILDFORD CELERITY" IS OF ASSISTANCE TO CLAUDE DUVAL.

"HOUSE—house!" cried Dick. "House, here! Hilloa!"

At this upon outside the door of the inn, a man ran out in his shirt sleeves, and said in a hurried voice—

"Good Lord, gentlemen, what is the matter? You quite take my breath away."

"Where's the landlord?"

"I am the landlord, if it's all the same to you, gentlemen."

"Then what do you mean by saying that it almost takes your breath away to see three guests at your door?"

"Because, gentlemen, it is so early, that's all; but if you will only please to alight, you will find that there is here good accommodation for man and beast, as the sign says, which is now over the door; and though you might go to a place where you might find a finer looking room than I can show you, and more filigree nonsense, yet I don't think you could possibly go anywhere where you would find more comfort than there is here, gentlemen."

"What guests have you?"

"Guests, sir? Why, I do think I may take upon myself to say, sir, that we have three."

"Three, have you? Well, who and what are they? for, to tell the truth, we are a little particular where we put up."

"You can't do better, sir, than be particular, so I can set your mind at ease by saying, that the three guests I think I have—"

"You only think?"

"Yes, gentlemen. The three guests I think I have, are your three noble selves, for there is not another soul in the house, except me and my own family."

"This will do," said Dick to Claude.

"Exactly."

"The very thing," said Jack.

"Well, landlord, we will stay some hours with you. Open your stable door, and let us ride our horses into the stable yard. You will be so good as to give them the best breakfast you can, and likewise do the same by us."

"With all the pleasure in life, gentlemen," said the landlord, who was certainly rather an original. "With all the pleasure in life, I may say. A merciful man is merciful to his beast, and I like to hear you say you wish the cattle to have a good breakfast."

"We think as much of our steeds as it is possible to think of such creatures," said Claude.

A very short time sufficed for the horses to be comfortably bestowed, in three stalls, and for their masters to be seated at the breakfast-table of the landlord, which was tolerably well supplied with abundance of good things. The party consisted of the landlord, his wife, and his wife's sister; and Claude Duval, with his friends, were not long in discovering that there was something or another upon the mind of the whole party, against which they were struggling might and main.

That this something was a matter of grief to them, that Claude could guess, by the way in which the females caught their breath, now and then, as if they were repressing the desire to sob, and by the landlord, without any cause in the whole world, pretending now and then to be seized with an immense desire to sneeze

This pretended sneezing, Claude was sufficiently sharp-witted to see, arose from a desire to hide tears, that would at times force themselves into his eyes.

Claude looked at Dick, who gave him a short nod in return, as much as to say, "I understand you, and see with you that there is something or another sorely amiss in the family."

Jack, too, by the observant way in which he looked at the landlord's wife, was evidently alive to the fact of the mystery that was pending.

After a time, it was obvious that the uneasiness of the whole party was very much upon the increase, indeed, and that, as they looked at a clock that was in the room, their pent-up feelings amounted to quite an agony.

At length the clock struck eight.

At that moment, the landlady could control her feelings upon some subject or another no longer, and she burst into an agony of weeping, crying out as she did so—

"He is lost! Oh, he is lost! My son—my son! he is lost!"

"Hush! Oh, hush!" said the landlord.

The landlord might as well said "Hush!" to some torrent, for the landlady's grief having once got the upper-hand of her, it could not possibly be restrained, and in a moment or two the sister joined in the sobbing, and Claude Duval and his friends looked upon the scene with the greatest possible surprise.

This surprise, upon the part of Duval and his friends, though, was very much heightened, and the mysterious conduct of the landlord and his family reached its climax, when he suddenly plumped down upon his knees before Claude, and holding up his hands, said, while the tears streamed down his face—

"Oh, sir, I don't know if you have any children of your own, or if you are likely to have any, but you may, you know; and so I conjure you to have some mercy upon my poor, unhappy boy."

"Yes—yes," cried the landlady, "have mercy upon him."

"Oh, do—do!" cried the sister.

"Good God!" said Claude, "what on earth is the meaning of all this? I don't understand a word that you are talking about. Pray, good folks, are you all a little mad or not?"

"Oh, no—no!"

"Then explain yourselves."

"Oh, sir, we know you."

"Do you, indeed?"

"Yes, sir, too well—too well."

"And, pray, who am I? If you know me, perhaps you can name me, although if you do I cannot for the life of me see what that has to do with him whom you call your unhappy son."

"But, sir—good sir, you are——"

"What, pray?"

"An officer—a Bow-street officer."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir, and those are your two comrades. Is it not too true?"

"My good friend, I don't know for the life of me what cause you have to fear or to expect Bow-street or any other officers here in this house; but as far as we are concerned you may banish your fears, for we are not at all in that line, I assure you."

"You are not?"

"Most certainly not."

"Oh, what a relief—oh, what a relief this is, to be sure! Don't say another word about it, I beg of you, gentlemen—oh, don't. It's nothing at all—it's nothing, wife, is it?"

"Yes, husband, it is much."

"No—no—no."

"But I say it is, and I have a strong opinion upon the subject. I think that,

after the mistake we have made, and after the way that these gentlemen have been treated by us, that we ought to explain all about it to them."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"Don't say, 'Oh, dear!' you might say that if our Charles were guilty; but as he is not, it is quite another affair; so don't, I beg of you."

"Well, then, I won't; and if the gentlemen will be so good as to attend to what we have to say it may lighten our griefs a little to tell it. Oh, where is my poor boy—where is he—oh, where is he?"

"Don't make that noise," said Claude. "Tell me, some one or other of you, as quietly as you can, what is amiss; but, first of all, why did the striking of eight of the clock have such an effect upon you?"



"Because," said the mother, "we expected Charles to arrive here by then, and he told me if he did not get home at that hour he would surely be in the hands of the police."

"But what has he done to make him obnoxious to the attentions of the police?"

"Nothing—oh, nothing."

"Well, that is strange. Pray tell me, then, what he has to fear?"

"My poor boy, Charles, sir," said the mother, "is, or I should say was, in the employment of a great merchant in the City, who is very rich; and as my boy is very good-looking, though I say it, who, perhaps, should not, the merchant's daughter, Miss Annie Hargrave, fell in love with him."

"No—no, wife," said the landlord.

"Yes, you know she did."

"Well, but you should say that our Charles fell in love with Miss Annie. That is the proper way to put it. Young ladies, you know, ought not to be supposed capable of falling in love with young gentlemen."

"Well, but, John, I think they are. I suppose I know more about young ladies than you do—what they are likely to do, and what not?—and I can tell you that they are continually falling in love, only that they do not say anything about it."

"Pray go on," said Claude.

"I will, sir. Then I may say, that my son and Miss Hargrave mutually fell in love with each other."

The landlord nodded.

"But, sir, when Mr. Hargrave found it out, which he did by a little accident that occurred to make him suspicious."

"Yes," said the landlord, "it was but a trifle. One day he went into the drawing-room, and instead of my son being at his desk in the counting-house below, he was kneeling at Miss Annie's feet, and she was a-kissing of him, and he was a-kissing of her, that was all."

"Yes, nothing else in the world," said the landlady, "and that made him suspect that they had made acquaintance with each other."

"I should rather think it would," said Claude.

"Do you, sir?"

"Certainly I do, madam. But go on. This Mr. Hargrave must have been a tolerably suspicious sort of man."

"Yes, and, as you hear, about nothing almost. Well, sir, what must he do but put himself into a violent rage, and turn our boy Charles out of the house: but not content with that, he came down here the next day before we knew anything about the matter, and said to us—'Where is the thousand pound note that your son has robbed me of?'"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. Well, when we heard that, we naturally screamed together, and then he said in quite a blustering way—'I shall have your son apprehended, unless you send him out of the country pretty quickly; he has stolen a thousand pound note of mine, and it is not likely I am going to put up with such a loss.' Well, sir, when he had said that, and frightened us all out of our wits, he went, leaving us in a pretty situation."

"When was that?" said Claude.

"Only yesterday morning, sir; but before we could think of what to do, there came a letter from Charles, explaining all about it, and saying that he was in hopes of getting an interview with Miss Annie, and persuading her to run off with him; he said, if we had anything to write to him, to send it under cover to a shop in Oxford Street; so we let him know what had happened here, and in answer he sent a few lines to say that if he were not with us by eight o'clock this morning, to conclude that old Mr. Hargrave had done his worst, for that he, Charles, was desperate, and if Annie would not be his, he did not care one straw what became of him."

"And that is all?" said Claude.

"It is, sir; so we thought you were an officer, we did indeed; and expecting our son every moment, you may easily guess what a state of mind we were in when we saw you."

"It is natural that you should be rather frightened, I admit," said Claude; "and I am very happy to inform you that I am not only no officer, but that I think your son is falsely accused by Mr. Hargrave, and that, much as he has the villany actually to concoct such a terrible plot against him, such a charge, under the circumstances, will never be able to be maintained against the young man."

"Oh, sir, do you, indeed and in truth, think so?"

"Upon my honour I do."

"What a relief that is," said the landlord. "I will run and get some of the old Madeira out of the corner of the cellar, and we will have a glass of it together, for who knows, after all—ha—ha!—but that our son, Charles, may persuade the sweet young lady to run away with him, and so be married to her—eh, wife?"

"Ah, who knows, indeed," said the wife, with a toss of her head. "I'm sure there's lots of lords and dukes that is no more to be compared in looks and manners to my Charles, though I say it, who ought not perhaps, than chalk is to cheese."

"To be sure," said the sister, "he is a genteel youth."

"Hush!" said Claude, starting up.

"Oh, sir, what is it?"

"The sound of wheels."

"Wheels? Oh, there's wheels within wheels in this world," said the wife.

The sound of horses' feet, now, as well as wheels, came plainly upon their ears; and before they could get to the door it was quite clear that some carriage had stopped at it.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIII.

MISS HARGRAVE IS PROTECTED BY CLAUDE AND HIS GALLANT FRIENDS.

The state of terror in which the landlord and his family evidently were now had about it something truly ludicrous. The landlord, himself, showed a strong desire to hide himself under the table. The wife went into hysterics, and the sister looked as though she fancied the chimney would not be a bad place to get into.

"Silence, all of you," said Duval. "Everything is to be lost by fear, and nothing is ever to be gained by it."

"Yes—yes," gasped the landlord. "I—oh, dear!"

"Stay where you are all of you; I will go to the door and see who is there."

"Oh—oh!"

"Silence, I say—silence!"

The peremptory way in which Claude Duval spoke had the effect even of causing the landlady to smother her hysterics, and the landlord himself sat looking intently at Claude as if he had only just then seen him for the first time.

"I will go to the door," said Duval to Jack and Dick; "you stay here; I will call to you if I want you."

"All's right," said Jack.

"Take care of yourself," said Dick.

"I will, you may depend."

Claude Duval was at the door of the little inn very quickly, and then he saw a chaise with the horse all in a foam in it, and a young man just alighting from it. In the chaise, too, there was a figure muffled up in several shawls and a cloak, and Claude Duval formed his own conclusions regarding that figure.

Stepping up to the side of the chaise, Duval said to the young man—

"Premising before I ask you any questions that I am a friend, let me request of you to know if your name is Charles?"

"It is. Stand off, sir."

"And you are the son of the landlord here?"

"I am. What of that?"

"Nothing particular, except that your friends here will be glad to see you. This, I suppose, is the fair and accomplished Miss Hargrave?"

When Claude Duval uttered these words, the figure that was enveloped in the shawls and the cloak uttered a scream, and turning to Claude, he saw the face of the loveliest young girl that he thought he had ever seen in all his life. She was very young evidently, but there was such a sweetness of expression, and

such a purity of look and general appearance about her, that it was quite a charming thing to have the opportunity of gazing upon such a face.

"Spare him!" cried the young lady. "Oh, spare him! He is indeed innocent, and the time will come when my cruel father will repent of the false charge he has made against my Charles."

"Oh, my Annie," said Clarles, "it cuts me to the heart to hear you plead for me. Sir, I know not who or what you are, but I defy you."

The idea of such a mere stripling as Charles defying a man like Claude Duval, whom few strong, stout men could very well defy, was rather absurd, and Claude said with a smile—

"My good sir, you and I, together with a couple of friends I have in the inn, may, I hope, defy your foes; but I am afraid that if we defy each other we shall do no good at all. Come in at once, and be assured that I am your friend."

Charles looked a little doubtful; young as he was, he had seen more of the world than Annie Hargrave, and he had found out how

"A man may smile—and smile, and be a villain."

But Annie called to him tenderly, saying—

"Oh, Charles, this is a friend to us, indeed. If he be not, there is no faith in outward virtue, for never, surely, could hypocrisy look and speak as he does."

Claude turned to the young girl, as he said—

"From my heart, Miss Hargrave, I thank you for that kind opinion. He hall not be betrayed by me, you may depend upon it. And now, Mr. Charles, ill you trust me?"

"I will, sir. But how came you to know who I am, and who the young lady passes my comprehension most completely."

"I have heard your whole story from your mother."

"Ah, then I am satisfied. Come now, my darling Annie; let me help you to alight from this vehicle, which has served us so well, and my father will look after the horse, which has done its duty so gallantly."

"Oh, Charles, are we not pursued?"

"We were so, dear one, but we have evidently baffled pursuit, or they would be closer to us than they seem to be."

Charles helped the young lady from the chaise to the ground, and as he did so, Claude, who was rather a close observer, saw that they both took advantage of the occasion to give each other a very tender and loving embrace, which seemed so to intoxicate the young clerk with joy, that his eyes sparkled again with the delight of his heart.

From what he now saw of both of them, Duval was more than ever inclined to befriend them to the best of his ability, and he called out to the landlord in a loud voice to come out.

In another moment the landlord embraced his son, and then he began to make a number of bows to Miss Hargrave, but she stepped up to him, saying in her sweet voice—

"You are my dear Charles's father, so I will show to you the duty and the love of a daughter."

With these words, she placed her arms upon his neck, and the landlord looked as though he were ready to sink through the ground.

"Oh, lor!" he cried. "She is an angel—quite an angel! Oh, Charles, how did you get such a sweet, dear, delightful——Oh, what is that? Horses' feet!"

"Hold!" said Claude, as he put himself into an attitude of listening.

They were all for a few moments like statues, so still were they; and then Claude said—

"Mr. Charles, have you any reason to anticipate peril?"

"I have."

"Do you think your enemies know the route you took?"

"I am afraid they suspect it"

"Then they are coming."

"Oh, my poor boy!" cried the landlord—"oh, my Charles, what on earth will become of him? He is lost!"

"Silence," said Claude. "I think, Master Charles, you were imprudent to come here. You would naturally be sought at this place."

"Yes, sir, it may be so, but my tenderness for the fair fame of Annie is such that I could not feel happy to place her in any other hands than in those of my mother, and that is why I came here at once; but I have yet hope that the persons who are approaching may be merely casual travellers on the road."

"Oh, no—no," said the landlord.

Miss Hargrave clung to Charles in quite an agony of terror, and Claude, then, after a moment's thought, said—

"Come in-doors, all of you. Stop! you, Mr. Landlord, put up the horse and the chaise at once in the stable. Surely, there are some places in this old house in which the lovers can hide?"

"Oh, no—no!" cried Annie, "that will look like guilt. My Charles must not hide from any man, not even from my father."

There was something so noble about the young girl's air and manner as she said these words, that Claude Duval admired her more than ever, but again he urged them to come into the house while the landlord put aside the chaise and the horse, and they accompanied him into the room where the mother and sister, and Claude's two friends were.

The meeting between the mother and her son was deeply affecting; but Claude Duval felt all the emergency of the situation of the young couple, and he said—

"Now hide yourselves, both of you, for however it may look like guilt, and be an action of guilt to do so, yet innocence itself is compelled at times in this world to hide its head."

"Mother," said Charles, "to you, and to you, aunt, I commit the care of this dear girl. Let it be sufficient for you to know that I love her better than I do my life; and rather than that a hair of this dear head should be injured, I would lay down that life with pleasure. Take care of her, for if anything should happen to her, I cannot live in this world."

"Charles—Charles!" cried the girl.

"Dear Annie, go and let me remain here to meet every questioning. I am innocent of all but loving you too well."

"They will kill you, Charles!"

"No," said Claude Duval, "you may trust me and my friends here with his safety. I think that, feeling his own innocence as he does, it is as well that Charles should face his enemies. If they have any authority at all, it is over him, and not over you, Miss Hargrave; and if they find him here, they have no right to enter a single room of this house in the name of the law; and if they attempt to do it in the name of violence and force in search of you, we will resist them; so Charles is doing the best thing he can to save you."

"Yes, at the sacrifice of himself."

"No—no! It may not be so."

"Charles?"

"Yes, dear Annie?"

"Do you command me to go?"

"No—no! So harsh a word as command to you can never pass these lips; but I ask you to go, dear one."

"Oh, Charles, that is, indeed, a command. Farewell! Oh, sir,"—turning to Claude—"you will protect him?"

"With my life."

The look of gratitude that the young girl gave to Duval went to his very heart; and if before, which, in truth, he was not, he had been ever so lukewarm in the cause of Charles, he would from that moment have felt that it was a sacred duty with him to do all that was possible in conformity with his promise to that young and beautiful creature.

The lovers took a kind farewell of each other; and just as a party of horse-

men of some six or ten in number dashed up to the door of the inn, Charles's mother and aunt conducted Annie Hargrave to the upper part of the house.

Charles looked a little pale, and the father, who had come in from attending to the horse and chaise, was in a terrible state of agitation. Placing his hands upon the shoulder of his son, he said, in a voice that was choked by sobs—

"My boy—my Charles! Oh, tell me—tell me, are you in truth innocent?"

"I am, father."

"Entirely so, and not by any—any——"

"Any what, father?"

"Any odd way of putting it, you know, so as to say that it was no real crime, or anything of that sort?"

"Father, I am innocent in every possible meaning of the word. I am falsely accused of stealing a thousand pound note. I know nothing on oath about it, sir, beyond taking it from a banker's and placing it in Mr. Hargrave's own hand."

"Then you had it once in your possession?" said Claude.

"I had, sir."

"I see, then, how the charge is made. He denies having received it from you?"

"He does, I suppose."

Claude felt very uneasy now for Charles, for he saw how easily, if Mr. Hargrave chose to destroy the note, he could fix the charge upon him by taking oath that he had never received it of him, while the banker could prove that he paid it to him, Charles, upon his, Mr. Hargrave's, account.

All these considerations did not at the moment present themselves to the young man; for, to tell the truth, his mind was so full of his dear Annie, that he thought but little of the peril in which he himself stood at that moment.

"Hilloa!" cried a horse voice from the door of the inn. "Hilloa! Is nobody at home here? Hoi! House here!"

"They come," said the landlord.

"Don't be alarmed," said Claude. "Let me speak and act in the matter. There is yet a chance."

As he spoke, Claude looked at Dick and Jack in such a manner, that they quite concluded he did not intend to let young Charles be taken, and they gave him a nod each in reply, to intimate that they were quite ready to act with him in the matter.

Before anything else could be said in the matter, the sound of footsteps in the passage came upon the ears of all in the room, and the door being violently opened, the party of mounted men who had stopped at the inn, and who had left one only of their number outside to take care of the horses, marched in.

"Stop, if you please!" said Claude Duval, advancing two steps in front of his friends. "Pray what do you want?"

This calm and cool address had the effect of stopping the sudden entrance of the officers, and the chief of them said in a civil enough tone of voice—

"I don't know what right you have to ask, but as I am always ready to answer a civil question to a gentleman, as you seem to be, I may say that I am an officer of the police, and that I have a warrant for the apprehension of Charles Brownlow, on a charge of felony against his master, Mr. Hargrave; and having reason to suppose he is here, I come here to seek him."

"He is here! He must be here!" said a voice in angry tones, and a man, with a countenance distorted by passion, pushed forward through the group of officers. "I will have the villain's life, for he has robbed me of my money and of my daughter, too! I say, I will see him hanged for it! I told him I would and I will!"

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIV.

MR. HARGRAVE FINDS THAT HIS VILLANY IS FULLY DISCOVERED.

After this speech from the violent man, there could be no doubt of his identity as Mr. Hargrave; so Claude Duval addressed him, saying—

"Sir, you shall have justice."

"Justice!" he cried. "I will have justice without your interference, sir. I don't care a straw who you are, sir. I will hang him if it costs me ten thousand pounds to do so; and if once I get hold of that undutiful child of mine, I will make her bitterly repent of her bad conduct, that I will. The hussy—the little wretch! Oh, I will make her smart for this morning's work, I will, indeed, and I will hang Charles Brownlow!"

The officer who had the command of the party shook his head, as he said—

"Sir, you will permit me to say, that it is very imprudent, indeed, of you to go on in this way."

"And why so, sir?"

"Because it looks as if revenge, and not justice, were your aim; and when the young man is put upon his trial, and I report your words that you would spend ten thousand pounds to get him hanged, it will go a long way towards getting him acquitted."

The demoniac look that came over the face of Mr. Hargrave as the officer said this, was truly dreadful to see.

"Ha—ha!" he cried; "it don't matter. The case is so strong against him, so clear, and so simple in its strength, that if the whole world were to say all sorts of things, it could not have the effect of contradicting the testimony against him."

"I admit it is a strong case, sir."

"Yes, you do well to admit it, for, in good truth, it is a strong case. Ha! ha! It is a case which will be his death—his death!"

The chief officer made no reply to these words; but turning about, he said—

"Is the master of the house here?"

"Yes," stammered the landlord. "I am that unhappy individual."

"Then, here is our warrant to search these premises, or any other that we may have reasonable suspicions of, for Charles Brownlow, accused of felony. You will be very ill-advised, indeed, Mr. Brownlow, if you place any obstruction in our way."

"I will not."

The landlord spoke very faintly, and was forced to drop into a chair, where he sat, looking so ill, that the officers really pitied him as the father of the youth whose fate, in their minds, was sealed.

It was then, at the moment that Mr. Hargrave was rubbing his hands together, and glaring about him like a fiend, and that the officers were preparing to search the house, that, from behind Jack and Dick, young Charles Brownlow stepped forward, saying as he did so—

"There need be no further trouble, gentlemen—I am here!"

"Ah!" cried Mr. Hargrave, "seize him! Bind him! Put fetters on him! This is the villain—this is the villain!"

"There is no occasion, sir," said the chief officer, "for either violence or torture. Are you Charles Brownlow, late a clerk in the service of Mr. Hargrave?"

"I am."

"Then, you are my prisoner."

Charles bowed.

"Upon what charge," said Claude Duval, "is this young man taken?"

"For stealing a thousand pound note."

"I deny it," said Charles. "I call upon you all to witness that I deny the

charge in toto. I did receive a thousand pound note from the Bank of England on account for Mr. Hargrave, in whose employment I was, and I gave it into his own hands in his own private counting-house within ten minutes after so receiving it."

"False—false as hell!" cried Mr. Hargrave, stamping fiercely upon the floor of the room.

"My good sir," said the officer, "there is no occasion for all this violence; we are not trying the case here, I assure you."

"But it is false!"

"It is true," said Charles.

"Well—well, you have both had your say," said the officer, "and there is an end of that. You will come to town with us, Charles Brownlow; our duty is quite plain and easy. It is, to lodge you in jail; and whether you be innocent or guilty is a matter with which, you see, we have nothing to do."

"Certainly," said Charles, "and I thank you for the kind way in which you are disposed to do your duty. I am really."

"Stop!" said Claude—"stop a minute. The charge is quite absurd, for Mr. Hargrave, if he were put upon his oath, don't know the number of the note, and Mr. Charles Brownlow does."

"Not know it?" cried Mr. Hargrave—"not know it? I do know it. I—I ought to know it. It is——"

"Well, sir?"

"It is 9—9—no, not 9—yes, it is 90. Stop a bit, I will soon confound you all, for I made a memorandum of the number of the note in my pocket-book this very morning."

"From the note itself?" said Claude.

"No, sir, not from the note itself, for I never saw it. I am not to be so very easily trapped, sir, as all that comes to. No, sir, the memorandum I made was from the information the bank clerk gave me, sir, if you please. Ha—ha!"

Mr. Hargrave nodded and smiled in the most vicious manner in the world, as if he had attained some great triumph over Claude Duval; and then going to the window of the room he looked in his pocket-book, and called out—

"The number of the note is 9023."

"Very good," said Claude. "Write that down, Mr. Officer, if you please."

The officer smiled as he said—

"I shall remember it; but really, Mr. Hargrave, you are acting very foolishly in this matter."

"Never mind—never mind. I stick to it. And now, if you please, we will search for the other delinquent."

"The other what, sir?"

"The other delinquent."

"And who may he be, sir?"

"My runaway daughter—the companion of the flight of this young vagabond. My daughter, whom he has seduced."

"Sir," said Charles, "that is false; and but for the halo that surrounds even you of respect, as being the father of Annie, I would knock you down for those words."

"Knock me down?"

"Yes, sir, for a foul calumniator of female innocence."

"Wretch! I say again you have seduced her!"

"Stop—stop!" cried the officer. "It is a very odd thing to hear a father accusing his child and somebody else defending her. But that is no business of mine. Come along, Charles Brownlow, to town at once."

"Yes, I am ready," said Charles.

"And so am I," said Mr. Hargrave, "as soon as you have searched this house from top to bottom for my lost daughter. I will have every hole and cranny of it looked into. Oh, I will make her remember this day's work!"

"Well, sir," said the officer, "search away."



"But you and your men will search?"

"Oh, no."

"No? Did you say no?"

"Yes, sir, we did. We have no warrant to search the house but for Charles Brownlow, and he is here."

"Yes," said Claude; "and the landlord of this house forbids any man at his peril to attempt to enter a room in it without his permission."

"Death and fury!" cried Mr. Hargrave.

"Yes, sir," said the officer, "death and fury are very hard words; but we are not going to have an action against us for trespass because you say death and fury."

"I will search the house myself, then," said Mr. Hargrave. "I and Mr. Jacob Bell. Jacob Bell—Jacob Bell! where are you? Never mind the horses, let them go to the d—l. Come here, Jacob Bell."

A man with a cringing gait entered the room, and bowing very low before Mr Hargrave, he said—

"Honoured sir, what is your noble pleasure?"

"Jacob Bell, you will help me to search this house for my lost daughter. Charles Brownlow is arrested, as you see."

"Oh, the villain!"

"Yes, Jacob, he is a villain."

"Oh, the wretch, to rob such a master—such a good master, too! Oh, Charles—Charles, how could you be so wicked? You will be hanged now, you unhappy young man, and I shall be compelled to give my testimony, humble as it is, against you."

"Against me! What do you mean?"

"Tell him," said Mr. Hargrave—"tell him."

"Why, Charles, I am sorry to say I saw you put the note into your own pocket, and I heard you say, 'Old Hargrave shall never see this note again. I will keep it as an instalment of his daughter's fortune.'"

"You vile fabricator!" said Charles, springing forward and catching Jacob Bell by the throat, "such words never passed my lips, or ever occurred to me. How dare you look me in the face, with such a hideous lie in your mouth?"

"Murder! murder!"

The officers rescued Jacob Bell from Charles, and Mr. Hargrave cried out—

"There, you see, you would not handcuff him, and that is the consequence of it. You see he assaults the witness, you see—you see."

"Oh yes, sir, we see."

"He! he!" said Jacob Bell, as he righted his cravat, "I fully expected to suffer; but as it is in the cause of my much honoured and beloved master I don't care. Oh dear, no—I don't care. He will make it up to me."

"I will, Jacob, you may depend."

"Oh, sir—oh—oh!"

Jacob bowed almost to the floor, and then Mr. Hargrave cried out—

"You and I, Jacob will search this house for my daughter. I am not afraid of your actions of trespass. Ha! ha! Out of the way, man!"

"No, thank you, sir," said the landlord.

Claude Duval had whispered in the landlord's ear what he ought to do; and seeing that the officers would not support Mr. Hargrave, and that Claude and his friends would support him, he gathered courage to act.

"Out of the way, fellow!"

"No, this is my house, Mr. Hargrave, and if you don't like it you may leave it; and if you are disorderly I will turn you out. As to searching my house, it is a thing I can't permit, and I won't either."

"Force your way, Jacob Bell."

"Try it," said the landlord.

"Yes, sir," said Jacob. "I—that is—oh, dear me, what a ruffian he looks, sir! If you were to go first, I don't think he would dare to hit such a great gentleman as you are, sir. Tell him you are worth two thousand pounds a year, sir, and if he hinders you after that, he must be mad."

"If he had twenty millions," said the landlord, "I'd knock him down."

The officers looked on rather amused at this scene, and Mr. Hargrave turning to them, said savagely—

"Of course, you will interfere if there is a breach of the peace?"

"Yes, if called upon by the master of the house."

"The master of the house?"

"Certainly. You are the interloper here, you know, sir. If you go outside into the road, there can't be any breach of peace, unless the landlord comes after you, and then he will be in the wrong; but you can't expect us to help you when you come into a man's house and assault him."

"I don't care—I don't care. I can see that there is a staircase in that corner yonder, and it may lead me to where I shall find my most undutiful child. Come on, Jacob Bell, I command you! Clear that man out of the way, or I will discharge you from my service."

Jacob Bell, under the dread of the threat, stepped forward, but Claude put out his foot, and Jacob trod upon it.

"What!" said Claude, "are my toes to be trodden upon in this desperate way by a ruffian! Villain! you seek my life, and in self-defence—mind you all, gentlemen, only in self-defence—I am compelled to put Jacob Bell gently outside the house."

As he spoke, Claude pounced upon poor Jacob Bell, and catching him by the back of the neck with the left hand, and the lower part of his apparel with the right, he sent him like a bomb-shell, head-foremost, right through the window into the yard, where he alighted amid a whole litter of pigs, who were busily amusing themselves on a dung-heap.

When Mr. Hargrave saw in what a violent and ready way his man-of all-work, Jacob Bell, was disposed of by one of the friends of the Brownlow family, he staggered back aghast, and did not stop till he reached the door, crying out as he did so—

"Help—help! Murder—murder!"

It so happened that these cries had some effect; although it was rather an absurd thing to hear them coming from the person who was quite untouched, while he who was is some degree of peril—that is to say, Jacob Bell—after uttering one great howl, said not a word.

The voice of Mr. Hargrave calling for help, and uttering that one fearful word "Murder," came upon the ears of his daughter, Annie, as she sat trembling in the bed-chamber of the landlady; and her kind and gentle feelings towards her father, notwithstanding he had ever treated her with a kind of harshness that might well have dissipated any tenderness she might naturally have for him, induced her to fly to his aid.

Rising from the old-fashioned arm-chair upon which she sat, she cried out—

"That is my father's voice. They are killing him!"

"Oh, no," said the landlady, "don't you think that, my dear. Nothing is more unlikely than such a thing. Don't you take that into your head."

"Yes—yes, he called murder, and it is my duty to go to him. He may forget the duty of a father, but I cannot take such an example even from him, and forget the duty of a child."

With this, despite an attempt the landlady made to stop her, Annie ran down stairs.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXV.

THE ARRIVAL OF SIR JOHN HARE, AND THE DISCOMFITURE OF MR. HARGRAVE AND JACOB.

It did not occur to Mr. Hargrave that he could possibly have such a hold upon the heart and the affections of the fair young girl, whose beauty he had only looked upon with an idea that it might, by wedding her to some man of rank, favour his own ambition, as to induce her when he cried for aid to forget every other consideration, and fly to his side.

When, therefore, from the staircase that Jacob Bell had made such an abortive effort to get up there came the vision of such loveliness, and with her long fair hair hanging in disorder, and alarm upon her sweet face, Annie appeared, Mr. Hargrave was scarcely less surprised than any one else in the apartment.

"Father—father!" she cried, "where are you?"

"My daughter!" said Mr. Hargrave.

"Yes, father, you called for aid—I am here."

"Good. Ha—ha!"

Annie looked about her in surprise, and Claude Duval stepped between her and her father, saying—

"Miss Hargrave, I am sorry to say that you have let your feelings get the better of your prudence in this matter. Mr. Hargrave is in no danger."

"But I heard a cry."

"True, you did."

"Of murder!"

"Yes; but it was fear, not danger, that provoked it."

"I don't care what provoked it," cried Mr. Hargrave, "so long as it has had the effect of producing this disobedient girl, whom I shall take with me to London, and I dare any one to interfere between me and her."

"I interfere!" said Claude Duval.

"And who the devil are you, after all? You seem to be very busy here, and you take upon yourself much—too much. You appear to have a liking to interfere in my affairs, sir."

"I have. You are right there, sir."

"Stand aside, villain!"

"Say that again, Mr. Hargrave, and you will find yourself with your friend Jacob Bell."

"Jacob Bell?" said Annie. "Is he here?"

"He is, to the confusion of you and your lover," said the father. "Upon the evidence of that very excellent man, Jacob Bell, I shall be able to commit Charles Brownlow of robbery; and in these glorious days, with such a king upon the throne as George the Third, who wishes every child in his dominions to read the bible, there is no escape for any one convicted of even a robbery; so hanged he will be."

"No—no!"

"Ah! we shall see—we shall see."

"Charles—my Charles, where are you?"

"Here, Annie," said Charles Brownlow, in a voice of affection.

"Oh, Charles, do not be cast down. Heaven will save you."

"Oh, Annie, it is not upon my account that I am cast down; but why did you leave the place of safety you were in? Here you would have had a safe asylum for a little time until my father and mother could have conveyed you somewhere else; but now, alas! you have appeared, and it will go hard with you to resist your father."

"You are a capital lawyer, sir," said Mr. Hargrave, rubbing his hands together; "my daughter is under age; therefore, I have absolute control over her. Ha! ha! Good gracious! what is that?"

Poor Jacob Bell had been all that time struggling and kicking to get out from the entanglements of the dung-heap, and now with a loud groan, and the most deplorable look in the world, he projected his head through one of the broken panes of the window through which he had been flung, and glared at the party present.

When Mr. Hargrave shouted and uttered an exclamation, all eyes followed him, and then they saw the miserable object that Jacob Bell looked.

"Oh—oh—oh!" said Jacob. "The Lord have mercy upon us all, miserable sinners! where am I now? and what is going to happen next?"

"It is Jacob," said Mr. Hargrave.

"Yes, sir, the ghost of your Jacob."

"Come in, idiot!"

"I'm coming, sir, if you please."

"Stop!" cried Claude.

"Oh, dear, yes, sir. Anything that you wish, I'm sure, I am delighted to attend to."

"I think, Jacob, you are safer where you are."

"If you think so, sir, I'm quite convinced that I am, and no sort of mistake. Oh, dear! oh, dear! was it a bomb-shell?"

"A what?"

"A bomb-shell."

"What do you mean, you fool?" cried Mr. Hargrave. "Are you mad?"

"Well, it's enough to make a fellow a little queer in his upper story; but it seems to me that nothing short of a bomb-shell could have sent a Christian right through a window in the sort of way that I went; and the pigs, sir, that were outside all fell upon me, and have torn my clothes dreadfully, sir. Oh, what am I to do?"

"What you please," said Claude.

"No more of this," said Mr. Hargrave. "Officers, do your duty. I no longer want your aid to secure my daughter—that I will do myself. All you have to do is to take your prisoner, Charles Brownlow, to London."

"We are ready."

"And as for you, Annie, I will settle matters with you when we get to London; so come at once without any further parley about it."

"Oh, save me!" said Annie.

"That is enough," said Claude Duval; "do you wish to go with your father or not?"

"I do not. I fear him."

"Yes," said the father, "and you shall have good reason to fear me before I have done with you, ungrateful girl that you are. Come with me at once, I command you to follow me."

"That is quite sufficient, sir," said Claude Duval. "If Miss Hargrave chooses to follow you of her own accord, and without any fear, she, of course, might go; but you shall not take her from here except with her own consent."

"I claim her as a right. She is under age."

"Assert your right then."

'I do so."

"Enforce it, then."

"Villain! the law will aid me."

"Go to law, then. Until you do so, and get such aid as the law will give you, this young lady will not be given up, and perhaps not then."

Mr. Hargrave had seen enough to know that he was baffled; and Charles Brownlow, as he seized Claude Duval by the hand, and shook it heartily, cried out—

"Oh, sir, you have raised me from despair again; and you, Annie, be but firm, and you are yet free from the tyranny of a home which is undeserving of so much excellence and beauty. Now, Mr. Hargrave, I am ready to go to London, and to meet the charge that you have to make against me."

"Stop," said Claude Duval, "I have sent one of my friends on a little message, and I advise you all not to go till he returns."

The officers shook their heads, and the chief said—

"We cannot wait. Come along, Mr. Brownlow."

"Nay," said Claude Duval, who about ten minutes before had whispered something in the ear of Jack, which had induced him abruptly to leave the room—"nay, let me beg of you to give five minutes more to this affair.'

"We cannot."

"We will not," said Mr. Hargrave.

Charles looked from one to the other in surprise as to what could be the cause of the delay that his friend Duval wished for, but at that moment Jack entered the room rather in haste, and said—

"He is coming."

"He?" cried Mr. Hargrave. "And who may he be?"

"Sir John Hare, baronet, and a justice of peace for the county, and special magistrate for this district of the suburbs of London."

"Sir John Hare?"

"Yes—you have heard of him?"

"Pho! I don't care for Sir John Hare. Officers, come along at once. Remember, I will give you a guinea each upon your lodging your prisoner in Newgate."

"But," said the chief officer, "did you say that Sir John Hare was coming?"

"He is," said Jack.

"Well, then, Mr. Hargrave, if that be the case, it would look like disrespect to such a gentleman not to wait for him. It can't make very much difference, you know, for here is the warrant for the apprehension of Charles Brownlow; so you know, sir, we are sure to take him; but as Sir John is a magistrate, why we ought to let him know, if he wishes, what is going on."

"Curse Sir John, and you too."

The officer smiled.

"I think," said Duval, "you are quite right, officer. It is but a little compliment you owe to such a gentleman as Sir John, when he comes in your way."

"But you sent for him?" said Mr. Hargrave, passionately.

"That, sir," said Duval, "is my business."

Mr. Hargrave was upon the point of making some very passionate reply, when the door of the room opened, and a couple of gentlemen appeared upon the threshold.

"Here is Sir John," said the officers, who knew the magistrate in a minute, and touched their hats respectfully to him.

"What is all this about?" said Sir John Hare, as he entered the room. The gentleman who was with him slightly bowed to the company.

"Oh, I will tell you, sir," said Mr. Hargrave.

"Well, sir?"

"I came to identify a thief, sir. This young man here robbed me of a thousand pound note; and as I gave information to Sir Richard Strong at Bow Street, he granted a warrant, and these officers came here to execute it; and I am with them to point out the culprit, as well as to get my daughter home, with whom he had eloped."

"Officer?"

"Yes, Sir John?"

"Is this so?"

"Yes, sir, it is so. Here is the prisoner, and there is the gentleman's daughter."

"You have nothing to do with the young lady?"

"No, Sir John."

"She is not included in the charge, I hope?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Very well. I don't see what I have to do, except to back the warrant as I am here. Give me pen and ink, and I will put my name to it."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Hargrave.

"Stop a moment, sir," said Claude Duval, advancing to the magistrate. "Sir John Hare, all England has heard of you as one who is more in love with justice than with law."

"Sir, I am much obliged to you for the compliment."

"This young man, Charles Brownlow, was clerk to this Mr. Hargrave, who charges him with receiving upon his account a note for one thousand pounds from the Bank of England, and never paying over to him the same."

"Yes," said Mr. Hargrave; "and which Jacob Bell has already sworn he saw him in possession of, and heard him say he would keep it."

"Just so. Officer, did you make a memorandum of the number of the note?"

"I did, sir."

"What was it?"

"It was 9023. Mr. Hargrave himself gave that as the number; but, of course, that can easily be ascertained at the Bank of England."

"Yes," said Sir John Hare. "But you will really do me a favour if you will tell me what I have to do with all this? I am not trying the case."

"No, Sir John; but I will show you what you have to do with it. You have written your name on the warrant."

"I have."

"Then you have jurisdiction, if you like; for your name being last on the warrant takes the case into your hands, if you like to deal with it. You can, by law, either send the prisoner to London before a London magistrate, or you can examine him yourself."

"That is quite true; but I shall merely let the officers take him to London."

"I don't think you will, sir. Now, Mr. Hargrave, if you please?"

With two steps across the room, Claude Duval was by the side of Mr. Hargrave; and before he could get out of the way, or make the least resistance, he caught both his arms by the wrists and held them up above his head, saying, as he did so—

"Now, Sir John Hare, this man who charges another with stealing a thousand pound note, No. 9023, has it in his pocket."

These words were uttered by Claude Duval with a shout, that made them ring through the house again, and every one present was amazingly startled at the statement. Jacob Bell at once dropped from the window on to the dung-heap again, for he saw that the game was up with his master.

As for Mr. Hargrave himself, he gasped again with terror, and in the singular attitude that Claude Duval made him assume, with his white face, and his staring eyes, and his mouth wide open, he looked like one transformed by a judgment of Heaven.

"What can you mean, sir, by this extraordinary conduct?" said Sir John Hare. "You surely cannot substantiate what you say?"

"I can, sir."

"Then I—I—blush for human nature."

"Do not do that, Sir John; for the honour of human nature, let you and I, and all of us, believe that there are few men like Mr. Hargrave. Officers, search this man, and if you do not find it as I state, you may take me to Newgate along with my friend Charles Brownlow."

The officers looked at Sir John Hare for a moment, and he gave a slight nod, as much as to say, "Do it." Then they, with the practical celerity they had in such matters, soon found a pocket-book in one of Mr. Hargrave's pockets. The pocket-book was handed to Sir John Hare, who said—

"Mr. Hargrave, if you are innocent of the really fearful charge which is brought against you, you will not shrink from my looking into this pocket-book. If you are guilty, it is my duty to look, for there cannot be a more sacred exercise of the privileges of those who have to administer the law than that which enables them to clear the innocent from an unjust accusation."

Mr. Hargrave tried to speak, but he could only utter a strange guttural sound, and as Claude Duval released him, he sunk into a chair quite prostrated.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL'S LAST APPEARANCE UPON THE ROAD.

THE state of affairs in the house was now so far interesting, that Claude Duval, as he glanced round him, thought he had never seen such a curious picture. There were the young lovers, locked hand-in-hand together, and evidently feeling that to each other they were all the world. There was the father and the mother of the young Charles, and his aunt, all so deeply interested in what was going on, that expression upon their countenances was particularly painful.

Then there was the magistrate, whose mind one might easily see by the look of his eye was quite made up regarding the guilt of Mr. Hargrave; and, lastly, there was the guilty old man himself, who, to be revenged upon his young clerk for daring to love his daughter, had brought such disgrace upon his own head.

Claude Duval and his friends and the officers, together with the old merchant,

might be considered as the accessaries of the scene, but that Claude himself was in the foreground a very prominent figure upon the occasion.

The magistrate yet seemed reluctant to open the pocket-book, and he again addressed Mr. Hargrave, saying—

"I presume then, sir, by your silence, you have no objection to my opening the pocket-book, now?"

Again the guilty man tried to speak, but again the words died away in the labouring throat, that could not shape them into anything articulate.

"I take consent, then," said Sir John; "and thus in presence of you all, I put to the test the fearful accusation that has been made against the man."

As he spoke he opened the pocket-book; and almost the first object that met his eyes within it was the very one thousand pound note in question.

"It is here!" said the magistrate. "It is here, to the confusion of the guilty, and to the delight and joy of all who love innocence and justice!"

"No! no!" yelled Mr. Hargrave. "Death and confusion! it is all a trick!"

"Beware!" said the magistrate—"beware what you say! I do not say that it is possible, in a criminal sense, to make your case worse than what it is; but you may yet aggravate the feelings of your fellow-men against you by the manner in which you comport yourself."

"Comport myself? I tell you all that it is false! I came to make a charge. I will have him hung yet!"

"On the contrary," said Sir John, "I feel it to be my duty to arrest you and your rascally accomplice on a charge of conspiracy against the life and liberty of this young man, whom you would have sent to death, knowing that he was innocent of the crime you charged him with."

"Arrest me?"

"Yes, Mr. Hargrave; and I imagine that you have fallen into the hands of a magistrate who will do his duty. Officers, seize that man!"

"Now, sir," said one of the officers, as he laid his hand upon the shoulder of Mr. Hargrave—"now, sir, if you please."

For a minute or two Mr. Hargrave seemed stunned, and so did his daughter; but then she cried out in frantic tones—

"Oh, no—no! He is yet my father! Save him! save him!"

"Impossible," said the magistrate.

The sound of his daughter's voice appeared to have the effect of rousing Mr. Hargrave to a sense of his position; and with a yell that sounded more like what might be uttered by some wild animal disappointed of its prey, when he imagined it to be all but in his grasp, he shook himself from the officers, and rushed out of the inn into the open air.

So very sudden and unexpected was this escape upon the part of Mr. Hargrave, that it took the officers completely by surprise for a few seconds; and then, when they did recover sufficiently to pursue him, they jostled each other at the door of the room in their eagerness so to do.

"After him!" said the magistrate—"after him, officers! It will be a disgrace to you all if he escape!"

The officers made a rush into the passage of the inn; and there they met the ostler, who cried out—

"That's the way he went!—that's the way!"

"Which way?"

"Round the corner, and into the kitchen-garden. Come on—come on!"

"Lead us the quickest way."

"Won't I, that's all. We will soon have him, I take it."

The officers followed the ostler into the kitchen garden of the inn, where he had accidentally seen Mr. Hargrave run, and as he had been listening in the passage, and had heard all that had taken place in the room, he was well aware of the terrible guilt of the man whom he pursued, and was quite willing to aid the officers in every possible way to capture him.

Upon reaching the garden the officers looked about them in surprise, for it



was not very large, and it was surrounded by a good brick wall on two sides and by a high paling with nails at the top of it on the third, while the fourth made up the back of the house, and yet no Mr. Hargrave was to be seen.

"By Jove," said one of them, "we are done."

"No—no, he's here," said the ostler; "I tell you, I saw him go. He's hiding among some of the bushes, or in the summer-house, or up a tree."

"Then, hang him, let us ferret him out."

With all the tact that their profession gave them in such matters, the officers searched the garden, but not the remotest trace of Mr. Hargrave could be found within it.

By this time, Claude Duval and his friends, too, had come out into the garden, fully expecting to see Mr. Hargrave a prisoner, and it was well that they did so come out, for the officers were just beginning to accuse the ostler of misleading them, when Dick Turpin said—

"You may depend the ostler is right; for there is a possibility from the window of the room in which we all were of seeing into the garden through a hedge that skirts the little farm yonder; and through that hedge I distinctly saw the figure of Mr. Hargrave, as he ran along the other side of it."

This put the question quite at rest as to whether he had gone that way or not, and a further search of the garden took place, but without effect, so that the officers were compelled to come back to the magistrate, and to inform him of the mysterious escape of the prisoner.

Jack, as he with Claude and Dick followed the officers, just touched each of them upon the arm, and said, in a whisper—

"Stop a bit."

"What is it, Jack?"

"Ah, you have found Hargrave," said Dick.

"Well, I may say I have."

"Call back the officers, then, and give the old rascal into custody."

"No—no, It is better not. The shock will be too great for the fair young creature, the daughter. He is dead."

"Dead, do you say? How do you know that?"

"There is a well in the garden."

"Ah, indeed, and so there is. He is down there, is he, Jack?"

"Yes; most probably by accident he has fallen into it, and there he lies."

"You saw him?"

"I did. By getting in one direction there is light enough down the well just to enable you to see the water, and there is something dark floating in it, which must be Mr. Hargrave."

"Or the bucket?" said Dick.

Claude smiled.

"Come," he said, "we may as well make sure of it."

Upon this they left the officers to go into the house, and proceeded to the well, which was in rather a secluded part of the garden, and there, sure enough, they all saw what looked like the body of a man in the water. The bucket was down, and the cord was at its utmost length; so Claude took hold of the windlass, and wound it up some distance, when the bucket, lodging underneath the dead body of the wretched Mr. Hargrave, brought it sufficiently up for them all three to identify it.

"'Tis he!" said Dick.

"I told you so," said Jack.

"It is, indeed," said Claude, as he let go the rope, and down the body went with a splash again to the bottom of the well.

They all three now looked at each other rather in doubt as to what they ought to do; but Claude Duval at length said—

"I tell you what I think the best plan, and that is, to leave the body where it is, and quietly tell the magistrate of it, and then get the daughter and her young lover to go to London and get married as soon as possible, for the probability is, that she is the heiress of all her father's wealth."

"Good," said Dick. "Let us try and manage it so."

With this impression and resolution, they came into the house again, and Claude Duval, stepping up to the young girl, said—

"My dear, it is quite clear that your father has escaped."

"Oh, sir, are you sure?"

"Quite sure; and now, if you feel that I have done sufficient for you and your lover to render my advice at all valuable or acceptable, I will give it to you."

"Yes, sir, we will follow your advice as if it were a command."

"It is, then, that you both go to London as quickly as possible and get married, and so put it out of the power of malignant fate to separate you."

The young lady was silent; but her lover cried out—

"I never heard such wise and excellent advice in all my life! If you only consent, dear one——"

"Oh, I cannot refuse you now. It would be absurd coquetry upon my part to do so. Take my hand, as you have already taken my heart."

"Never was consent so gracefully given," said Claude Duval. "I daresay the landlord here will go with you and see to every necessary arrangement."

"Oh, dear me, yes," he cried, "and so shall my wife, and her sister can mind the inn while we are gone; and as we have no custom, it is not at all likely that she will have a great deal of trouble. But I insist upon everybody having a drop of something before we go."

The officers did not seem to think that that proposition was by any manner of means a bad one; but the magistrate shook his head, and said—

"I will take a glass of water, if you please, in the which I can just as well drink to the health and happiness of the young couple as in any stronger liquid."

"Well, sir, if you won't have anything but water, I can promise you as fine a glass of that as the whole country can produce. I will go to the well in the kitchen garden myself and get you some."

"Thank you."

"No—no—no!" cried Claude Duval; "stop!"

"Eh? Did you say stop?"

"Yes, I—that is—Did you say the well in the kitchen garden?"

"To be sure I did."

"Well, then, I was going to say that I and my friends, in trying to get up a drop of water, broke the windlass."

"Oh, well, if that is the case, I can get some from a stone filter in the bar, if that will do."

"Quite as well," said the magistrate.

The water from the stone filter was got, and the health and happiness of the young couple was duly drunk; and then in the course of a quarter of an hour they and the landlord and his wife started for London.

The moment they were gone, Claude Duval took the magistrate aside.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS SET UP IN A NEW LINE OF BUSINESS COMPLETELY.

The expression of Claude Duval's face as he took the magistrate aside was quite sufficient to convince him that he had something of importance to communicate to him, and he listened with attention as Claude said—

"Sir, I prevented you from getting a draught of water from the well."

"You did; and that you had some motive in so doing, beyond what you state, I could very well guess."

"I had, sir. Mr. Hargrave is there."

"In the well?"

"Just so, sir; and, therefore, I thought that you would prefer a glass of water from any other place just now than that."

"God bless me, yes. But how came you not to mention it before?"

"I feared the effect which such a communication might have upon the sensitive feelings of his daughter; the tidings had better come to her more quietly than they could possibly have reached her here in the midst of all the excitements of the strange scenes that have been enacted in this place."

"You are right, sir. You are considerate as well as right."

"Now, however," added Duval, "I tell you, sir, because it is my duty to do

so, you holding the official position that you do, and perhaps, after all, it is the best end that such a man could have possibly come to, considering all things."

"It is, indeed. Think you it was suicide?"

"Certainly not: it was a mere accident, no doubt. He was flying from the officers, and, probably, attending more to them as they came in pursuit of him than to where he was going, and so fell into the well; and as he would go headforemost, probably death would be all but instantaneous."

"It will be my duty," said the magistrate, "then, to inform the coroner for the county of the affair; and then, gentlemen, I shall request the attendance of all three of you at the inquest that will take place."

Claude was silent for a moment or two, for the idea of troubling himself by attending an inquest on the body of old Hargrave was one that he could not entertain for a moment; and yet it was a difficult thing to say no.

"I beg," added the magistrate, "that you will not hesitate about the performance of such a public duty?"

The tone of voice in which this was said convinced Claude that Sir John was likely to have rather a bad opinion of him and his friends if they did not accede to the request; so he said with an air of frankness—

"Well, sir, be it so: we will attend. I presume it will be to-morrow morning, at the earliest, before it takes place?"

"Oh, yes; but if you will do me the favour to breakfast with me in the morning I shall be able to let you know precisely. You, perhaps, know my house. It is not very off—Fairlawn Lodge."

"Thank you, sir; we will do ourselves the honour. And now, as we have really rather an important engagement, we will take our leave of you and the inn for a short time; but as we return here to dinner, if anything should arise for which we may be required, we shall be most happy to attend you."

To all this, sounding so fair and straitforward as it did, the magistrate could make no possible objection; so Claude and his frends went to the inn-yard, and Claude called for the ostler.

"Coming, sir—coming."

"You will saddle our horses, and bring them out as quietly as you can."

"Yes, sir—directly, sir."

"Jack, and you, Dick?" said Claude.

"Yes, Duval? Anything amiss?"

"No, I hope not. But one of the officers has been staring at me for the last quarter of an hour in a way that I don't very well like."

"Indeed?" said Jack.

"Who is he?"

"One there with the red nose. Don't you see him?"

"Yes. Confound him!"

"So say I. But he has put me in the humour of getting away from here just as quick as I can."

"Look! look!" said Jack; "he is going to speak to Sir John."

"Is he?"

"Yes—yes! There, he is making his way up to him."

"I will stop that," said Claude.

If the horses had only been out and ready there is very little doubt but that Claude Duval would have disregarded any communication that the officer might have made to Sir John; but as they were not he felt that the only plan was to gain time, so he strode up to the magistrate at the very moment that the officer did, and just as the latter opened his mouth to speak, Claude said abruptly—

"Sir John, a word with you."

"Certainly, sir."

"I, too, Sir John," said the officer, "wish to say a word."

"Upon my reputation," said Claude, "this is not very respectful conduct. I was speaking to Sir John, and you, fellow, come and interfere."

"Yes, but——"

"Begone, sir," cried Sir John. "How dare you behave in this rude way to a gentleman? Begone, sir!"

"But, Sir John——"

"I will not hear you."

"Oh, sir, I assure you, that——"

"Will you be off, sir? If you say another word I will have your constable's warrant taken from you. Be off, sir."

The officer gave his hat a dab upon the top of it, and strode off in high dudgeon and indignation that he could not be heard.

"Now, sir, if you please," said the magistrate, "I have to apologise to you most sincerely for that fellow's inpertinence."

"Don't mention it, Sir John, I beg," said Claude. "I was only going to say that as I may see the secretary of state this evening, would you think that there was any impropriety in my mentioning to him the occurrence that has taken place in this house to-day?"

"None in the least."

"Then I shall probably do so, for it is a peculiarity of mine when I see a gentleman act in so noble and excellent a manner as you have done to-day, that I cannot, without great violence to my feelings, keep it to myself."

"Sir, you are too good."

"Oh, no—no, not at all."

While Claude and the magistrate were thus complimenting each other, Jack and Dick, who felt that there was no time to lose, urged the ostler to be quick with the horses, and themselves lent a helping hand in getting them ready, so that Claude, who every now and then stole a glance in that direction, saw them both mount, and that Jack held his horse by the bridle all ready equipped for the road.

"Now, Sir John," said Claude, "I leave you with very—very many thanks, sir, for the kindness and civility which we have all received at your hands,"

"Sir, the kindness has all been on your side."

Another moment and Claude was in the saddle. The magistrate patted his horse upon the neck, as he said—

"Upon my word, gentlemen, you are all three well mounted."

"Pretty well," said Claude.

"I don't think that there are three other such horses in the whole country. Why that black mare that you ride, sir,"—speaking to Dick—"is a magnificent creature."

"She is," said Dick. "My Bonny Bess."

"What, sir, do you call her?"

"Elizabeth, sir, that's all."

"Oh, I thought you said Bess—I—God bless me, what is this?"

The officer was tugging at the coat skirts of the magistrate, and then he called out, in a voice partly of rage and partly of fear—

"Sir John, I can't hold my tongue! Sir John, I can't hold my tongue if you kill me for speaking! I tell you, sir, that if that tall one on the bay horse is not Claude Duval, the highwayman, that they call Gentleman Jack, and if this one on the black mare is not Dick Turpin, I'll be hanged."

A flush of colour spread itself all over the face of the magistrate, for if this should be correct information, he saw how terribly he must have been taken in, and what a story it would be to tell against him.

"It's true, Sir John, upon my life it's true."

"No—no. It—cannot—be—To horse! to horse, officers! Hilloa—your pistols."

"Hold, Sir John," said Claude. "Accept our thanks, and if you wish to say anything more to us, you will be able to do it when you catch us at breakfast to-morrow. I have the honour to be Claude Duval."

"And I Dick Turpin," said Dick.

"And I the devil," said Jack. "Whoop, hilloa!"

With a bound they reached the road. For a moment they leant forward in their saddles, and then as the officers hurriedly dragged what horses they could find from the stables, off went Claude and his friends like the wind.

A straggling volley of pistol bullets came after them, without doing the least damage, and in ten minutes they were two miles from the little inn, where they had certainly done much more good than harm, and for which they ought not to have been hunted in such a way.

"Halt!" said Claude.

They all drew up.

"Where are we, Jack?"

"Not very far from Guildford, Claude; but it will be better to get out of the high-road, won't it?"

"Yes. Come on—here's a lane."

A very beautiful lane, down one side of which there flowed a pretty streamlet, lay to the left, as they looked westward, and they at once turned their horses' heads down it, and pursued it about half a mile. Then again ClaudeDuval called a halt, and said to his friends—

"What is to be in our line of business now? I do think that we have seldom, if ever, found ourselves so free from any engagements of any sort as we are now."

"That is true," said Dick Turpin; "but I suppose it is a state of things that is, after all, not likely to last very long."

"Certainly not," said Jack; "but I advise Claude, now that he really does feel himself to be in such a position, to think seriously."

"Of what, Jack?"

"Why, of adopting some means of acquiring money enough to retire from so very perilous a mode of life as this."

Claude shook his head, and then he said, in a voice of emotion—

"Jack, when you utter such a remark as that, you put me in mind of one who is dead and gone long ago, now as it seems to me. When she was alive—I need not more particularly allude to her, for well you know who it is that I mean—when she was alive I ever at her suggestion entertained the hope that the day might come when we might retire to some tranquil spot far away from the turmoils of the great world, and there find the repose that it is in vain to seek within its whirling vortex; but when she left me I had no such hopes, and I only look forward to some sudden death, which will only have one pang, after which I may again look into her eyes."

As he said this, Claude Duval glanced upward, and was silent for a moment or two. Then a remarkable change came over his face, and he cried out—

"Oh, God! 'tis she—'tis she! On the very edge of that silvery cloud I see her now—I see her now!"

CHAPTER CCCLXXXVIII.

THE GUILDFORD COACH COMES TO LONDON IN STRANGE HANDS.

Both Dick and Jack were rather alarmed, as well, indeed, they might be, at this strange conduct upon the part of Claude Duval, for it was the first slight intimation of the fact, or the seeming fact, that the adventurous life he had led had affected his intellect a little.

They looked at one another inquiringly, and then Jack, edging his horse close to Claude, laid his hand upon his arm, saying—

"Claude, you are not well?"

"Yes—yes, Jack, I am quite well."

"No, you ain't," said Dick. "There has been too much excitement at work

in your brain, Claude. Come, now, I have certain advice to offer to you, which I hope you will take, for I feel confident it will do you good."

"But I saw her," said Caude. "I tell you I saw her."

"Imagination has played you a trick, Claude."

"No—no! I saw her upon the edge of the cloud, and for a moment—only for a moment, for ere you could say 'Beloved!' 'twas gone. She regarded me with a sweet smile, and beckoned to me."

"Do not, I implore you," said Jack, "give way to such fancies. Believe me, Claude, that if you do, they will take such a hold of you that they will quite unman you, and you will find yourself unfit for any exertion when you are called upon for it."

"No—no, not that, Jack. I am all right as far as that goes, but I am warned, I tell you both."

"Warned of what?" said Dick.

"Of the fact that we shall soon part. And yet I will not willingly, and of my own accord, part with either of you on this side of the grave."

It was impossible that Dick or Jack could pretend to misunderstand that this was a foreboding of death on the part of Claude Duval; and after a brief pause Dick said to him in a serious tone of voice—

"Claude, let me warn you of one thing, and that is, that imagination and fear often fulfil their own prophecies."

"I know it, Dick, but it will not be so in this case; believe me, I will fight to the last; but yet I have a belief that I am near to the end of my career."

"I will hear no more of this," said Jack. "These gloomy fancies will upset us all. I don't wish to hear more about such matters. My own nerves are none of the strongest, as you both well know, and the best thing we can do is to talk of something pleasant, and contrive to live just as long as we possibly can without any forebodings upon the subject."

"I will say no more," said Claude.

"That is right," said Dick; "and now let us trot on again for a little space."

They did trot on, but neither Jack nor Dick could be off from noticing that Claude frequently cast his eyes up to the fleeting clouds that were careering over the sky, evidently having in his mind a hope that he should see again the vision that his heated fancy had once produced.

They neither of them thought it prudent, though, to nurse such thoughts by any further remarks concerning them, so they tried to say things to Claude that would seem to be the furthest possible from any such suggestion, and they had the satisfaction in a little time of finding that to all outward appearance he was much as usual.

The lane that they were in was about a mile and a half in extent, and seemed to lead right away towards the upper part of the Hammersmith Road; but after going about a mile down it they found that the hedge upon one side of it skirted a farm-yard, and from the number of handsome-looking hay-ricks about, they came to the conclusion that they were close to some homestead of importance as regarded size.

"Suppose we stop here," said Dick.

"What, in this lane?" said Claude.

"No; but just take a look over the hedge, Claude, and say what you think of this place. It appears to me that if we must stop somewhere it is better that it should be where we are less likely to meet with unwelcome intruders. One thing is quite clear that we cannot very well keep our horses on their feet now till the evening, if we expect them to be in an efficient condition when that time comes."

"That is true."

"Well, then, let us ask the hospitality of the people of this farm for some few hours, and that will sufficiently swallow up the time, so that we shall be able to take to the road again tolerably fresh."

"Yes," said Jack; "that is better than risking the stopping at any inn."

"Be it so," said Claude Duval.

Having thus obtained Claude's consent to a halt, they rode on till they came to a gate, which led into rather a pretty-looking paddock, at the farther end of which there was another gate, evidently close to the house itself; but, as yet, they could not see any one.

They opened the gate, and rode into the paddock; and then rather a bluff-looking countryman met them, and looked inquiringly at them, upon which Claude said to him—

"My friend, can you allow our horses a rest for an hour or so in the homestead, while we indulge ourselves with a glass of your old ale?"

"Well, I'm danged," said the man, "if you ain't as good as a witch."

"How do you mean?"

"We have got some old ale."

"Oh, yes, I know that quite well," added Claude, who had no very flattering idea of the intellect of the countryman, from his wondering at such an evident guess as that there was some old ale to be had at an English farmhouse.

The terms upon which Claude and his friends could stay at the place as long as they liked were easily settled; and, in wandering about a delicious garden that was attached to the place, they almost forgot that there was such things as prisons and officers in the world.

The shades of evening, however, at last began to fall across the landscape; and the distant trees and hedges and fields began to be mingled together in a mass of confusion.

"It is time to go," said Duval.

"Yes," said Dick. "But stop, now, just for a few moments. I told you while we were in the lane that I had a proposition to make to you; and, as I did not then mention it, I will now."

"Excuse us, Dick, for our non-attention."

"Don't mention that. But listen to me: I should like a change."

"A change, Dick.

"Yes, I want a month's peace and quietness; so I propose that we try this night what we can do on the Guildford road, as regards putting us in funds; and then, if we are fortunate enough to get a good purse full enough for the purpose, I would wish that we should go to some quiet sea-side place for a time, and forget that we are highwaymen, and in peace and security recover the tenour of our minds a little."

Claude looked at Dick for a moment in silence, and then he said—

"This is proposed for my interest, Dick."

"Yes, partly, and partly for my own, and partly for Jack's. I know that we all need such a change. Come, now, Claude, don't object to it."

"I won't. Be it as you propose, if agreeable to Jack. What do you say to it, my old friend?"

"I am perfectly willing," said Jack. "Be it as you both agree; and, in fact, what is now proposed is particularly agreeable to me, and it would be still more so if it could be accomplished at once without the proceeding of to-night's work upon the road."

"Well, let me see," said Dick. "What money have you, Jack."

"None."

"Then that is soon settled. What have you, Claude?"

"Something under ten pounds."

Dick executed a long whistle, and then he said—

"I have about twenty pounds, but that will not be enough to do for us all three, and take care of the cattle, too, for that time, so there is an end of it. To the road we must go, and good luck go with us."

"Amen!" said Jack.

Claude nodded his head, and then he said—

"Now, Dick, you shall be general-in-chief to-night. If you think that the



THE FRIENDS WAITING THE ARRIVAL OF THE GUILDFORD COACH.

Guildford road is the best one we will take to it at once; so come on, I know the way."

This, then, was formally agreed upon between them all, that as soon as they had in any way made up the sum of one hundred pounds they would cease their depredations, and start across the country to some of the little villages upon the Kentish coast, and there take up their abode for a month.

Man proposes and fate disposes, though, and it will be seen whether Claude or his friends were ever destined to carry out such an idea as that which they now entertained.

The night, as it happened, was a very dark one, indeed very much darker than was at all to be expected, considering the age of the moon, but the fact was that a sudden shift of wind about sunset brought from the south-west a great mass of clouds, which effectually obscured all traces of moonlight; and, although they did not at once bring rain, it was pretty evident that they were sufficiently charged with aqueous particles to do so at any small amount of provocation.

This state of things was in many respects more favourable for the designs of Claude Duval and his associates than as if the night had been fine, although in one respect a rather threatening night was bad for them, inasmuch as it kept at home persons who otherwise might have ventured out into the roads, and so become the prey of the highwaymen.

Nevertheless, the three friends took their route by the nearest way they could find to the Guildford road, which was then a much more popular one as regarded coaches, both public and private, than it is now.

By going some distance over a field or two, where they found a bridle path, they at length emerged in a part of the road that was at the foot of a hill, and which was exceedingly favourable for their purpose, inasmuch as if they got just a little way on the assent, as the hill went Londonwise, they would be able to stop any vehicle or horse with ease.

"Here, then, as I am commander-in-chief," said Dick, "I should say, we pause."

"So be it," said Claude.

"But," added Dick, "as I am not at all above taking advice, I would beg to say—Is not this a good place for our purpose?"

"It is, Dick. I don't think, viewing the general description of the ground, we could have a better. All we want now is the enemy."

"And that wish is soon supplied," said Jack, "for, lo! I hear the sound of a horse's feet."

As Dick and Duval had been talking while Jack had been listening, he had caught the sound of advancing feet first; but the moment they turned their attention to the subject they too heard it.

"One horse," said Claude, "and so, we may conclude, one horseman. Who will stop him? It don't want three to one man."

"I will," said Dick.

"Very well; we will take it by turns as long as single passengers only appear. I will sally out to the next one, and you to the third, Jack."

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIX.

THE OFFICERS OF JUSTICE ARE UPON THE TRACK OF THE HIGHWAYMEN.

THERE was not much time for consideration now, for the approaching horseman came on at rather a sharp trot. Upon getting to the commencement of the ascent of the hill, though, he altered the pace of his steed to a walk, and then Dick Turpin went out quite gently into the road and intercepted him.

"Good evening, sir," said Dick.

The horseman paused on the moment, and said in a mild voice—

"Goon evening, sir; but I don't know you."

"You will remember me, though," said Dick. "I don't want to detain you longer than necessary, but you will oblige me with your purse, sir."

"A highwayman!"

"Call me what you will, but be quick."

"Alas, sir, I certainly have a small sum of money about me, but it is the sole hope of one who is in great distress for the want of it. I implore you not to take it from me."

"Stuff," said Dick. "Come, sir, give it up."

"But let me tell you that I am poor. I am a clergyman—a curate merely; my own income is not fifty pounds a year. The little sum of money that I have with me is for the relief of the orphan and the widow. Oh, young man, if you have a heart at all you will let me pass in peace; but if you have not, there is the money, and may God forgive you as I do."

"Pass on," said Dick. "I cannot say whether you are deceiving me and

only playing a part or not, but the doubt is sufficient, so pass on. I will not take your money."

Upon this, the clergyman rode close up to Dick, and said—

"It is dark, but yet I would fain see your face, that I may know you again if ever it should be in my power to do you a kindness."

"No—no. It is as well not."

"Oh, yes—yes. Honour me so far, my friend, I beg of you. There, now, a cloud has partially swept from over the face of the moon, and if you turn this way I shall see you."

"Look at me, then," said Dick Turpin, as he took off his hat, and the curate did take a good look at him by the dim night light.

"Shall you know me again?" said Dick.

"I shall."

"Then good-night, sir, and good speed to you."

"Farewell!"

The curate set spurs to his horse, and rode off.

"Am I done," said Dick to himself, "or not? Well, at any rate, if I am taken in, the fellow deserved to get off for his cleverness in playing the part that he did, for in good truth it was admirably done, and, after all, I rather incline to the opinion that it was all true."

When Dick got back to his friends he told them exactly what had taken place, and Claude said at once—

"You did quite right, Dick. The gold that would be necessary for the wants of the widow and the orphan would do us no good."

"Not a whit," said Jack. "It would bring a curse with it."

"So I thought," said Dick, "but it is your turn next, Claude, and here comes the chance. Another horseman, by Jove! The road is well frequented to-night."

From the same direction, that is to say, from countrywise, that the curate had come, they now heard a horse approaching at a rapid canter, and Claude Duval, finding that there was no time to lose, sprang out into the road, and called out—

"Stop, on your life!"

There was a scream, then, evidently in a female voice, and the horse was pulled up so quickly that it reared right on to its haunches, and then commenced plunging in evident fright.

Claude could just see that it was a female figure that was upon the horse, and seizing the opportunity to do so effectually, he dashed forward and caught the refractory horse by the bridle, and brought it to a state of quietness in a few minutes.

"Oh, sir," said the voice of evidently quite a young girl, "was it you who called out to me to stop, or have you saved me from that danger as well as from the more real one of a fall from my horse?"

Claude hesitated a moment, and then he said—

"I did call out to you to stop, but it was a mistake."

"A mistake, sir?"

"Yes, I took you for some one else, that is all. You are free to pursue your journey, if you please. Your steed is quiet now."

"Thank you, sir; but—but—you are not really a—a——"

"A gentleman, I hope," said Claude, as he slightly raised his hat, "having in all respects behaved as one to you. It is better not to inquire further."

"Sir, I thank you. Good night."

"Good night."

The young lady cantered on, and Claude went back to his friends and laughed, as he said to them—

"Another failure. It was a girl merely; so, of course, I let her go on without ever inquiring if she had any money with her. It really don't seem as if we were destined to do much good upon this road to-night, for there seems to arise some good reason for letting every one pass whom we may happen to stop upon the highway."

"Well," said Jack, "it is my turn next, however, and perhaps I shall have better luck than either of you."

"Hush!" said Dick. "Jack, you won't go single-handed upon the next adventure. Don't you hear?'

"Yes, the sound of wheels. It is a stage coach."

"Are you sure of that? Listen again. Perhaps, after all, it may be some private vehicle."

They all three now listened attentively, and they distinctly heard the tramp of four horses, and the heavy, grinding sound of the wheels of a vehicle of considerable weight upon the road; but if there had been any doubt at all upon the character of the vehicle that was approaching it would have been completely set at rest by the braying sound of a horn, that was evidently blown by the guard of the coach.

That it was a public vehicle that was now rapidly approaching was evident, and Jack at once said—

"Now you know it is a stage coach."

"We do,' said Dick.

"Yes," said Claude, "there cannot be any mistake about it now."

"What is to be done?" said Dick.

Jack was rather thoughtful, and evidently waited to hear what Claude would say upon the subject; and after the pause of a moment or two, he spoke—

"Here are three of us," he said, "and there is a stage coach coming along upon the road. It is evidently bound for London, and is likely enough to have in and about it passengers sufficient to make up the money that we want. If we can get that money by such a *coup* as stopping the coach at once, I think it is better than waiting here for perhaps half the night, and only falling in with such chances as have already come across us."

"That is true," said Dick.

"Why, yes," said Jack, "I cannot deny it."

"Then," added Claude, "what do you both say? Shall we attack the coach, or leave it alone?"

"Attack it," said Dick.

"Then," said Jack, "as I should be in a minority if I were to say no to the proposition, I won't; and, therefore, you may consider that I agree."

"On, then," said Dick, "for there is no time to lose. What is to be the order of the attack, Claude?"

"Anyhow you please, as far as I am concerned."

"Then, Jack, you stop the leading horses. I will keep the coachman and guard quiet, and you, Claude, see to the passengers. Will that do?"

"Perfectly well."

"Come on, then, for there are the lights of the coach already flashing on the herbage of the hedgerows."

To stop a stage coach with four good horses in it, going at its usual pace upon a country road, would, under ordinary circumstances, have been rather a difficult as well as a hazardous exploit; but when such a feat was done by any of the knights of the road they took good care to place themselves under such peculiar conditions that the thing was not near so troublesome to do as it might have been.

One of the most essential of these conditions was to be upon the aclivity of a hill, so that the horses were, at any rate, reduced to a walk nearly, and the difficulty of stopping them was very materially reduced.

This was precisely the position occupied by Claude and his two friends upon the occasion of stopping the Guildford coach.

The guard of the coach blew his horn again, doubtless for the purpose of warning any vehicle that might be coming down the hill of the close proximity of the coach, and then the horses were brought to a walk, and the broad glare of the lamps fell slowly and oddly enough upon the hedges and the trees on each side of the road.

"Are you ready?" said Dick Turpin.

"Quite," said Jack.

"Yes," said Claude, "I am quite ready."

"On, then, at once, and don't give them time to think about it."

Dick did not pause another moment, but giving his horse an impulse forward, he rode out into the middle of the road, and presented a pistol at the coachman, crying out in a firm, clear voice, as he did so—

"Pull up, or you are a dead man!"

Upon the impulse of the moment the coachman pulled up, and then Jack was at the heads of the leaders in another moment, and without alarming them at all took gently hold of one of them by the bridle, so that they understood they were to stand still.

"Oh, Lord!" said the coachman. "Here's no end of highwaymen stopped the coach, as I'm a sinner!"

"Guard!" said Turpin, "guard!"

"What now?" said the guard.

"You are very likely armed," said Dick, "and I only speak to warn you that we are in sufficient force to make resistance perfectly useless; so if you attempt to make any it can only have to you the effect of getting your brains blown out."

"Yes," said Claude, as he rode up to the side of the coach, "that is about it; and now that you understand your situation, your best plan will be to be quiet."

"Blaze away at 'em, Bill," said the coachman. "You have got a blunderbuss.

"Yes," said Bill, "but don't you hear, they are going to blow my brains out if I do? and as they are the only brains I have got, I don't seem to like it."

"You are a sensible man," said Dick.

"Thank you, sir."

"You are a coward, Bill," said the coachman.

"I know it," said Bill, "that's why I was made guard of a coach, you see, Joe, 'cos it wasn't supposed I would bring you and the passengers into any danger by useless resistance."

The coachman shook his head despairingly, and Claude Duval at once let down the window on the off side of the coach, and looking into the vehicle, he said—

"If there be any ladies here, they need not be at all alarmed, as no violence is intended."

"Violence, sir!" cried a voice. "What the devil is the meaning of all this? Coachman!—I say, coachman! go on, or I shall bring an action against your proprietors for delaying me on my journey."

"The coachman dare not go on, sir," said Claude, "and it is quite useless for you to put yourself in a passion. You will be so good as to deliver up your money, watches, and jewellery, if you please, and be quick about it."

"Murder!" cried a lady's voice.

"No, madam," said Claude, "there is no murder in the case."

"Why, good gracious, man! you don't want to rob us?"

"I do, madam."

"Why, it's a highwayman!" cried the man's voice. "Upon my life this is a pretty state of things. Here we are stopped by a highwayman. Sir Peter Brown!—Sir Peter Brown, I say! are you going to stand this?"

"Oh, yes," said a weak voice—"oh, yes, and a great deal more, if necessary. I cannot allow my serenity to be disturbed by my ideas of resistance; so, my good fellow, here is my purse. There are about forty pounds in it, to which, I'm sure, you are quite welcome, if you will be very quiet and polite in what you have to do."

"Thank you, sir," said Claude. "Now you, sir, if you please."

"But, bless me!" cried the other man, "I—I——"

"Confound you, sir!" said Claude, as he put the lock of one of his pistols in trim for firing. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, to force me to fire into the coach, for somebody else may get hurt. Lean forward, sir, that I may get a good aim at you alone."

"Oh, no! The Lord have mercy upon me! Good sir, oh, don't—don't! There is my purse, and my watch. Oh, do go away at once, for I don't feel very well."

CHAPTER CCCXC.

THE GUILDFORD COACH PASSES COMPLETELY INTO NEW HANDS.

By the feel of the purse that was handed to him, Claude Duval had every reason to believe that it was tolerably well filled, so he was pretty well satisfied with the result of the attack upon the coach. The lady, who was the only other passenger in the vehicle, give such evident symptoms of being in hysterics, that Claude Duval said to her—

"Madam, if you wish to get rid of me you can do so at once, by handing me your purse. Come, be quick, now."

"Oh, give it to him," said the passenger who had been first inclined to bully Claude—"give it to him, and let him go."

"Yes," said the other, who was named Sir Peter Brown, as he calmly took a pinch of snuff—"yes, I think that will be the plan, madam."

"Take it—oh, take it. There it is, and my rings, too—my brooch—oh, my bracelets—oh—oh!"

"I don't want your jewellery," said Claude. "Good-night, madam; and I trust, gentlemen, you are much more frightened than hurt."

"Claude—Claude!" cried Dick.

"Yes, Dick?"

"Look down the road there! What is that?"

Claude did look down the road; and what he saw for a few moments had the effect of rather confusing him, for he could not make out what it was.

"What is it, Dick?" he said. "Is it a bonfire moving along, or what?"

"No, Claude, it is a strong party of mounted men, preceded by two bearing flambeaux. Don't you see them now?"

"Ah, yes, I do."

"We must be off. The only three outside passengers that there were to the coach slid down, and ran off. I let them go, as is my custom, pretending not to see them; but now they will give the alarm to those people who are advancing without a doubt, and we shall be taken if we don't mind."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried the coachman. "Now, my fine fellows, I rather think you are in for it, for I can see, if you can't, that it is a strong party of mounted police that is coming up the road. It is to be hoped you have made your wills all of you."

"Be quiet," said Claude.

"Oh, yes, I'll be quiet. Ha! ha!"

"Dick, we may yet baffle them."

"How? By flight?"

"Yes, partly, and partly by *finesse*. Will you see to my horse?"

"Certainly I will."

Claude dismounted rapidly, and then, rather to the surprise of Dick, he mounted on to the coach box, and snatching the reins from the hands of the coachman, he said—

"Get down, or you are a dead man!"

The coachman, seeing a pistol in the right hand of Claude, rolled off the box into the road in a moment, calling out as he did so—

"Bill—Bill, why don't you shoot him?"

"I'd rather not," said Bill. "Two can play at that game, you know, Joe. Is there anything I can do, sir"—addressing Claude Duval—"to give you any satisfaction?"

"Yes. Be off with you after the coachman."

"With all the pleasure in life, sir."

With amazing celerity the guard dropped from the roof of the coach on to the road; but he took his blunderbuss with him.

"Now, Dick," cried Claude, "you and Jack ride on in front of the leaders, and I will drive the coach. Off we go, and all's right."

"Good," said Dick. "I see now. It is the best plan in the world."

Claude touched the horses with the whip, and off they went; but at that moment the guard did a very desperate thing, for kneeling down in the middle of the road, he fired his blunderbuss after the coach, and half a dozen slugs with which it was loaded went, slanting upwards fortunately, right through the back panel.

The effect of this discharge was to frighten the old lady in the inside of the coach into a state of hysterics, and to blow off the hat and wig of Sir Peter Brown, while one of the slugs hit the irascible gentleman on the side of the nose, and reduced that prominent member of his face from an aquiline, of which he used to be very proud, to a snub.

"Confound the fellow!" said Claude, when he heard the discharge of the blunderbuss. "If I had not four horses to manage, I would let him know that such tricks were not to be played with impunity."

It was a good thing now for the safety of the coach and the inside passengers, and himself, too, that Claude Duval was a good whip, for the horses had become very much alarmed at the sudden discharge of the blunderbuss, and after kicking a little had fairly broke into a gallop.

Any effort to pull the cattle in for a mile or so would most likely have ended in the upset of the whole concern; so Claude acted upon the prudent plan of rather encouraging them in a gallop than otherwise, so that they soon got tired of it, and comfortably subsided into a good round trot of about nine miles an hour.

During the time that the horses had made such speed, Dick and Jack had got out of the way, and only kept up with the coach, one on each side of it; but now they resumed their position in the front, which would hide them from any one who might be coming after the vehicle.

Gradually, then, Claude pulled up, and said to Dick—

"Look down the road, and see if you can see anything of the rascals we expected after us, Dick."

"No. But there is a turn in the road."

"Turn? There is, and rather a sharp one too. I thought that we should have been upset at it."

Now, the passengers in the inside of the coach had been so confused altogether at the attack, that they were utterly unaware of the change of the driver that the coach had, and hearing some talking now, and feeling that after the mad way in which the coach had been going on that it had come to a stand still, the irascible gentleman whose nose had suffered pulled down the glass, and popped his head out at the window.

"Hilloa! hilloa!"

"What's the matter?" said Claude.

"Coachman! coachman!"

Claude guessed the mistake at once, and imitating the voice of the coachman as well as he could from hearing it only once or twice, he said—

"Here you are, sir. Hope all's right, sir?"

"No, you rascal, all's wrong."

"Sorry to hear it, sir."

"You sorry to hear it, you vagabond? How dared you submit to those rascally highwaymen in the way you did?"

"Couldn't help it, sir."

"You couldn't help it, you wretch? You know well that you could help it, and your duty was to help it; but I'll bring an action, sir, against your proprietors, sir, I will, sir, you vagabond; and I don't fell quite sure but what you are in the plot yourself, confound you!"

"Oh, dear, no, sir."

"But I say, oh, yes, sir! and I only wish I had hold of the rascals, now I have got my pistols out of my travelling vallise—where, somehow or another, they always are when I want them most—I would let them see that an Englishman's coach as well as his house were his castle."

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, sir, indeed! Curse you, sir!—that's what I say."

The irascible gentleman drew up the window with such violence, that it was a wonder he did not smash it at once.

"On again, Claude," said Dick, "they come—look!"

Claude gave one glance behind the coach, and then he saw the party with their flambaux advancing at a trot.

"No," he said. "It is better to brave it out, now. You both of you get into the shadow of the trees, and leave all to me."

"We will aid you," said Dick, "if there be any occasion."

"Yes," said Jack. "Trust us for that."

"I do."

Both Jack and Dick, now, got out of sight almost among the large overhanging branches of a chestnut tree, that grew by the road-side, and Claude put on the coachman's extra great-coat, that fortunately for him was upon the box. In the pocket of the coat, too, was a large red worsted comforter; and when Claude got that round his neck and the coat on, he was as thoroughly disguised as any one need wish to be.

He had just completed these little arrangements, when a party of twenty-five well armed and well mounted men arrived at the coach.

A man with a pistol in his hand, and who was evidently the leader of the mounted force, rode up to the side of the coach, and cried out to Claude—

"Hilloa! Mr. Coachman, have you been stopped on the road?"

"Oh, lor, yes, sir."

"Oh, you have?"

"Haven't I, sir, and my guard killed, and my passengers robbed!"

"Oh, indeed. I thought as much."

"My 'osses, too, sir, took fright, and off they set, and if I hadn't been as good a whip as there is a goin', though I says it myself as perhaps oughtn't, there would have been a regular upset, and no mistake."

"No doubt of it, the rascals. Did you know them?"

"Me, sir? Oh, lor, no!"

"Well, then, I can tell you that in all likelihood it was Claude Duval, and a couple of fellows who are with him, one of whom is the famous, Dick Turpin, on that four-footed devil, his black mare."

"Oh, sir, you don't say so?"

"It is so, in sober truth."

"Then we are all dead, sir!"

"Oh, no, you are not. I and my men will hunt Claude Duval till we find him; but we are off the scent just now. Do you know which way he went?"

"Yes, to be sure I do."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes, sir. You saw a lane just before you got to the turn in the road, by the old finger-post?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, then, sir, he went down there along with some other fellows, and thankful enough was I when he did, for then I thought that we might be rid of 'em for to-night, at all events. I only wish, sir, you may catch him. I declare I'm all of a shake, but I don't think any of us are killed, sir, except my poor guard."

"We'll have the rascals—we'll have them. Thank you for your information, coachman, and you will hear of it again if we catch them."



"No doubt of that, sir."

"This way—this way," cried the chief officer, as he turned his horse's head in the contrary direction again. "This way, my men. Good-night, coachman."

"Good-night, sir."

Another moment, and the twenty-five officers were all on the gallop away from Claude Duval and his friends, as quickly as they could possibly go.

"Bravo!" cried Turpin, clapping his hands as though he were applauding at a theatre. "Bravo! bravo!"

"So say I," said Jack.

"Well, it is not bad," said Claude; "and now I have no sort of objection to bidding good-by to the Guildford coach. Where's my horse?"

"Here you are, all right, Claude."

"Thank you. But the best plan will be to release the horses from the coach, and let them trot quietly to town by themselves, otherwise the passengers may get upset, after all, and it will do us no good to expose them to any such dangers."

"None in the least," said Jack. "I'll manage it."

With his experience and tact with regard to horses, Jack in a very few minutes released all the four horses from the coach, and then away they trotted to town, not at all displeased not to have dragging behind them the vehicle, that was thus left alone in its glory in the road.

Claude Duval then mounted again, and going up to the coach door, he let down the blind, and said in quite an easy tone of manner as he looked in at the astonished passengers—

"There was a gentleman here who said he had got his pistols ready for me if I came again; and as I am here, perhaps he will explain what he meant by that remark about me."

"Oh, lord, no!" cried the irascible gentleman. "This is the devil himself!"

"If you are the same highwayman who before favoured me with your company," said Sir Peter Brown, "I beg to state that I have not had time to go home and get any more money."

Claude laughed and drew up the window again; and then turning to Jack and Dick, he said—

"Come, I rather think that we may now conclude this adventure to be settled to the satisfaction of all three of us; and the sooner we go from the coach the better."

"So say I," replied Dick.

"And I," said Jack.

"Come on, then. Where is my horse, Jack?"

"Here, Claude, and all right."

Another moment and Claude Duval was mounted again, and with his two friends on the road, ready and fearless for whatever might occur. They paused for a few moments, and the silence that was between them seemed as though it had something ominous about it. It was Dick Turpin who broke the silence.

"Claude," he said, "which way do you go now? Have you enough, do you think, to make it worth our while to try to carry out the little plan we thought of awhile ago?"

"Ay," said Jack, "that is it."

"I will soon see," said Claude, as he let the bridle of his horse go on to the creature's neck—"I will soon see about that. Perhaps you could let me have a match alight for a moment; for I think that there are notes in one of the purses."

"To be sure," said Jack.

"No!" cried Dick—"no, don't be quite so hasty. I hear nothing, but Bess does. Only notice her."

Turpin's steed was pawing the ground in rather a suspicious manner, and the creature's ears were projected forward so as to catch the slightest sound.

CHAPTER CCCXCI.

CLAUDE DUVAL FULFILS THE PROPHETIC FEELING OF HIS SOUL.

"WHAT does Bess mean?" said Claude Duval to Dick, after the pause of a few moments, during which they heard no alarm.

"She means that there is danger. You hold her for a moment, Jack, while I place my ear close to the ground and listen."

"I will, Dick."

Turpin dismounted and flung himself flat on the ground, placing his ear close to it, and after about half a minute's intent listening he rose, and springing into the saddle, he said—

"Claude, my boy, they are trying to steal a march upon us."

"How do you mean?"

"I am quite confident that a number of horses are coming along the road so carefully and slowly that they may be within a few hundred yards of us before we should under ordinary circumstances hear any sound of their approaching feet."

"Ah, say you so?"

"It is so. I cannot help thinking that they must have adopted some mode of more effectually deadening the sound of the creatures' hoofs upon the road."

"That may be done," said Jack.

"As how, Jack?" said Claude. "I don't see how on the spur of the moment such a feat could be accomplished."

"Oh, yes; I once tied a silk handkerchief over one of the feet of my horse, many times doubled, and it was surprising how it stilled the sound. But I have an opinion with regard to these advancing officers, which I think, if we do ever know the rights of the matter, is very likely to turn out the correct one."

"What is it, Jack?"

"Simply, that before they all got very far from here they met tht guard and the coachman, who have given the information, not strictly in accordance with what they got from us"

"It must be so."

"Nothing more likely," said Dick. "This will be our way, I take it. And now I seriously incline to get over the first practicable hedge we happen to come to and make our way into the open fields. So long as we continue upon roads, whether they be highways or byeways, we run the risk of encountering the officers."

"Be it so," said Claude.

They now, at rather a swift canter, for they thought that was the pace that would make the least noise on the road, which happened to be pretty hard just about that spot, went on townwards, until Dick Turpin, who was a little in advance, came to a portion of the hedge by the wayside which was of so straggling and imperfect a nature that there could be no sort of difficulty in crossing with the horses.

"This will do," he said.

"We follow you, Dick," said Claude, "for, if you recollect, you accepted the appointment of commander-in-chief, and I am still willing to concede it to you."

"And I," said Jack.

"No—no, that's all nonsense. You are our chief, Duval, and to you we both look. But that don't much matter; Bess I know can do this feat of leaping from the road into the fields, for she is well used to it, and, perhaps, after seeing her do it, your horses will follow."

As he spoke, Turpin just patted the neck of the beautiful creature he rode, and in another minute she had made a dash at the little embankment by the side of the road, and clearing the slight obstruction of a straggling alder branch or two, she was in the meadow beyond in safety with Dick Turpin.

"Bravo!" said Claude.

"Yes," said Jack, "it was beautifully done."

"Come on—come on. I don't know how it is so," said Dick, rather hurriedly, "but now that I am here upon the green sward I seem to hear the sound of horses' feet in this direction easier than I did even upon the road."

Thus urged, both Claude and Jack spurred their horses up the embankment, and they both got into the meadow rather gallantly.

"Well done," said Dick.

"Yes," said Jack, "as regards the scramble it is; but let us now listen for the sounds you heard, Dick."

Claude said nothing, but he bent his head down about on a level with the saddle, and with his hand at his left ear he listened intently.

A strange clanking sound came upon the night air. They all heard that.

"What is it?" said Jack.

"What is what?" said Claude, for he wanted to hear from Jack if he, too, heard the clanking sound.

"Why I don't know how to describe it, but if I didn't think it was not at all likely, I should say that there was a sound not unlike that which would be produced by military accoutrements."

"Yes, that's it."

"What's it, Claude?"

"We are pursued still by the officers, who, no doubt, have fallen in with the coachman and the guard or one of them, and by some means or another, too, they have got the aid of some military."

"Think you so, indeed?" said Dick.

"I do."

"Then there is no time to lose, and let who will be in command among us I say but one word, and that is, on—on!"

Dick did not stop to argue the matter, but off he set, and was quickly followed by Claude Duval and Jack. The meadow in which they were was certainly of considerable extent; but going at the rate they did they very soon cleared it, and then they came to a very low and easily scaled hedge which they got through in a moment, but to their mortification they found the field upon the other side was a ploughed one, and at every step the horses sunk above their fetlocks in the soil.

The labour of getting along this field at any speed was truly terrific; and after trying a canter, and a gallop, and then a trot, they were compelled to let the horses walk it, for fear of straining them, so that when they should get upon beaten ground they would be found lame after such an exertion.

Fortunately this ploughed land was not of very great extent, and when they emerged from it, they came upon a portion of grass that covered a long avenue, bordered by chestnut trees on each side.

The avenue really looked so artificial, that Claude Duval and his friends could scarcely bring themselves to think that it was other than a work of art.

The morning light was just beginning to show itself in the eastern sky now, and as a long pencil of grayish, strange colour shot up from the horizon, Dick waved his hand, saying—

"To cover! To cover! They come! On—on! Follow me!"

Without asking Dick for the special cause of this sudden alarm, or staying to look for it themselves, both Jack and Claude followed him closely up the avenue, and then they came to a row of iron hurdles, beyond which they could just see, looming larger in the morning light, several huge haystacks.

That they had come upon a farmyard, instead of keeping to the open fields, was now a fact too evident to dispute. But Dick did not hesitate a moment. Springing from his horse, he laid violent hands upon several of the hurdles, and succeeded in displacing them, and then he cried out in a sharp, quick, but yet suppressed voice, to his friends—

"Come on—come on! Concealment is our only chance."

While Dick Turpin had been displacing the iron hurdles, both Claude and Jack had had time to take a look along the seemingly artificial avenue down which they had come, and then they no longer doubted the wisdom of the hurried proceedings of their friend Turpin.

It so happened that rather a heavy gleam of light fell from the eastern sky round a little clump of trees at the commencement of the avenue, just after leaving the ploughed field, and that streak of light fell right upon the arms and accoutrements of about half a dozen lancers, whose gay equipage and martial appearance was certainly rather out of place in that seemingly peaceful region, in which the birds were just awakening to welcome the rising sun.

We may as well now state at once to the reader the cause of this sudden and truly alarming accession of strength to the attacking party.

The fact was, that the officers, with the exception of one, were all totally deceived by the assumption of the character of coachman of the Guildford Celerity by Claude Duval. That one officer, however, happened to know the coachman well, and he thought that there was a slight difference of tone that was rather odd.

It said a great deal, though, for the accuracy of Claude's sudden assumption of the coachman's character, that this man could only suspect that there was something rather odd in his friend's voice, without being able to pronounce positively upon the fact that it was not him.

After the party had ridden of, and taken the route that Claude had sent them upon, and which would have separated them from the coach further and further, this one suspicious officer communicated to the commander of the party his suspicions that they were being deceived in some way.

This brought the party to a halt.

After some parley, then, it was agreed to send six of the force still onwards by that route, while the remainder should go back and seek to overtake the coach again, and thoroughly satisfy themselves with regard to the identity of the coachman; and it was in the attempt to carry out this portion of their plan that, after reaching the road again, they heard a faint voice crying out—

"Hilloa! hilloa!"

Upon coming to a halt, and answering the cry, it was repeated, and then they followed the sound, till they came to the guard of the Guilford Celerity, who was lying in a ditch by the road-side, with his discharged blunderbuss still in his grasp.

A good shaking and some eager questions put to him by the officers, at once let him see that he was among friends; and then out came the whole affair, to the intense mortification of the officers.

Before they left the guard, for leave him they were compelled to do, since they had no spare horse for him, the six men they had sent down the turning came back into the road again, accompanied by a sergeant's party of Lancers, who were *en route* for the head-quarters of their regiment.

From this party they learnt that it was quite impossible three mounted men could have come by the route supposed, without passing them, and they repeated that they had met no one whatever for five miles or more.

Of course, putting all this together, the magistrate who was with the officers came to the tolerably sensible conclusion that he had been completely taken in by Claude and his friends. The only thought was how to repair the serious error into which they had fallen.

The magistrate, in the first instance, easily, by stating who and what he was, induced the sergeant in command of the five Lancers to lend him what aid he could in the matter, and the more especially as it did not now seem likely to take him out of his route.

Thus was it that the military force was once again enlisted in the service of the civil authorities against Claude Duval and his two companions and friends.

What will be the result of this combination, we shall quickly see.

It was arranged that the party should be divided in this manner.

The Lancers were to take to the fields, along with the six men who had met them in the cross-road, and to ascertain as they went along if any trace of the highwaymen was to be found, while the magistrate with the remainder of the party kept on the high-road, with the hope of driving the thieves off into the meadows.

All this had been executed with such speed as was possible, and carried out, and the consequence was, that Claude and his friends found themselves, as the reader is aware, with the Lancers and the six officers in the rear, the farm-yard and its dependencies in the front, and the road, no doubt, well taken care of by the magistrate and the strong force still under his orders.

We now return to Claude and his friends.

Their position, to them, did not seem quite so desperate as it really was, for they did not up to that point know of the division of the force that had been sent against them; and it was to their minds just possible that the people attached to the farm might befriend them in some degree, so that it was rather with hopefulness than otherwise that they paused amid the haystacks, and waited for the coming assault.

By dint of some exertion, they replaced the iron hurdles that had been cast down by Dick, for, at least, they would be some sort of protection against their pursuers; and it would not be a very easy thing to take them down, when exposed to the fire of the pistols of the highwaymen, as either the Lancers or the officers would be if they should make the attempt.

While all this was going on, the worst possible thing that could take place for Claude and his friends did occur, namely, the rapid approach of the morning, which happened to be a really fine and clear one. To them the light seemed each moment to be spreading itself over the sky, with a speed that was quite unusal with it.

"We shall be in broad daylight in another hour," said Jack.

"No," said Dick—"no. Don't say that."

"But look at it."

"Yes. But I think I have more experience in country matters than even you have, Jack, although you ought to know a good deal about it, too. Don't you see the mist in yonder valley thickening each moment? Look at it. It is only half-way up the trees."

"Ah, yes!"

"Well, then, my opinion is that in the course of the next quarter of an hour we shall have a white fog about us; and, if so, it will, I think and hope, be all to our advantage."

"It will," said Claude.

"Not a doubt of it," said Dick; "and as for these soldiers, I don't feel quite sure that they know we are on their route at all. But I see now how it was that we heard the seemingly muffled sound of horses' feet while we were in the road; for what we listened to was the tread of the cattle on the grass in the meadows."

By the actions of the Lancers and the officers of police who were with them, the supposition of Dick Turpin that he and his two friends were not known to be so close at hand, seemed to be pretty well verified.

They came on till they were within a couple of hundred yards of the farm-yard; and then Claude distinctly heard the order to halt.

In the clear, fresh morning air, then—although it was pretty evident that the white mist covering it had not yet come—the voices of the sergeant of the Lancers and the principal of the officers came clearly upon the ears of Claude and his party.

What they heard induced them to think that everything might be gained by keeping quiet; so they descended and led their horses round the haystacks, and, pulling out a few handfuls for them, they left the creatures to amuse themselves; while they themselves peered round the corners of the stacks, and alternately watched their foes, and listened to what they said.

CHAPTER CCCXCII.

CLAUDE AND HIS FRIENDS HAVE A SERIOUS BATTLE IN THE FARM.

It would seem that the sergeant of the Lancers, although he had not liked to refuse his aid to the magistrate who had requested it—and, indeed, he did not feel very clear but that the magistrate had the power to demand his co-operation—did not seem to be very much pleased with the duty he was upon.

Claude and his friends could hear him, in rather a burlesque sort of way, speaking to the officers.

"Well, Mr. Officers of Police," said the sergeant, "I don't see that we are doing any good now. Here we are close to a farm-yard. What are you disposed to be at, now?"

"Confound the fellows!"

"Ah, well, so say I. But it is of no use our staying here and swearing, you know. Show me what I can do, and I will try and do it. But it seems to me that we are on the wrong track."

"It does look like it."

"Well, what is to be done?"

"I suppose we must take to the road again, and see his worship, and ask him what he would have done."

"Well, come on, then. I don't think you will catch these fellows you are after this bout, at all events."

"I never did think we should, sergeant."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, dear, no. You don't know that Claude Duval—if, indeed, it be he, and not the devil himself. He is as cunning and as brave as half a dozen people put together."

"Well, I only wish he would come into our regiment. They say we shall be off to the continent to fight the rascally French soon; and he is just the sort of fellow I should like to ride next to, if all is true that is reported of him, and I suppose a good lot of it is."

"I think it, too."

"Well, then, it's understood that we are to make our way into the road again, is it?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

Now Claude Duval and his friends began to congratulate themselves that all was well, and that in another five minutes the Lancers and the officers would be past the spot, and so they would, but for one of those little *malapropos* accidents upon which the lives and fortunes of men seem at times to turn.

Just as the sergeant was giving the orders to his men to clear the way through the hedge to the road there arrived in the farm-yard a great thick-headed-looking man in a smock-frock, rubbing his great sleepy eyes as though he had just roused himself for the day, as, indeed, he had, for his duty was to feed a considerable number of pigs that were close at hand.

"Oh, lor! oh, lor!" he said, "what a thing it is to have to get up of a morning. I don't so much mind it after one is up, but it is a horrid thing to have to get up when you are sleepy. How I should like to stay in bed for a week and have a lump of fat bacon brought me now and then, and a jug of master's old ale!"

The yokel had just got so far in his soliloquising, when his eyes fell upon three horses quietly at work upon a haystack, and pulling out portions of it with the greatest perseverance.

"Hilloa!" he cried in a voice that rang through the place again. "Hilloa! master! Oh, won't I have you all in the parish pound, and no sort of mistake! Master! Oh, I say, can't you leave off? Master—master! here's some cattle got at the hay. Hilloa! master—master!"

"Villain!" cried Claude Duval, as he sprang at the fellow and held him by the throat with a grasp of iron. "Another word, and you are a dead man."

Alas! it was too late. The fellow had said words enough not only to reach the homestead, but the officers and the Lancers, too. From the house there was at first no notice taken of the cries of the swineherd, but the officers pricked up their ears; and although they could not tell exactly what was amiss, the mere fact that there was something was quite sufficient to induce them to inquire into it.

"Sergeant, did you hear that?" said the chief officer.

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I think it's worth looking to."

"So do I, if you want to catch your men."

"Then you think that—that——"

The sergeant nodded only.

"That will do," said the officer. "Come on. Forward, all of you. Something strikes me we shall have them, after all."

Just as the Lancers and the officers came up to the iron hurdles at a trot, the farmer, who had been aroused by the cries of his swineherd, reached the other side of the farm-yard.

"What's all this about?" he said.

"Peace!" said Dick Turpin. "You and all your family had better consult their own safety by keeping within doors. There is likely enough to be some rough work here."

"Rough work?"

"Yes; be warned in time."

"Well, but, as this is my farm-yard, and as these are my stacks, I rather think I have a right to be here."

"Shoot him," said Jack.

"Well, it will save trouble, to be sure," said Dick, as he presented a pistol at the farmer.

Neither Dick nor Jack had the least intention of shooting the man; but the effect upon him was complete, for with a yell of fear he turned and ran back to his house again as hard as he could.

"Now," said Claude, as he let go the swineherd, "you follow your master, and keep out of harm's way. You have done quite mischief enough for one day; but I don't want to take your worthless life."

Quite delighted at his escape from what he had only a few moments before looked upon as certain death, the swineherd galloped off after the farmer; so that the place was clear of them, although the much greater danger remained, in fact, as the Lancers and the officers were rapidly approaching.

"Dick," said Claude, "what is to be done?"

"I'll be hanged if I know,"

"Can we not escape?" said Jack, as he placed his foot in the stirrup of his horse.

"I don't see the way."

"Nor I," said Dick. "Here we are, and we must fight it out. We are to some extent strengthened here by the stacks and the iron hurdles; but I don't see any way out of here but across the yard, and into the house, and then we should just have to hold a kind of siege, which would be fatal in the end."

"It will be fatal," said Claude, "to one in any way."

Jack and Dick looked at each other significantly; and then Dick sprang to his horse with a feeling of desperation, as he said—

"A fight here between three men and the force opposed to us would be madness. I say, let us try and get away to the left here into the road through every obstacle. It appears to me that there is merely a kitchen garden to get through and a paling to cross, and there we shall be. Come on, Claude. Mount and follow me!"



"As you please," said Claude, as he sprang upon his horse.

Jack did the same, and they made a dash past the haystacks to a little deserted piece of ground; but the getting there had two effects, which at once dislosed the operations of the party.

From that direction they ran into the road, and there, not very far off, was the magistrate and his party returning, and evidently looking for the glitter of the arms of the military, as they could be seen through the trees.

The second effect that that movement had was to mark them to the Lancers and to the officers, who with one voice called out—

"There they are—there they are!"

"Lost now, I think," said Jack.

"Back to the stacks," said Dick. "While there is life there is hope."

They ran back in a moment to their old position, and then again they dismounted, just as the Lancers came up at a trot to the iron hurdles, closely followed by the officers.

"Dick and Jack," said Claude, rapidly, "let me give myself up."

"Give yourself up?"

"Yes, upon condition that you two go free."

"Never!"

"Never!"

These two answers came sharply from the lips of both Jack and Dick; but Claude Duval looked at them both, and spoke in a tone of melancholy seriousness, saying—

"I know that you do not like the idea of such a thing, but let me beg of you to entertain it. I may have many chances of escape afterwards, but now only look at our situation."

"Say no more," said Dick, "I won't listen."

"Nor I," said Jack.

"We live or die together."

Claude bowed his head in silence, and a sort of shudder came over his frame, after which he looked up coolly and calmly, and with an expression of great beauty beaming upon his face, as he said—

"Be it so. We will fight to the last; and if they gain a victory over us they shall not say it was a bloodless or an easy one."

Dick and Jack could not but look at Claude Duval as he spoke, and they thought they had, in all their long acquaintance with him, never seen so strange an expression upon his face as it then wore.

That time, however, so rife with danger as it was, was not one in which there could be any meditations upon Claude's looks, for they heard the sergeant of the Lancers suddenly cry out—

"Halt!"

Then, to the surprise of his two friends, Claude Duval walked leisurely forward for a few paces beyond the haystacks, and facing his foes, he said—

"Well, what is it?"

"That's our man," cried the officers with one breath. "That's Claude Duval. Seize him—seize him! That's the rascal!"

The Lancers looked at each other and then at their officer doubtfully, and then the sergeant glanced at the police, saying—

"Well, if that's your man, take him."

"Claude Duval," said the chief officer, "I summon you to surrender in the name of the king. I have a warrant against you, and if I had not, it is quite lawful to apprehend you, and you must see that resistance is quite out of the question. I warn you."

"Rather," said Duval, "let me warn you."

"Of what?"

"Of the certain fate that will be yours if you don't be off at once."

"Oh, stuff! That won't do at all. Now, my brave fellows, go in and win. Take him alive if you can, but if you can't, just give him a poke with one of the lances, and that will answer the purpose very well."

"You had better surrender," said the sergeant to Claude.

"No."

"Well, I can't help it."

"Shoot him!" cried the chief officer, for he felt that if an affray really took place the likelihood that he would come out of it in a whole skin was not very great; therefore, he would have been glad if Claude Duval were to be shot at once.

"No," said the sergeant, "none of that. Go and take your man, and if there is any risk we will aid you; but it is quite absurd of all of us to go in upon one man."

"There are three of them," said the officer. "The other two are close at hand."

"You don't know that," said Claude.

"Where are they, then?"

"Look for them in the fog."

The object that Claude had in view in engaging his foes in talk was to let the white mist, which was coming rapidly from the valley, reach the spot, and even as he spoke it came in dense wavy clouds, enveloping horse and man in its fleecy embrace.

The moment Claude saw that such was the case, he stepped back, saying as he did so in a loud, clear voice—

"Come on now, at your peril. The first man who lays a hand upon the iron hurdle, will be a corpse ere he can take it off again."

"Take that, then, and be hanged to you," said the chief officer, as he drew one of the holster-pistols, and fired it at Claude.

Duval's hat was blown off his head by the shot; but before he could think of returning it, there was the sharp crack of a bullet from Jack's pistol, and the chief officer, with a cry, fell from his saddle, and his horse galloped down the avenue half mad with fright.

The officers huddled together, and cried out to the soldiers to take Duval and his friends, for the fall of their chief had given them a sort of panic. The sergeant of the Lancers, however, took things quite easy.

"Dismount!" he said to his men.

In another moment every saddle was empty.

"Protect the horses," he then added. "This affair must be done on foot."

The soldiers thrust their lances into the turf, and fastened the horses to them, and then stood in rank, waiting for further orders.

"Take them alive, if you can, my men," said the sergeant; "but cut down all who resist. Draw sabres! Forward! March!"

The situation of Claude and his friends was now in truth one of the most critical that could well be imagined. They had no wish to take the lives of the soldiers; but after the orders they had heard given, it was but a course of self-defence to do all the harm they could.

CHAPTER CCCXCIII.

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY COMES TO THE AID OF DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS.

With the air of men who feel that they had rather a disagreeable duty to do, but which at all hazards must be done, the Lancers marched towards the iron hurdles. It was then that Duval cried out in a loud voice—

"Halt, if you value your lives!"

"Give them a volley from your pistols," said the sergeant.

Five pistol-shots whistled past the heads of Claude and his friends.

"Load!" said the sergeant.

"Fire!" cried Claude.

At the moment he and his two friends returned the fire, and two of the soldiers fell by the iron hurdles.

"Forward!" shouted the sergeant, and he sprang over the hurdle close to him. Claude bounded forward, and seized him by the arm and throat, and tossed him back again as though he had been a truss of straw.

The police officers at this moment poured in a volley of pistol-shots against Claude and his friends; but the salute was returned, for Dick had knocked down one of them with a hedge stake he had found, and Jack had wounded another. There was [illegible] was unhurt, and he prudently retreated clear of the hurdles, finding himself in such an emergency as he was.

The fog and the smoke from the firing mingling together, prevented the officers on horseback from seeing how the soldiers were getting on; and they kept cheering to them to encourage them.

Then it was that Dick, seeing that if the fight continued they must certainly be worsted, laid hold of Claude by the arm, saying—

"Follow me—follow me! Come, Jack—come. I think there is a chance yet."

Claude made no answer, but followed him hurriedly through the farm-yard, and so did Jack. They came to an ivy-covered porch of the house, and there they found that the fog was not so bad; and Dick was in the act of trying to force the door open, when a little girl, of about twelve years of age, came up to them, crying, and saying—

"Oh, is it you they came to kill?"

"Yes."

"Then come this way, and they shall not.—Come, come, before grandfather sees you. They shall not kill you! Oh, do come!"

In wonder they followed the child across the yard to the right; and she opened a little gate and led them into a flower-garden, and so on to a corner of the house where there was an open door.

"This way!—oh, this way!" she said. "I saw all from the window of my little room, and they tried to kill you, I know. They killed my poor brother, did the bad soldiers, and they shall not kill you! He was a soldier: but he wanted to come home and love us all again and be happy: but they would not let him, and so they shot him. Do you want to go home and be happy?"

"Yes," said Dick.

"And they won't let you?"

"Just so."

"Then I will save you! I am but a child, I know; but I can do more, and just because I am a child, than any one else can do now for you."

"That is true," said Dick.

"Hark!" said Jack—"hark!"

"Forward!" cried a voice—"forward! This way! They cannot have escaped us altogether."

There was then a rush of many feet; and then the little girl took Dick by the arm and led him through the open door and up a little flight of steps to the upper floor of the house. There was a long and dreary-looking passage upon that floor, from which opened various rooms; and into one of them the little girl went, followed by the three stalwart men, whom she said she would save.

This was something like the fable of the lion and the mouse, in which the latter, with all its weakness, aids the former, with all its strength, to elude its foes.

"Come in," said the child: "this is my chamber. They let me have this room to myself entirely, and I alone keep it neat and clean. There is my little bed—there is my little work-table that my aunt gave me; and, you see, I have some books and some flowers. Now, do you think if you hide in this room and I sit reading here so calm and still, like a little nun, that anybody will think you are here?"

"Certainly not," said Dick.

"We are saved!" said Jack. "Don't you think so, Claude?"

Even as Jack put this question to Claude Duval, that personage tottered, and would have fallen but that a little couch that was in the room fortunately was close to him; and he sank upon it with a deep groan.

"Good God," said Jack, "what is this? Light—light! Draw the blind, and let us have some light."

Dick Turpin, when he heard Jack speak in this way, did not speak a word, but in two steps he crossed the little room, and reached the window. A green blind was across it, which enveloped everything in the apartment with a mysterious kind of halo. With one movement of his hand, Dick Turpin removed this

obstacle to the early daylight, and then it streamed into the room, and upon the face of Claude Duval.

One look at that pale face, upon which death had set its seal, was enough for both Jack and Dick.

Poor Claude sat upon the little couch, with his right hand upon his breast, and every vestige of colour had fled from his face. His very lips were of an ashy paleness.

The little girl was much alarmed, and stood trembling by the window, gazing at that awful face.

"Claude—Claude!" said Jack, "what is this? Oh, speak to me, I implore you. What is the meaning of it?"

Dick Turpin said not a word.

Then it was that, with an evident effort, Claude Duval smiled in a strange fashion, and holding out his other hand to Jack, he said—

"Jack, old friend, it is nearly over now."

"Oh, God, no!"

"Hush! Jack, hush! They have done for me at last, old friend, Do not think much of this little accident. It was sure to come to this some day. Dick, are you there?"

"Yes, Claude," said Dick, as he snatched up his hat, which he had laid upon the little table. "Yes, I—"

"Stop. Where would you go? Oh, don't leave me now, either of you."

"You are wounded," said Dick, "and I would get surgical aid for you."

"No—no; oh! do not."

"But it may save your life."

Dick moved towards the door; but Claude clenched his left hand, and in a firmer voice he said—

"Dick, if ever you had the slightest feeling of affection for me, you will stay now with me, and not go upon the fruitless errand you speak of. I know that no human aid can avail me now; my minutes are numbered. But do not let them take me in life, if you can help it."

Jack had staggered back to a chair, and with both his hands clasped over his face, he rocked to and fro in quite an agony of grief.

There was a something about the tone in which Duval spoke that brought even firmer conviction to the mind of Turpin that what he said regarding the utter uselessness of surgical aid was but too true, so Dick laid aside his hat again, and slowly walked up to Claude. Looking him earnestly in the face, he said to him—

"Duval, old friend, tell me—is it a bullet?"

"Yes, Dick."

"And where?"

"So near to my heart that it is quite near enough, Dick, to end my career. It's all over! Hark! what is that?"

The sound of voices in the house came upon their ears; and a look of deep distress came over the countenance of poor Claude.

"Oh! my friends," he said, "for you both there is hope! I was selfish when I asked you to stay with me. Flight may yet save you. Go—go, and leave me! I can but die once!"

"Never!" said Dick, as he drew a pistol from his pocket and stood by the side of Claude's chair with a determined aspect. "I, too, can but die once, and I am willing to do so in your company, Claude; and woe be to the man who first tries to lay a finger upon you!"

Poor Jack still rocked to and fro in helpless grief.

The sound of voices came nearer and nearer still to the corridor.

Then it was that the little girl stepped to the door, and opening it quickly passed out of the room. Dick looked a little anxiously after her, for he was afraid that the courage of the child had deserted her, and that she would go and throw herself upon the protection of her friends, and disclose who were in the

room she called her own. But such was not the case: in a few moments the girl returned.

"They are searching the house," she said.

"Then all is lost!" said Dick.

"My good friend," said Claude, and he spoke still fainter now than he had done before, "it is a chance for you, and for you, dear Jack. This window is not far from the ground."

"No, no," said Jack; "I will not leave you!"

"Nor I!" said Dick, firmly. "Jack?"

"Yes, Dick?"

"Your pistols! We will all die together, if it must be so. Your arms, Jack! Don't submit easily. The most timid animal in all the world, if hunted to the covert, will turn upon its foes. Be a man, Jack!"

"I will—I will!"

Jack sprang to his feet, with his hair dishevelled, and looking scarcely less pale than poor Claude. With cautious eagerness he took a pair of pistols from his pocket, and pointed them both towards the door of the room; and then, in a strange, cracked voice, he said—

"Let them come!—let them come! Let the bloodhounds come for their prey! Ah, they will find me ready for them! Life for life! They shall rue the day they struck down the noblest heart that ever beat in human bosom! War to the death! Let them come!—I am prepared! and, oh! that I could single out the hand that did the deed!"

"No—no!" gasped Claude, "not this—not this. I did not mean this."

"Cease to talk," said Dick. "I see that it only exhausts you the more, Claude. I will not yet abandon hope of your recovery."

Claude shook his head.

"This way, then, if you will go into every room," cried a voice in the corridor; "but I tell you they couldn't come into the house without some of the family being aware of it."

"Don't be too sure of that," said another voice, in rough and surly accents. "A pretty piece of business this has been, to be sure. No less than three of my men killed by it."

"Well, but highwaymen must be caught," said another.

"Oh, confound your highwaymen! I only wish they had been down your throat before I and my men came across you."

This conversation was between the sergeant of the Lancers and the chief officer, and it was the former who had made the remark about the impossibility of Claude and his companions getting into the house without having been seen by some of the family.

"They come," said Claude. "God! they come, and I so helpless."

"Not helpless," said Dick, "while Jack and I live. Be firm, Jack."

"I will—I will."

CHAPTER CCCXCIV.

THE LITTLE GIRL PROVES HERSELF TO BE A TRUE HEROINE.

It takes us longer to tell of these stirring and startling events than it took for them to be enacted; but that is a necessary condition of nature.

When the sound of voices in the corridor struck upon the ears of the young girl who had already done what seemed to be all that it was in her power to do for Claude Duval and his friends, a flush of excitement came across her cheeks, and glancing round the room, she clasped her hands together in seeming despair.

Then, with a bright flush of hope upon her face, she sprang to the side

of the couch upon which Claude lay, and said in a low tone so that it might not be heard without—

"There is still something to be done."

Claude shook his head.

"Oh, yes—yes, but there is."

"Yes," said Claude, "one thing only. Take a dying man's blessing. If it does you no good, my dear child, it will do you no harm."

The girl looked at Claude for a moment, and the tears swam in her eyes as she did so; but the voices came again upon the silence of the house, and the necessity for immediate action came strongly to her mind.

With a celerity, and a power of action that was little to be expected from her age and sex, she took from where it rested, partly against the wall and partly around the head of her little bed, a tall covered screen, gaily papered with flowers, and placed it round the front portion of the couch, which it completely hid.

"There," she said. "Behind that you will all be safe."

"Alas, my dear," said Dick, "do you, indeed, think that so frail a screen as that, will protect us from those who seek our lives?"

"I do."

"She is right," said Claude, faintly—"she is right. The darkness, too, is grateful to us. Come—oh, come. It is a chance."

The girl looked eagerly from one to the other of them, and then in the corridor the tramp of the heavy footsteps of the officers, and of the sergeant of the Lancers and his own men, who where in fit state to come with him, came nearer and nearer still.

There was evidently no time to be lost, if they would attempt even to take advantage of the chance of concealment afforded to them.

"It may do," said Dick. "Come, Jack."

"To the last—to the last!" said Jack, in a tone of abstraction. "Let them come, I will fight them to the last."

"Jack, you know not what you say," said Dick, taking him by the arm. "Come this way, there's a good fellow."

"No—no! I have to defend Claude, and this is my place. Over my corpse alone shall they reach him."

"But you mistake. You will be the destruction of him."

"Let them come!—Oh, let them come!"

"Claude, call to him," said Dick, "if you possibly can. Your voice only will have any effect upon him."

"Jack—Jack," said Claude. "I want you, old friend."

"Yes—yes. I am here—I am here!"

Jack stepped behind the screen, and Dick followed him.

"Hold my hand in yours, Jack," said Claude, "and don't leave me: Help me to lie down very quietly—quietly. Oh, God!—Ah, yes—more quietly still. God bless you both."

They gradually let Claude sink down upon the couch, and Jack held the hand in his that was disengaged, for the other was still pressed upon his heart.

Behind the screen, now, there was a gloom almost approaching to darkness, so that it was only in a dim sort of fashion, that Dick and Jack could see each other. But they felt how critical was there position, for in the course of a few moments there came a tap at the door of the room.

Preceding that tap at her room door, the little girl had sat down by her work-box, and opening it, had taken out some unfinished sewing, and, although her little hands shook again, she did her best to seem to be quietly at work.

The tap came to the door again, and then she, with as firm a voice as she could possibly command, called out—

"Yes—who is there?"

"Lucy! Lucy!" said a voice. "Are you up?"

"Yes, grandfather, I am up."

"Open the door then, child."

"Come in, grandfather. The door is not fast. Come in. I'm only doing a little work."

The girl's voice shook and quivered as she spoke, notwithstanding all her efforts to appear calm, and then, fearful that the expression of her face would betray her, she darted from her seat, and succeeded in drawing the little green curtain right across the window again before the door was opened.

This was a bold manœuvre of the girl's, for it placed the room in such a state of semi-darkness, that those who came from a strange light could not possibly have the chance of noticing that she was very pale, and that tears were in her eyes, and that her very lips quivered with emotion.

The door opened, and the farmer made his appearance.

"Oh, yes, you are up and dressed, Lucy," he said. "All's right. Don't you be at all alarmed, my dear, but there are some gentlemen looking for some thieves, and they don't seem to be satisfied till they have looked into every room in the old house."

"Thieves, grandfather?"

"Yes, my dear. Did you not hear a disturbance?"

"Oh, yes, but I didn't know what it was all about."

"To be sure not. How should you? Well, gentlemen, here is my little grandchild's bed-room. I suppose you don't exactly expect to find Claude Duval and his friends hid in her work-box, do you?"

The chief officer and the sergeant of the Lancers just appeared on the threshold of the room and glanced in. Lucy rose from her seat, and faced them with more boldness than one would have thought her capable of.

"Oh, grandfather," she said, "why do you bring these men here? This is my own little room, as you always told me."

"My dear, I can't help it. They will soon go."

"Oh, yes," said the officer. "You sleep here, do you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, well, there's no use wasting time bothering here. Come on, sergeant. Sorry to have troubled you, my little dear, but we couldn't help it. Come on. This is only waste of time."

"So I should think," said the farmer, as he closed the door of the room again, leaving Lucy with the three highwaymen.

The girl burst into tears, then, when the door was shut, and was about to say something, but it was as well she did not, for it was opened again in a moment by her grandfather, who popping his head in, said—

"You can come down when you like, Lucy. We shall have breakfast soon, my dear; but don't you be frightened."

"No—no, I am not."

"That's right. But how dark the room is."

"I prefer it, grandfather."

"Oh, very well—very well. Now don't you be alarmed, for the people who are in the house will go soon."

"Yes, grandfather."

The door was again closed, and again Lucy felt that there was another reprieve for those whom she had chosen to throw the shield of her protecting innocence over.

While these extremely peculiar movements were proceeding, Dick Turpin had stood close to the couch on which lay Claude. A pistol was in each of his hands, and if the screen had been attempted to be moved aside there is very little doubt but that both the chief officer of the civil power and the sergeant of the Lancers would have met their death; so that, after all, the little girl was as much entitled to their gratitude, if they had but known their danger, as she was to that of Claude Duval and his two friends.

But soon the retreating footsteps of the searching party were lost as they descended the stairs to the lower part of the house, for Lucy's room had been

the last they had searched in the corridor, and the little creature felt that to a great extent the danger was now over, and that she might speak freely.

"They are gone—they are gone!" she said.

"Yes," said Dick, "and so far all is well. We owe to you our lives, and I don't know what to say to you to express what I feel upon the occasion."



"Nor I," said Jack. "How dark the room is."

"Yes, it is, Jack."

"It is the window blind," said Lucy. "I will soon remove it again. There, you can see better now."

"Move the screen, Dick," said Jack.

"Stop," said Dick. "Has your room-door a fastening, Lucy?"

"Yes—oh, yes. I will lock it."

The girl went to the door, and just as Dick heard the sharp click of the lock

he doubled up the screan that was before the couch upon which Claude Duval lay.

"Now, Claude," he said, "let us hope that you are better. The danger is past, and who knows but, after all, we may only have to recount this along with others of our peculiar adventures?"

"Do you hear, Claude?" said Jack.

Dick suddenly knelt down by the side of the couch and looked in Duval's face. Then a strong emotion shook him, and clasping his hands, he said—

"No, Jack. He does not hear. He will never hear again! He is dead!"

"Oh, God, no—no! Not Claude—not my friend—my only friend, oh no! Dick—Dick, don't say it. Light—more light!"

Jack dashed the screen cautiously aside, and then he lifted up the head of Claude. One glance into the calm, cold, passionless face was enough. Serene in death lay Claude Duval. A slight—a very slight smile seemed to curl the upper lip, and that was all. It was quite evident that that daring and adventurous spirit had fled without a pang.

Jack dropped to the floor as if he had been shot, and did not move for many minutes.

Dick Turpin, although much cut up by the death of Claude Duval, yet had about him more presence of mind upon this occasion than poor Jack had, and he removed from the breast of the corpse the right hand which even in death there continued.

The moment that hand was out of the way, Dick saw that poor Duval had received a bullet as nearly as possible over the region of the heart, and the only wonder was that he had lived so long as that he had had the indomitable firmness to prevent any great sign of the agony he must have suffered to escape him.

A very small portion of blood had oozed from the wound and saturated his clothes just around the spot, and his hand was soaked in blood; but there was nothing else to show the violent death to which he had come at last.

"It is all over," said Dick. "Farewell, poor Claude!"

Dick took his own hat, and tied it gently over the face of the corpse, for he saw Lucy close to the window looking much alarmed, and he was afraid that the look of the dead face would alarm her still more.

"My dear young friend," he said to her, "you have no cause for fear. We who live will not leave you, and he who is no more cannot, if he would; and were he still in life he would risk it for you twenty times. We owe you much—oh, so much! and now I know not how to ask you to do still more for us."

"I will—I will," said Lucy, sobbing. "What is it?"

"I don't know whether you can do it or not, but do you think that there is any chance of us being able to stay here in peace till night?"

"Oh, no—no."

"Well, I hardly thought it possible."

"It is not possible," said Lucy. "My grandmother will be here twenty times in the course of the day. Oh, no, no! I would if I could; but what can I do?"

"Nothing—nothing! Jack—Jack, I say—be a man!"

Jack slowly rose, and shudderingly looked at the couch.

"Rouse yourself!" said Dick. "It is true that our old friend is gone: but he is at peace! Think of that, Jack. There will be no more rewards for him, dead or alive. Cupidity, with cruelty and malice in its train, will never again start to hunt him to the death. He has now no fears of chains or cells, nor of the gallows-tree. The vulgar multitude, who would have made high holiday at his execution, will have no chance to do so now. He is dead; and he has died, I am sure, a much less painful death than many thousands who would execrate his name. He has gone to his God, Jack, where he will be judged more from what he thought and what he meant than from what he seemed to do, and where the good deeds of his life are written by recording angels; while the tears of gratitude of the

widow and the orphan, whom he has oft cherished and aided, will blot out even the memory of his crimes!"

Jack looked at Dick while he spoke; and, as he did so, a change came over his face—a change from all the agony of deep grief to serenity of soul. He took Dick's hand in his, and shook it.

"Thank you, Dick," he said—"thank your brave heart! Thank you! I did not think of all that. You knew Claude better than I thought you did. I thank you from my soul, Dick, for those kind words; and they are so true, too. I am much better—oh, so much better, now!"

CHAPTER CCCXCV.

THE FUNERAL OF CLAUDE DUVAL.

Poor little Lucy listened to what Jack and Dick was saying with the most intense interest; and then she plucked Dick by the sleeve, saying—

"Sir?—sir?"

"Yes, my dear? What would you say?"

"You do not know my grandfather. He is at times rather a stern man, they say, and he has not a good temper; but he has a good heart, for all that, and he will not be unkind to you."

"Think you so?"

"I know it. Now, if you will let me go to him and tell him all that has happened—how you sought shelter here—how your poor friend is dead, and how much you both loved him, and how cruel it would be to bring death and danger to you both, do you think that there is anybody in the world who could be so unkind as to say nay to you?"

"She speaks truth, Dick," said Jack. "We must throw ourselves upon the kindness and the consideration of this family."

"Be it so," said Dick. "But stop a moment, Lucy—stop a moment: you shall not go empty-handed. Here is gold. Nay, do not turn aside and refuse it, but give it to your grandfather or your grandmother, whichever you think will like to have it the best; and tell them that we consider it only a poor payment for the shelter we ask till night for the corpse of one whom we love well, and whom we would not desert even in death."

"Yes—yes," said the little girl, "they will be kind, but I cannot take the money."

"It is not for you," said Dick. "Believe me, Lucy, I have seen enough of you to feel that you would not take money for doing a kind action."

The eyes of the child filled with tears.

"But," added Dick, "it is possible that the world may have altered the feelings of your friends in that particular, even if they were once like yours; so take the money, and if it has no other effect it will have that of convincing your relations that we have no evil intentions towards them, and that by affording us the shelter we ask they run no risk of our leaving our dead friend a burthen to them."

"Yes, yes—take it," said Jack.

Thus urged, the little girl took the money, and with a countenance full of sympathetic feeling she glided from the room upon her mission of gentleness to the farmer and his wife.

The officers and the Lancers had left the house after, as they all thought, as efficient a search of it as it was at all possible to make, and not a little amazed were they at the seemingly mysterious disappearance of the three highwaymen.

"Dick," said Jack, as he pointed to the corpse of Claude, "did you—did you, Dick——"

"What, Jack?"

"Did you close poor Claude's eyes?"

"No—no. I thought of that, but could not."

"I am glad you did not, Dick."

"Are you glad, Jack? Oh, yes, I understand you. It is a last sad office that you would wish to do for one whom you knew so well in life as Claude."

"It is, Dick."

"Then, Jack, I honour the feeling, and am glad that I did not interfere with what I feel is your prerogative, my good friend."

Jack stepped up to the couch, and with a gentle and reverent hand he removed the hat that covered the face of the corpse.

There was nothing in the smallest possible degree repulsive in the look of Claude Duval. You might, had you seen him lying upon that couch so very calm and still, have really thought him sleeping. To be sure there was something of a strange colour about the face, and Jack thought that that colour was deepening upon it even as he looked at it.

Gently and sorrowfully Jack closed the eyes of the corpse and placed a half crown piece upon each one. The coins upon the eyes of the dead man gave the face a strange look, but Jack did not heed that. His heart was full of the reminiscences of the past as he looked in the face of his old friend and companion.

"There is one," he said, "who has gone to the grave before you, Claude, to whom, had she lived to see it, this would indeed have been a dreary day. You and I and all of us mourned for her when she went to death; but, after all, it was a happy thing that she took the dark and dreary path before you did, Claude, for had she lived, I would not have looked into her face this day for the wealth of worlds."

"You are right, Jack," said Duval.

"Yes, it is so—I know it is so," said Jack.

Poor Jack then lifted the coverlet from the bed, and laid it gently over the still form that lay upon the couch.

The coverlet slowly sunk to the shape of the body, and was awfully suggestive of what was beneath it. With a shudder Dick turned to the window, and in silence looked into the garden beyond it. Then there came upon the morning air the lowing of cattle, and the cackle of the feathered inhabitants of the farmyard, as they aroused themselves for the new day. The mist that had swept up from the valley was gradually dispersing before a bright beam of sunshine that had broken through the mazes of a darkening cloud.

"Morning," said Jack, as he stood by the side of Dick. "It is the blessed and beautiful morning; but all is night to him who there sleeps the long sleep that knows no waking."

"Don't say that, Jack. Perhaps, even while we look upon that still form, the brighter and nobler essence of its nature has awakened in a region where there is no night."

"I should like to think that, Dick."

"And don't you?"

"I don't know exactly. Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't."

"Well, Jack, that is a subject upon which we will talk at another time. Do you hear the sound of footsteps in the corridor?"

Jack started.

"I do—I do. They come as foes or friends—it don't really much matter which to me now. I never in all my life felt so very indifferent to my life."

Dick stepped between Jack and the door, and his hand was plunged into the breast of his apparel. Most probably it grasped a weapon of defence, for it was impossible he could tell in what kind of spirit the people of the farm were coming to that apartment.

The voice of the little girl now came upon their ears, and what she said rather tended to increase the doubt regarding the intentions of the farmer than otherwise.

"No—no, grandfather," they heard her say, "you must not. It is so very wrong. I said you would not—I said I knew you would not, and, indeed, you must not."

"Pho—pho, child," said the farmer, "you don't know what you are talking about. Hold your tongue, do now."

"Yes," said rather a shrill, peevish voice. "Children can't be supposed to know, so don't be so vain and silly, Lucy, as to try to set up your little judgment against ours. A pretty thing, indeed, that would be!"

The door of the room was now opened, and the farmer and his wife appeared upon the threshold of it. Dick advanced two steps, and in a tone of clear and firm decision, he spoke.

"Hark you, sir," he said, "I don't know your name, or I would address you by it; but I do hope that for your own credit in particular, and the credit of human nature in general, you will listen to the voice of feeling and of humanity, and ratify the promise which this child has made to us in the purity and in the innocence of her young heart."

"Oh, sir—oh, gentlemen," said the farmer, as he made a low bow, "don't mention it, I beg of you."

"It's not the smallest trouble," said the woman executing a curtsey, "I assure you, gentlemen."

"Not the least," chimed in the farmer. "I'm quite sure, anything that I can do, or my missus——"

"Yes, me or my good man," added the wife, "we will do with all the pleasure in life."

"That we will," said the farmer.

Dick and Jack were quite amazed at this rather extraordinary, and overdrawn politeness on the part of the farmer and his wife; but Lucy soon furnished a key to it, for, with tears in her eyes, she said—

"They took the money—they took all the gold; but I cannot, and will not think that they mean to keep it."

"Silence, child," said the grandmother. "Dear me, how children's tongues do run on to be sure, don't they, sir?"

"Hush! will you?" said the farmer. Upon my word, Lucy, I don't know what has come over you to-day."

"But the money, the—the——"

"Say no more about it," said Dick Turpin. "I am very glad if the few guineas I sent are of any service."

"Service!" said the farmer. "Oh, my dear sir, you can't think how bad the times are for farmers. They always are, I rather think, for you see, sir, when we have bad crops, we can't, of course, sell so much as we would wish; and when we have good crops, the difficulty of keeping up the prices is quite terrible; so what with one thing and another, sir, the agriculturist almost always has something to grumble about; and as for the guineas being of service, I beg to assure you, sir, that they are of the greatest possible service."

"Yes," said the wife; "and if you think our services worth a few more of them, I'm quite sure it isn't for humble folks like us to say no to your generosity."

"Grandfather," cried the little girl, "do not—oh, do not act in this way. You will surely be sorry when you come to think of it in the time to come. Don't you know, that what is asked of you is nothing that is worth money—nothing that ought to be sold like your corn and your turnips, grandfather? It is kindness and good feeling, not goods. You cannot, and ought not to take the money."

"Oh, you aggravating child!" said the grandmother, "is this the return you make for all our kindness to you?"

"Let me," said Dick, "put an end to this discourse, by at once declaring, that I and my friend here would much rather you kept the money than not. We

are quite satisfied with the arrangement, and will double the sum we have already given you if you will keep faith with us, and aid us in what we wish."

"Oh, yes—yes," cried the farmer.

"Double it?" said the wife; "why, then, we've nearly forty guineas, as I'm a sinner!"

"Quite forty," said the farmer.

"Then we will promise," said Dick, "to make it forty more."

CHAPTER CCCXCVI.

NIGHT AT THE FARM HOUSE—THE OLD CLOAK.

However poor Lucy might be shocked at the mercenary conduct of her grandfather and grandmother, Dick Turpin and Jack were better pleased that it should be so than otherwise, unless, indeed, the feeling of sympathy, which might possibly have dictated a kind course of conduct towards them, had been very complete and perfect indeed.

Such not being the case, however, they felt that the next best thing was to feel sure of the farmer and his wife through their avarice, and therefore was it, that from the moment Dick saw how greedily they appropriated the money he had already sent, and hinted at how very agreeable it would be to get still more, he was quite satisfied that he and Jack not only saw no possible risk in the house than they could screen them from, but that everything would be done that they might wish as regarded the disposal of the mortal remains of Claude Duval.

"You will be content," said Dick, "with that sum?"

"Oh, yes, quite—quite," said the farmer.

"Yes, my good gentlemen," said the wife. "We are much obliged."

"Oh," said Lucy, "I don't like this."

"Lucy," said Dick, "you ought to like it, when I tell you that it suits us well."

"But it is not right."

"Yes, yes, it is quite right enough, so don't cry."

"Cry indeed," said her grandmother. "I only wonder what she has got to cry at. But children, of course, sir, don't know the world as you and I do."

"Indeed, they do not."

"Ah, dear me," said the farmer, advancing towards the couch, upon which lay the corpse of Claude Duval, "and so it has come to this, has it? and here lies the body of your poor friend, gentlemen. Well, it really is too bad to hunt human beings as if they were nothing in the world but foxes come to steal your poultry. I always set my face against such things, that I do, and I hope I always shall."

"And what can we do, gentlemen, to accommodate you?" said the wife.

"Dick," said Jack, "we will stay here in this room."

"Yes, Jack."

"You tell them, then."

"Listen to me," said Dick. "We wish, when night shall come again, and that it may come soon we earnestly desire, to take our dead friend further into some shady spot, and inter him beneath some tree, so that we may know the spot, and that while we do so, we may please ourselves with the idea that he will mingle with the earth undisturbed by any one."

"Yes," said Jack.

"If, therefore, you will take care that no one comes to this room to interrupt us during the day we will remain here, and at night we will relieve you of all further trouble by taking away this sad sight."

"And a—a—then—a——"

"Then what?"

"The other forty guineas?" said the farmer.

"Them you shall have when we leave the house, without fail."

"Then, gentlemen, I am quite satisfied. You shall have every attention during the day, and whatever you like to order, I'm sure. My wife will cook you anything you like, and I daresay Lucy will wait upon you with cheerfulness."

"Oh, yes," said Lucy.

"Be it so," said Dick; "all we shall want will be a loaf of your country bread, and some water. We are in no mood for eating; but yet we feel the necessity of preserving our strength for what we have to do."

"Yes," said Jack, "that is it."

The farmer and his wife, with a profusion of bows, professed now the most unbounded sympathy with what had occurred, and they heaped such loads of abuse upon the officers and the military who had aided them, that it was quite terrible to hear them do so; and, if possible, Jack and Dick were more disgusted at all this mock show of commiseration than they were at the downright selfishness and mercenary grumbling feeling that had before characterised them, and which was still in the ascendant, their fine talking being only another manifestation of it.

With some difficulty they got them to go away, and leave them alone in the room with the dead.

It was in truth a long and weary day that which Dick and Jack passed together in that chamber. They had some discourse together about the past several times; but none at all of the future. That was a subject they seemed to avoid by mutual consent until poor Claude should be under ground.

The long-expected night, though, came at last, and then upon one of the visits that Lucy paid to the chamber, Dick said to her—

"Lucy, did you hear or see anything of our horses?"

"Oh, yes; they are feeding by the haystacks, and they are all three now in the stable; but—but——"

"But what, my dear?"

Lucy was silent.

"Nay, now, this is unkind of you," said Dick. "I feel quite sure that you have a something to tell us, and why do you not do so?"

"Yes, I have a something."

"But you do not like to say it?"

"In truth I do not, and yet I feel that I ought. I heard my grandfather say to my grandmother something about the horses."

"Come, now, what was it?"

"He said—'They don't know, I daresay, what has become of their horses, so we will not say anything about them either, for they are worth a good hundred pounds each, and to sell them will be the making of us.'"

"That's rather too bad, don't you think so?"

"It is—it is, indeed."

"Well, don't you mind it. Our horses we will and must have, but there is no occasion to make any disturbance about them just yet. However, upon one of the horses there was rather a large cloak rolled up, and strapped to the back of the saddle. That cloak we want."

As he spoke, Dick gave a glance to the couch, and Lucy comprehended at once what the cloak was wanted for. It was to wrap the dead in.

"You shall have it," she said; "but there is something I want you to do."

"What is it?"

"I want you to trust Harry Brown."

"Harry Brown?—Who is he?"

"He is a boy on the farm here, but he is a good boy, and you may trust him, and if you do trust him he will be a great help to you. If you will let me tell him all that has happened, and then let him come to you, you may depend upon him quite as much as you can upon me."

"Do so, then," said Dick. "I shall be glad to see him."

Little Lucy's face quite brightened up at the permission to tell all to Harry Brown, who we may suppose from that was a very great favourite of hers, and she left the room in a moment, as though she dreaded that Dick or Jack might retract the permission they had given her.

"What noise is that without?" said Jack, suddenly.

Dick stepped to the window.

"It is rain," he said.

"Ah, rain, is it? Oh, yes, and I hear the rustling of the wind past the window, and the dashing to and fro of the tree-tops. It is a gusty and a stormy night, Dick."

"It is, indeed."

"Well, Dick, you have heard the old rhyme, I suppose?

"'Happy is the bride that the sun shines on,
And happy is the corse that the rain rains on.'"

"Yes," said Dick; "I have heard of it, Jack; and if the rain pleases you, I shall be glad of it."

"Thank you, Dick; but believe me, I am not quite so superstitious, after all, as you and as poor Claude used to think me."

"No, Jack, I never thought you so."

"Did you not? Well, it is kind of you to say so. Dick, we—we will bury him as deep as we can."

"Yes, Jack."

There came a slight tap at the door now, and upon permission being given, it was opened, and Lucy said—

"Here is Harry Brown."

A very handsome country lad stood upon the threshold of the room.

"Come in," said Dick.

"Yes, sir, I am here," said the lad, "and Lucy has told me all."

"And are you willing to befriend us?"

"Oh, yes, quite so."

"Very well; then, do you know where to lay you hand upon our horses?"

"I do, indeed."

"That is well, Harry Brown."

"Yes, sir, and Lucy said you wanted the great-cloak that was strapped to one of the saddles, so here it is."

"Many thanks both to you and to Lucy for your kindness, I did want it. Here, Jack, here is the cloak. It has covered our old friend many a time from wind and from weather, and it will make as good a shroud for him as he or we could wish."

"It will," said Jack.

"Now, Harry Brown," said Dick, "I will just tell you what sort of help we want from you. At the hour of twelve we mean to carry out our dead friend to the long avenue of trees close to the farm-yard, and there bury him, so we shall want you to get us a couple of spades and a pick-axe, you see, and a lantern, and when the funeral, if we may call it such, is over we want you to bring us the horses to the spot where we dig the grave. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, it shall be all done so."

"We thank you from our hearts, Harry Brown; and remember that we trust you with our lives, for if you chose to betray us we should soon, perhaps, be even as our poor friend is who lies so cold and still yonder."

"He will not," said Lucy.

"Indeed I will not," said Harry Brown, "and if you have the least thought that I would do such a thing I am very sorry that you trusted me at all."

"We have no such thought," said Jack. "Do not suppose that we have any such thought. Lucy answered for you, and that is quite enough for us."

This assurance satisfied Harry Brown, and with Lucy he left the two friends alone in the darkness of the chamber with the dead.

Waiting thus, some hours crept slowly on, until a distant church clock, in a pause of the storm of hail and rain that now and then dashed past the window of the room, struck the hour of twelve.

"It is time," said Dick.

Jack started from his knees by the side of the corpse.

CHAPTER CCCXCVII.

THE BURIAL OF CLAUDE DUVAL, AND THE PRESET TO HARRY BROWN.

THE evening, which had set in with such strong demonstrations of bad, had by no means played the part of a false profit with regard to what the night was going to be.

Such a stormy night for the season of the year could hardly have been looked for. The rain, at times, came down in perfect torrents. The wind rushed sweeping by the homestead and wood, and yelled among the trees as if it were a living thing.

There was a secret pleasure in the mind of Jack to find the elements of nature in so disordered a mood upon that night, for they seemed more to harmonise with his desolate feelings than as if all had been calm and serene.

"Dick," he said, "can you see?"

"No, but I expect Harry Brown here with a lantern soon."

The sound of footsteps in the corridor came upon their ears, and there was a flash of light, and the farmer himself appeared at the door of the room.

"Oh, gentlemen," he said, "I have heard that Lucy has told my boy Harry to help you; I assure you he is a good lad."

"So we think," said Dick, "and we will accept his aid."

"I am here," said Harry.

As he spoke, the boy advanced with a lantern in his hand, and close to him came Lucy with a little red cloak on her and the hood drawn over her head as though she intended going with them to the interment of poor Claude.

"Why, Lucy," said the farmer, "what is the meaning of this, child? You won't surely leave the house to-night?"

"Yes, grandfather."

Dick looked at her for a moment in silence; and then he said—

"The rain is falling, Lucy, and the wind is boisterous. Do not come."

"Oh, let me!" she said. "You know I knew him while he was alive, and one of his best smiles and kind looks was for me. He shook hands with me before he died; and so I think him a friend, and seem as if I ought to follow him to the grave. It is not the rain or the wind that will stop me in such a duty."

"Let her come," said Jack, in a voice of deep emotion. "If the spirit of poor Claude could look down upon us—as who amongst us will say it cannot?—it will be well pleased to see such a mourner by his grave. So I say, let her come."

"Be it so," said Dick.

"Well, but," said the farmer, "I really ——"

"Nay, my friend, let her have her way," added Dick. "I request it of you."

"Oh, well, in that case ——"

"That will do. Now, Jack, help me. Harry, the light."

Harry Brown stepped with them up to the couch. Over and over again they wrapped the body in the large cloak; and then Dick took off his cravat, and tied it round, so that the cloak could not come off easily. The farmer hurried about the corridor in evidently rather a scared condition; for he was goggling his eyes fearfully, and shaking in every limb.

"Now, Jack," said Dick, "we will carry him between us."

"Yes, Dick."

They lifted the body from the couch.

The procession was a very strange one. First went Harry Brown with a lantern, and then came Dick and Jack with the corpse. Then came little Lucy with her red cloak; and the farmer sometimes followed her, and sometimes walked by the side of her, and seemed in fear and apprehension about something.

Perhaps he was in an agony about the forty pounds? We hope not; but we are very much afraid that was the case.

In this way, then, they went along the corridor and down the stairs, and so on round into the garden. Oh! how the rain beat upon their faces; and how the wind tore and roared around them, as though wild and angry at the proceedings it in vain tried to thwart.

Harry Brown held up the lantern, and by that guide they went; and being, as of course he was, so well acquainted with the farm and all its intricacies, he led them by the shortest and the nearest route through the garden, and so on by a little paddock and a gate that avoided the farm-yard and the row of iron hurdles—

close to which poor Duval had received his death-wound—right to the entrance of the long avenue of tall and beautiful trees.

This avenue, owing to the wind taking a decided direction at right angles to its length, was very much protected from the violence of the storm of wind and rain; so that when they all got safely into it it had the appearance as if that spot were screened from the rougher influence of the weather, which respected the solemn duty the mourners came upon.

And now Dick looked about him; and seeing that they were close to the foot of a gigantic old elm tree, he said, in a low tone, to Jack—

"Will this spot do?"

"Yes, Dick. Yes."

They slowly placed the body on the ground.

"Harry Brown," said Dick, "we shall want the spade and the mattock."

"They are here," said the boy, "I brought everything you could wish to this place some hours ago, for I thought I should have to help you with the light, and so on, when you came yourself with the body."

"Many thanks. Now, Jack, we will dig poor Claude's grave."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Jack.

It was quite evident, from Jack's manner, that his mind was wrought up in some wonderful way to go through with the sad task he had set himself, and that there was no sort of likelihood of his giving way at it. Dick had a dread of what might happen when the reaction of feeling took place in poor Jack's mind when all was over.

Harry Brown brought them the tools for making the grave, and then he placed the lantern on the ground, at the head of the corpse, and stood there with his arm round Lucy's waist to support her.

"Can I help you, gentlemen?" said the farmer. "Dear me, I feel as if I ought to help you as much as I can, considering what you have promised to give me before you go." This was a hint to them not to forget, and Dick took it as such, for, turning to the farmer, he said quietly—

"We never forget what we promise; but we would rather dig the grave ourselves."

"Much rather," said Jack.

They now set to work in earnest, and after first carefully taking off the turf, so that they could use it again to cover up the spot, they began to dislodge the earth, and each shovelful that they took up for some time they cast as far from them as they could, for they knew that else they would not be able to leave the grave, as they wished it, level with the surrounding turf, without leaving a mound of mould outside.

It took a weary time to dig the grave: but the exercise was good for both Dick and Jack; and it is to be hoped that it had the effect, in some measure, of dispelling some of the dreary feelings that filled, at times, the mind of the latter.

At length they had the grave to their mind, and then they rested from their toil, and stood upon the brink of it. There was a solemn stillness now, for the wind had gone down a little; and the rain only came in a straight stream, pattering from leaf to leaf of the old tree, at the foot of which the last house of Claude Duval was made.

"It is done," said Dick.

"Yes—yes!" faltered Jack, as he wiped his brow.

Jack moved to the body, and signed to Jack to help him, and they lifted it gently up; and, partially holding by the cloak, and partially by the ends of the cravat that Dick had wound round it, they let it into the grave.

Then Dick lifted his hat from his head; and they all shuddered as they stood by the grave.

"Farewell!" said Dick—"farewell, Claude Duval! We commit you to the earth! You had your faults—as who of us is without? But to a merciful Heaven, that searches deeper into human hearts than we can do, we leave you! There are those who will plead for you at the throne of All-grace; and One who knows us

best, knows well that your faults were none of the worst; and so you may have hope of the life to come."

"Amen!" said Jack.

"Amen!" said Lucy, in a low tone, and she clung to Harry Brown.

Then Dick took a shovelful of the earth and cast it into the grave, crying—

"Come, Jack, our work is not yet done."

It was at this moment, then, that Jack raised a shriek of agony, and called aloud to the dead—

"Claude—Claude! my friend—my brother!—oh, more than twenty thousand brothers are you to me!—oh, God, give him back to me, and take this wretched life for his! Claude—Claude, come from the grave, and let me look upon you once again!"

"Jack," said Dick, "be a man."

"I am—I am; but I am but a man. If I were more or less, I might be calm, but I am only human! Claude—Claude, come back to me again! Oh, Dick, what if he be not dead?—what if we have been too hasty? Claude, speak to me! 'Tis I, your old dear friend, calls to you!"

"Come—come, Jack," said Dick, taking both his hands in his. "Let me implore you to be calm. This is but a paroxysm of feeling and will pass away. For my sake, and for your own, be calm. Claude is happy in death. Why should we even call upon his spirit in such a fashion?"

"It is over," said Jack. "I—I am calm now."

"That is well."

"Yes, Dick—yes; but—but——"

"What would you say?"

"You saw him—eh, Dick? He was dead?"

"Oh, yes, Jack. Banish that delusion, I pray you."

"Yes—yes, I will. Forgive me, Dick, for giving you all this trouble. Come—come, what am I to do?"

"Help me, Jack, to accomplish this sad duty."

"Yes, I will—I will."

They shovelled in the earth upon the body, and the grave slowly filled higher and higher still, till it was near to the level of the earth. They then very quietly patted it down.

"You should jump upon it," said the farmer, "and it will go ever so far lower down, I can tell you."

"Wretch!" screamed Jack, as he aimed a blow at him with the spade, "would you ask me to jump upon his remains? Villain—murderer!"

"Stop, Jack—stop," said Dick. "Let him be. He did not mean anything of the kind in an unkind spirit. Let him be."

"But it shall not be done!"

"Certainly not. There, we will manage without. See, now, all is flat, and ready for the turf."

They replaced the turf, and to that operation Harry Brown lent a hand, so that it was soon done; and so Claude Duval was buried, and the rain from the saturated leaves of the old tree fell like tears upon his grave.

"It is done," said Dick, as he threw down the spade.

"Yes, it it done," said Jack. "Oh, God, yes!"

"Jack—Jack!"

"I am calm, Dick. Don't scold me."

"Farmer," said Dick, "here is the gold we promised you."

"Oh, really gentlemen, I'm quite sorry to have to take it. I hope you may never want it, upon my word I do; but, you see——"

"Silence! Where are our horses? We each had a horse when we reached this place."

"A horse, gentlemen, had you?"

"Yes, and you know it."

"Oh, dear me! Well, is it possible! Didn't anybody see 'em? Well, I never! A horse, did you say?"

"Three horses," said Dick. "Where are they?"

"Why," said Harry Brown, "they were in our stable, but they are now under the shelter of one of the haystacks, quietly eating, I hope, and I can bring them in a minute or two to you."

"You wretch!" cried the farmer; "what do you mean by that? Oh, you ungrateful boy! you villain! how dare you say anything about the horses? Oh, I'll kill you, I will!"

"No you won't," said Dick.

"I will—I will!"

The farmer made a movement to go up to the boy, to execute some of his threats against him; but, with such an expression upon his face as the farmer's better judgment, if he had any, might well shrink from, Dick interrupted him, saying—

"Lay but a hostile finger upon that lad, and you die upon the spot."

"Die upon the—a—spot? Oh, Lord!"

"Yes. Be warned, I beg of you, for I can assure you that we are in no sort of humour for trifling."

"Oh, well, I—I really——"

"Silence!"

"But I didn't mean indeed——"

"Oh, never mind him," said Harry Brown, "I don't care whether he turns me away or not. I can always get work to do."

CHAPTER CCCXCVIII.

THE CONCLUSION.

Both Dick and Jack felt a little distressed when they heard Harry Brown say this, for it led them, of course, at once to the conclusion that he foresaw his own discharge from the situation he had in the farm.

"No—no," said Dick. "This must not be. It is not fair, Mr. Farmer, to sacrifice the boy to any malevolence you may have against us. I beg that you will not do it."

"Oh, no—no," said the little girl, "he surely will not, and cannot be so cruel."

"I don't care a jot," said the boy. "I work, and work hard, too, for all I get in this homestead; and to the one who does so, the favour or the disfavour, the passions or the caprices of employers are as nothing. What is it to one who does his duty, and gives, as too often is the case, to some testy and stupid employer forty shillings' worth of real work for every twenty shillings he receives, what that employer chooses to think? He can't take away our arms, and while a man has them, is he not independent?"

"You rascal," said the farmer, "this is the gratitude I get from you, is it by keeping you in my service all the time I have?"

"Gratitude? Stuff!"

"Oh, dear, me! this is the way of the world," added the farmer. "I have had the boy with me for two years, and see how he treats me now. Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"And he did not suit you?" said Jack.

"Eh?"

"I say, he did not suit you?"

"Oh, yes, he did, though."

"Well, then, what on earth has he to feel grateful for? I rather think you ought to feel grateful to him."

"Harry," whispered the little girl, "don't say too much, for if you do, I, too, shall lose you."

This was a view of the subject that had not occurred to Harry Brown while his blood was up from the unmerited reproaches of the farmer; but when now, it came at once across him in all its terrors that he would lose the society of the dear girl whom he loved so well, he certainly felt shocked at himself for having gone so far in the tone of defiance with which he had treated the farmer.

Dick Turpin saw the effect that a few whispered words from the little girl had had upon Harry Brown, and he could well guess what they must be to produce such an effect; so stepping up to Harry, who was looking very crest-fallen, indeed, he said—

"Harry Brown, I don't think you need regret what you have said. On the contrary, it is just as well that you have defied the farmer in the way you have."

"Think you so, sir?"

"Yes. There are very many natures who always behave the better in proportion as they are so treated; and I should not at all wonder but that after this night the farmer will think more of you than ever he did."

"I hope he may, sir."

"And so do I," said the girl. "It is quite impossible, though, that he or any one can think too much of Harry Brown."

The young creature in saying this, uttered nothing but the really genuine sentiments of her heart. She did believe that there was nobody in all the world to be compared to Harry.

Far from smiling or being displeased to hear her speak with such enthusiasm of her young lover, Dick Turpin was glad of it, and turning to the farmer, he said—

"My good sir, neither I nor my friend choose to take the trouble of coming to any conclusion with regard to what you have said of our horses. It is sufficient for us that they are to be found, and are even now forthcoming; and it will be much better for you to say no more upon the subject. Harry, you know where our steeds are?"

"I do."

"Then let us have them, and we will be off at once from this place."

The farmer had seen enough to know and to feel that it was quite madness to say anything more about the matter; and anything in the shape of an apology, or an attempt to explain away what he had said, would inevitably tend to make matters worse; and he had the prudence to hold his tongue.

No doubt, though, the man whose cupiditity had been so strongly awakened by the thought that he would get possession of the steeds of the highwaymen, was deeply mortified to find such a capital source of profit slipping through his fingers in such a way; but, as there was now no help for it, he could only utter divers groans, and bite his lips in silence.

Harry Brown, with alacrity, ran to fetch the horses; and, in the course of a few moments, he brought all three of them to the brink of poor Claude Duval's grave.

"Here they are," he said; "and I have taken upon myself to say that they are none the worse for being here for the time they have. I have taken good care that they are well fed and groomed; so that they are all three as fresh as so many daisies."

"They are, indeed," said Dick, as he patted the neck of his superb steed; and then he said—"Jack, just step this way a moment. I wish to speak to you, if you please."

"Yes," said Jack. "What is it?"

They whispered together for a few moments; and then Jack said—

"Yes, be it so; I am perfectly willing, Dick. It may be the making of him, for all we know."

"Will you say it?"

"No, no—you."

"Very good."

Upon this, Dick turned to the farmer and his little niece, and to Harry Brown; and, addressing them as a group, he said—

"I believe my friend here,"—indicating Jack—"has satisfied you, Mr. Farmer, by paying you all that has been promised you?"

"Oh, yes—yes," said the farmer, in a great hurry, for fear the sum he had stipulated to receive would be mentioned, and so get to the ears of Harry Brown—"oh, yes, I am quite satisfied upon that head. Say no more about it."

"Very good. As for you, my dear, kind, good girl,"—to the little niece—"I can only return my sincere thanks; but I am quite sure that you desire nothing more."

"Indeed I do not."

"Nor do I," said Harry Brown. "We are both quite repaid, and it has been a great pleasure to me to be of service to you."

"No, Harry Brown," added Dick. "My friend and I are not going to let you off so nicely as all that."

"Let me off?"

"Don't look surprised. We are but two of us now. He who was with us, and whom we so deeply regret, lies now in the cold and silent grave. What good will his horse be to us?—none at all; so, Harry Brown, as some slight expression of our grateful feelings to you, we give the creature to you."

"Give it to me?"

"Yes. Take it."

"It is well worth a hundred pounds," said Jack, "and I advise you to sell it for no less a sum."

"Oh, gracious goodness!" cried the farmer, "you don't mean that, gentlemen? Why, what is the good of the horse to Harry Brown? If, now, he were a farmer, it would be quite another affair. I will accept it in his name, if you please."

"Oh, no, no!" said the little girl. "I think Harry had much better accept it in his own name."

"Silence, miss! I will have you well corrected when you get home."

"No," said Harry—"no, you won't, sir. Beware of the consequences of any bad treatment of the girl. I daresay these two gentlemen will have the goodness to call at some odd time or another if ever they should be near to this place, and inquire how we both get on."

Dick quite understood that Harry Brown wished him to frighten the farmer with an idea of a visit from them; so he said—

"That we intend to do."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" said the farmer; "but the idea now of giving a horse worth a hundred pounds to a lad who is earning his half-a-crown a week and his victuals only! Oh, it's really dreadful to think of, it is, indeed!"

"Take the horse, Harry," said Dick, "and sell it. Much good may the money do you, as I am pretty sure it will. If you are very careful of it, such a sum as that mentioned may possibly be the means of placing you in some position of life which may be the high road to that independence which you so well deserve."

"I will take care of it for her sake," said Harry, as he glanced at the young girl.

"Do so. You could not possibly have a better incentive to well doing than your love for one who so well deserves all the affection you can possibly bestow upon her."

As he spoke, Dick took the bridle of poor Claude's horse, and placed it in the hands of Harry Brown, saying—

"He is yours: take care of him."

"Yes," said Jack; "and when you sell him, be a little careful, though, that he goes into kind hands."

"I will—I will, indeed."

Dick and Jack now mounted their horses, and they seemed to be upon the point of riding off; but yet there was a host of struggles in their minds, which prevented them from quite so easily leaving the spot of earth where Claude Duval lay in death.

"Come," said Dick, "this will do, Jack."

"Yes—yes, I am coming. Oh, Claude—Claude!"

"Jack, you promised you would be firm."

"I am—I am! Harry—Harry Brown?"

The boy sprang to the side of Jack's horse in a moment.

"Will you," added Jack, in a tone of emotion, "take what care you can that the grave is not disturbed? I do not ask impossibilities of you, but only as far as you can, you know."

"I will, indeed."

"And I will plant some flowers upon it," said the girl.

When Jack heard this, he turned to speak again, and to say something that should convey to the young creature how grateful he felt to her for that kind thought, but he could not speak, so he merely waved his hand, and then galloped down the avenue.

"Farewell!" said Dick.

In another moment he, too, was off; and before he could reach Jack, the latter had got to the end of the avenue, where they would either have to get through the hedge into the high road, or to go over the ploughed field again, which had proved such a distressing thing for their horses.

"Hold, Jack!" cried Dick. "Let us to the road, my friend. This way—I see a gate."

Jack obeyed the call of Dick, but he said nothing. A white gate, that each moment became whiter and whiter as the morning dawned, was close at hand; and Dick dismounted, and, with the aid of a large stone that he found, he broke the padlock that fastened it, and swung it open. Leading, then, his own horse through it, he said—

"Come on, Jack; there is no danger now, I think, for our enemies seem to have left this spot."

They passed through the gate, and then it swung shut with a heavy clang behind them, and Dick mounted again. As he did so his face was turned towards the east and he saw that the coming dawn was already with rare and singular beauty tinting the horizon with many strange colours.

"See, Jack," he said, "this night, with all its terrors and all its griefs, is already over."

"It is," said Jack.

Dick was glad to hear him speak at all, although it was in rather strange accents that he did so. It was in vain that Dick tried to get a glance at his face; Jack's hat was pulled down so far over it that that was not possible.

They cantered in silence for about the space of two miles, looking at the advancing sunlight, and discovering that soon some great changes took place in the face of nature.

In a long streak, that must have been some hundreds of miles in extent along the horizon, there came a gleam of stange, greenish-looking light, which shed its reflection across the meadows and the trees that lay beside the road on which Jack and Dick were.

After a time a slightly yellow tone seemed to take possession of the lower edge of this streak of light, and then it vanished and threw up into the air long pencils of light, that had a very beautiful, though rather a cold effect.

A lark in the meadows close at hand awakened and went up—up—up into the sky till it caught a glimpse of the sun, and then it began to awake solitude with the sweet melody of its voice; and from every tree and every bush there came

the twitter of awaking birds as they heard the songster of heaven proclaim that a new day had commenced.

"The night is over, Jack," said Dick, who wanted to get him into conversation if he possibly could. "You see that there is still much beauty and much gladness left in the great earth."

Jack raised his arm before him, and then turning to Dick, he said—



"Yes, there is beauty and there is gladness for all, save me! It is he alone who, with a capacity for suffering beyond that possessed by another creature, may look upon such a scene as this and feel no gladness."

"For a time, Jack, I admit. But there is no balm to a wounded spirit like nature and time."

"Dick, I am going to say something that, I am afraid, you will think unkind. Will you forgive me?"

"Oh, yes, since you ask it; because I feel quite sure that it is not intended as an unkindness. What is it, Jack?"

"We must part, Dick."

The manner in which Jack uttered those words were such that if he had spoken for a month about the subject, Dick Turpin could not have felt more thoroughly convinced than he at once did that Jack meant what he said.

The silence that ensued between them was somewhat embarrassing; but, at length, rather from feeling that he ought to say something than from any idea connected with what he said, Dick said—

"Do I understand you rightly, Jack? Did you say, part?"

"I did, Dick."

"And you mean it?"

"As Heaven is my judge, I do!"

There was another rather long silence now; and then, as Dick patted the neck of his steed, he said—

"God forbid that I should say anything to keep a man in my company who prefers being out of it. I don't suppose you have said such a thing as this, Jack, without giving it some sort of consideration. It would be quite an insult to you to suppose you had, old fellow; so, of course, if you have made up your mind to it, why, there's an end."

"As I suspected," said Jack.

"As what?"

"As I suspected: you are hurt about this affair."

"Hurt? Oh, no!"

"Yes, Dick, you are; but I expected you would be, only I preferred coming out at once with the fact, and then telling you why I had so made up my mind, to going a more roundabout way in the matter, and leading you to that conviction. Now, Dick, I will tell you why I think of leaving you."

"Well, Jack, go on."

"My heart is in the grave with poor Claude; and—and——"

Jack paused, and his head drooped upon his breast—he thought he had more strength than nature had given to him. The pronunciation of the name of Claude had completely, for the moment, unnerved him; and he was unable to proceed in what he had meant to say.

Hot, scalding tears gushed from his eyes, and trickled down his cheeks; and his bosom heaved with emotion.

Dick, to tell the truth, was himself too much affected at this paroxysm of grief upon the part of Jack to say anything of a comforting character to him for some seconds; but when he did speak, it was as well to induce him to retract his resolution to separate from him, Dick, as to try to assuage the agony of regret that was at his heart for the death of Claude.

"Jack, my dear fellow," he said, "let me tell you one thing, and that is, that you are coming to too hasty a decision. When the mind is full of any great passion—such as grief for the departed, or the like in magnitude—the judgment is far, very far, indeed, from free to act; and, therefore, you should be specially cautious of coming to any conclusion as to what you will do, or what you will not do, under such circumstances."

"Yes—yes, I know."

"You comprehend me, Jack?"

"Fully. The weakness of the moment is over, and I am able now, Dick, to tell you more calmly, that I have something to do, which will take me from you at once and for ever."

"Something to do?"

"Yes—yes, but I cannot tell you."

"I can hardly think, Jack, that you can have any work in this world now to perfom that a friend might not help you in."

"You are wrong. Oh, do not ask me! Dick, will you leave upon my mind the gratification that we parted quite good friends, without a shade of ill feeling—

without any dim consciousness of offence upon your side? May I take with me that thought?"

"You may, Jack."

"With all your heart do you say so?"

"With all my heart Jack."

"Give me your hand, Dick."

Dick stretched out his hand to Jack, who grasped it firmly, and looking Dick in the face, he then said—

"I think I have said quite enough, and that it is better now that we say good-by to each other as we are, than enter further into a subject that must be painful to both of us."

"But, Jack, you half promised me an explanation of the reason why you are forced to leave me."

"I did, but I cannot now say more. Look there, Dick."

"Where?"

"To the west."

"Yes—well, I see. What of it?"

"There is where I am going. I shall keep that way, Dick; and when the early sun overtakes me, and throws his later beams into my face, I shall still follow it. When the night comes, I shall lie down to rest, till I can see my way again by the first faint beams of the morning. Yes, Dick, I have a mission to the west."

"Well, but, Jack?"

"Say on—I attend you."

"Come, now, my good friend, this is not kind to me. It is not kind to the memory of him whose grave we have stood by the side of. I ask of you but to stay this one day with me, and then if at this hour to-morrow morning you still have this strange determination to depart, I will no longer oppose it."

Jack shook his head.

"No—no, Dick," he said. "How sorry I am that you have asked me this much, because I cannot do it. At once, now, and for ever—farewell!"

"But why say for ever?"

"Because we shall not meet again."

"Oh, yes, we shall, Jack. Farewell, if the word must be uttered, for a little time; and when you wish to find me you know twenty places where you can go and inquire for me. The time will come when you will wish to sit down by the side of one who can speak to you of Claude Duval."

Jack held up his hand as if he would beg Dick to be silent, but Dick went on.

"In that time your feelings will be cooled down to a more sober state; and although neither you nor I, who knew him so well, can ever cease to feel regret for the death of our old friend, yet time will do much towards softening down that feeling to something of the tenderness of regret, without any of its wild and passionate feelings. Then, Jack, you will seek me."

"I will, if that time should come; but it will not. Farewell, Dick—farewell!"

Jack gave his horse an impulse forward, such as the creature was but little accustomed to, and after a plunge it darted off like the wind. By a dexterous movement of the bridle the creature was turned to the right, and a hedge and ditch together were cleared in gallant style. Another minute, and Jack and his steed plunged into a little copse in the meadows, and Dick was truly alone.

"Gone," said Dick—"gone! Claude Duval and Jack left me. I am alone now in the world! How still and sad the feeling is. No, I am not quite alone while you live, my gallant Bess—you who have borne me scathless through so many trials!"

The creature arched its neck and made a grateful snort as Dick patted it upon its silken mane.

"Hark! for the road!" cried Dick Turpin. "I must conquer reflection in the excitement of a life that is still open to me. Come, Bess, you and I are now all the world to each other, for there is an end of GENTLEMAN JACK."

In thus concluding the life of one of the most celebrated highwaymen that ever lived in this country, we may say, that one of the great sources of amusement which the contemplation of the career of such a man as Claude Duval affords to the reader must be looked for in the fact, that never again can the same circumstances that afforded facilities for highway robberies exist in England.

The railway train has put an end at once, and for ever, of the old class Knight of the Road; and we may truly say that the first sound of the first railway whistle was the knell of the old-fashioned mounted highwayman.

Dick Turpin and Gentleman Jack, and their friend, Sixteen-string Jack, might stop the York mail, but not the York train; and we may truly say—

"The highwayman's occupation's gone," and "we shall never look upon his like again."

THE END.

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